

Growing Up Soviet in the Periphery:
Imagining, Experiencing and Remembering Childhood in Kazakhstan, 1928-1953

by

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A Dissertation Presented in Partial Fulfillment
of the Requirements for the Degree
Doctor of Philosophy

Approved October 2020 by the
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ARIZONA STATE UNIVERSITY

December 2020

ABSTRACT

This dissertation discusses children and childhood in Soviet Kazakhstan from 1928 to 1953. By exploring images of, and for, children, and by focusing on children's fates during and after the famine of 1930-33, I argue that the regime's success in making children socialist subjects and creating the new Soviet person was questionable throughout the 1930s. The reach of Soviet ideological and cultural policies was limited in a decade defined by all kinds of shortcomings in the periphery which was accompanied by massive violence and destruction. World War 2 mobilized Central Asians and integrated the masses into the Soviet social and political body. The war transformed state-society relations and the meaning of being Soviet fundamentally changed. In this way, larger segments of society embraced the framework for Soviet citizenship and Soviet patriotism largely thanks to the war experience. This approach invites us to reconsider the nature of Sovietization in Central Asia by questioning the central role of ideology and cultural revolution in the formation of Soviet identities.

My dissertation brings together images of childhood, everyday experiences of children and memory of childhood. On the one hand, the focus on children provides me an opportunity to discuss Sovietization in Central Asia. On the other hand, this dissertation contributes to our understanding of Soviet childhood: it is the first comprehensive study of Soviet children in the periphery in English. It shows how images and discourses, which were produced in the Soviet center, were translated into the local context and emphasizes the multiplicity of children's experiences across the Soviet Union. Local conditions defined the meaning of childhood in Kazakhstan as much as central visions. Studying children in a non-Russian republic allows me to discuss questions of ideology, cultural revolution and

the nationalities question. A main goal of the dissertation is to shift the focus of Sovietization from the cultural and intellectual elite to ordinary people. Secondly, by studying the impact of the famine and the Great Patriotic War, I try to understand the dynamics of the Soviet regime and the changing conceptions of culture and identity in Soviet Kazakhstan.

In memory of Mark von Hagen (1954-2019)

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

I could not have become a historian without the strong support of numerous teachers. First of all, the guidance of the late Mark von Hagen and Laurie Manchester made this dissertation possible. Mark von Hagen had believed in me from the very beginning even though I had no background in history when I applied for a PhD degree in the United States. It would not be an exaggeration to say that I learned almost everything I know about Soviet history from him. Yet, he could not be with us at the end of my journey. That is why I cannot have an utter feeling of joy for completing my doctoral study. I probably never deserved his belief in me, but I will always be proud of being his last student. Nevertheless, I was lucky enough to have another wonderful mentor. Laurie Manchester was much more than a teacher and an advisor for students in Soviet history at our department. Quite often I think that she cares about my success more than I myself do. This dissertation is completed thanks to Laurie Manchester's never-ending support, patience and guidance. I would also like to thank Ilker Aytürk. He wholeheartedly encouraged me, an average bachelor student in economics, to pursue a graduate degree in social sciences and humanities and became my first inspiration and guide.

I am grateful to my other committee members too. From the beginning, I was privileged to benefit from Agnes Kefeli's expertise in the history of Turkic peoples of the Russian Empire and the Soviet Union. Anna Holian and Adrienne Edgar were both greatly helpful and encouraging. As a leading expert on Soviet Central Asia, the feedback that Adrienne Edgar provided is priceless. At Arizona State University, I also benefited from guidance and instruction of Stephen Batalden, the late Rachel Fuchs, Hava Samuelson and the late Aaron Moore. I would like to thank to Tyler Kirk, Benjamin

Beresford, John Romero and Philip Skorohodov too. I am also grateful to Niccolo Pinciola, who read Chapter 2 and provided valuable feedback.

Special thanks go to Mustafa Şener Hoşnut and Abdullah Başar Akbay. They were not only faithful friends; they bore a hand whenever I needed help. Without them, my life in Arizona would have been so much more difficult. As we say in Turkish, “haklarını ödeyemem”. My life in Almaty was made more enjoyable by the friendships and support of Cengizhan Canaltay, Atahan Atalay, Turgay Düğen, Gene Bunin, Aliya Bolatkhan and Elina Malagova. I also would like to thank to the employees in the archives and the National Library, who were always nice and helpful. For about one and a half years until the beginning of quarantine measures, I volunteered for Atajurt Kazakh Human Rights Organization in Almaty. I witnessed the tireless efforts of Atajurt volunteers to document the tragedy in Xinjiang and to help the victims of Chinese fascism. Their devotion in their cause despite continuous political pressure and various other challenges is admirable. Throughout my volunteer experience, I got to know more than a dozen concentration camp survivors and hundreds of people whose loved ones were detained in Chinese prisons, concentration camps and forced labor factories. My life in Almaty was shaped by my volunteer work as much as by my dissertation research. I would like to finish my words by drawing attention to the tragedies lived in Xinjiang under the current dystopian regime.

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NOTE ON TRANSLITERATION

Throughout this dissertation, Kazakh words are transliterated according to the 1979 BGN/PCGN system adopted by the United States Board on Geographic Names (BGN) and the Permanent Committee on Geographical Names of the United Kingdom, with the exception that the letter “Ң” is transliterated as “ñ” instead of “ng”. I have transliterated Russian according to the Library of Congress System.

I have used Kazakh versions of place and human names. However, for names which have more or less standard English transliterations I have used these standardized versions even though they are usually adaptations from Russian (Karaganda instead of Qaraghandy, Auezov instead of Äüezov, Tokayev instead of Toqaeв). I have used the standardized versions for some Russian names too. In addition, in cases where I used only a Russian-language source by a Kazakh author, I have preferred to transliterate the author’s name from Russian for the sake of consistency (Rafika Nurtazina instead of Rafīqa Nurtazīna).

The Kazakh language underwent several script changes during the twentieth century. Kazakh was written in the Latin script from 1929 to 1940. Even during this period, there were frequent changes in the script. Therefore, for the sake of consistency, I have transliterated these words from their Cyrillic versions instead of using the Latin forms. Lastly, I have preferred to use Almaty instead of Alma-Ata. Even though, imperial Vernyi was officially renamed as Alma-Ata in 1921, many Kazakh-language sources that I read used Almaty throughout the 1930s.

GLOSSARY

<p> agha (Kaz.): ata (Kaz.): ASSR (Rus.): aūyl (Kaz.): äke (Kaz.): äpke (Kaz.): baqytty balalyq shaq (Kaz.): batyr (Kaz.): bay (Kaz.): belsendi (Kaz.): besprizornik (Rus.): besprizornost' (Rus.): bī (Kaz.): Ded Moroz (Rus.): detdom/detskii dom (Rus.): detgorod/detskii gorodok (Rus.): Detkomissiiia/Detskaia Komissia (Rus.): detkommuna/detskaia kommuna (Rus.): </p>	<p> older brother grandfather Autonomous Soviet Socialist Republic a Kazakh village (Today, its use is general. In the early Soviet period, it was used for small nomadic units). father older sister happy childhood Kazakh warrior heroes (They were usually of non-aristocratic origin and gained their status due to their courage and military skills. Many have turned into legendary figures in Kazakh culture). a wealthy person in nomadic Kazakh society (After the Bolshevik takeover, <i>bay</i> was used akin to kulak). activist a homeless or abandoned child (child) homelessness judicial and administrative authority in nomadic Kazakh society; comparable to <i>qadi</i> in other Muslim societies. Santa Claus (Literally, “Grandfather Frost”) children’s home (usually translated as “orphanage”). children’s town (Although <i>detgorods</i> are mostly associated with famous model institutions in the European parts of the Soviet Union; in Kazakhstan, usually larger <i>detdoms</i> were called <i>detgorods</i>). Children’s Commission children’s commune (The term was used for labor communes which were usually run by NKVD and </p>
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	hosted “indocile” children; but other children’s institutions with large workshops were also called communes).
detpriemnik (Rus.):	child receiving center (Usually when children were taken from the street, they were first hosted in these centers).
galstuk (Rus.):	pioneer scarf
GorONO (Rus.):	City Department of Education
Gorsovet (Rus.):	City Soviet
hujum (Uzb.):	Bolshevik attack on traditional social structures, particularly female veiling, in Uzbekistan. Launched in 1927.
internat (Rus.):	boarding school
kolkhoz (Rus.):	collective farm
kolkhoznik (Rus.):	collective farmer
Komsomol (Rus.):	The All-Union Leninist Young Communist League
Komsomolets (Rus.):	Komsomol member
korenizatsiia (Rus.):	indigenization or nativization (The Bolshevik policy of promoting native cadres and supporting native languages and cultures).
qalym (Kaz.):	bride price
Narkompros (Rus.):	The People’s Commissariat for Education
Narkomzdrav (Rus.):	The People’s Commissariat for Health
NKVD (Rus.):	The People’s Commissariat for Internal Affairs
Oblast (Rus.):	region
OblONO (Rus.):	Regional Department of Education
ODD (Rus.):	Society of Children’s Friends
OGPU (Rus.):	Unified State Political Administration
Oktobrists (Rus.):	youth organization for children between 7 and 9 years of age
otkochevnik (Rus.):	the refugee nomads who were displaced during the famine (Derived from <i>kochevnik</i> /nomad).
otlichnik (Rus.):	a top student

Pioneers:	a mass youth organization for children between the ages of 9 and 14
Qurban ayt (Kaz.):	Eid al-Adha (Feast of sacrifice).
raion (Rus.):	district
som:	speakers of Kazakh, Kyrgyz and Uzbek called ruble <i>som</i> (Today, both Kyrgyzstan and Uzbekistan use <i>som</i> as their official currencies).
sovkhos (Rus.):	state farm
Sovnarkom (Rus.):	Council of People's Commissars
täte (Kaz.):	aunt
töreshildik (Kaz.):	aristocratic rule in Kazakh society (<i>Töre</i> is a descendant of sultans and a member of white bone/the aristocratic class).
vospitatel'naia rabota (Rus.)	educational work
yurt (Kaz.):	nomadic dwelling used by Kazakhs

INTRODUCTION

It was a surprise for almost everyone when Kazakhstan's first president Nursultan A. Nazarbayev resigned from his post in March 2019. The new president Qasym-Zhomart Tokayev was an experienced Soviet diplomat and Kazakh politician. For me, however, he was first and foremost Kemel Tokayev's son. A witness to the Kazakh famine and a veteran of the Great Patriotic War, Kemel Tokayev eventually emerged as a famous Soviet Kazakh writer and is remembered as the founder of the detective genre in Kazakh literature. Although the new president is approached with suspicion by more nationalist circles, his father is commonly seen as a true son of the nation; as one columnist wrote, his heart beat for his people.¹ However, complicating a simple nationalist interpretation, Kemel Tokayev was a Soviet patriot, even a supporter of Stalin. Victory Day (9 May) was the most important day for him until his death and he considered camaraderie during the war years the most significant period of his life. Moreover, he always respected Soviet military leaders and Stalin himself, and never liked Khrushchev.²

Young Kemel lost his parents in Bishkek (Frunze) during the famine and was taken to a *detdom*³ together with his older brother Qasym. Conditions in the *detdom* were

¹ Aray Zhumatay, "Elim dep soqqan zhüregi", *The Qazaq Times*, September 13, 2018, <https://qazaqtimes.com/it/article/47134>.

² Qasym-Zhomart Tokayev, *Slovo ob otse / Äke turaly tolghanys* (Almaty: Parasat, 2005), 129.

³ *Detskii dom* literally means a children's home and is usually translated into English as orphanage. Nevertheless, Soviet children's homes were ideally founded as institutions for not only orphans even though they later mostly hosted orphans. However, for the time period studied in this dissertation, not all children in Kazakh *detdoms* were orphans, and documents rarely use the adjective "orphan"; rather they talk about *besprizorniks*, translated as abandoned or homeless children. In addition, *detdom* is a widely used abbreviation used in both Russian and Kazakh. For these reasons, in this dissertation, I prefer to use the Russian words *detdom* and *besprizornik* instead of their translations.

not satisfactory and Qasym wrote a petition to the director and asked him to send them to a boarding school for a better education.⁴ From then on, Kemel studied at a boarding school for orphans in Shymkent. Does Kemel Tokayev's successful career and Soviet patriotism mean the Soviet regime Sovietized orphans or created Soviet patriots in detdoms and boarding schools? Is his case exemplary or exceptional? What does, after all, Sovietization of Kazakh children mean in the age of Stalin? Was Sovietization equal to Russification and was Kemel Russified? Lastly, did Kemel Tokayev really become a Soviet patriot at the detdom and boarding school?

Kemel Tokayev is not the only successful Kazakh who was raised in Soviet institutions. Iliyas Esenberlin, the author of the famous trilogy *Köshpendiler (The Nomads)*, is another one.⁵ One can find other examples too. However, it is easier to write a history of success stories and on the basis of them claim that the Soviet regime successfully indoctrinated Kazakh orphans and integrated them into Soviet society as socialist citizens. Such an approach ignores tens of thousands of besprizorniks who were not as lucky as these famous authors. Secondly, what it meant for these figures to become Soviet is not as straightforward as one might think. Both Tokayev and Esenberlin greatly contributed to Kazakh literature; hence, they were not "Russified". It is also questionable whether Soviet patriotism had anything to do with socialist values and ideals for either figure. In fact, Esenberlin's trilogy, *The Nomads*, originally published from 1969 to 1973, is an obvious manifestation of all the historical myths of Kazakh national discourse and

⁴ Tokayev, *Slovo ob otse*, 114.

⁵ For Esenberlin's detdom years, see: Amangeldi Qashqymbaev, "Iliyas Esenberlinniñ balalyq shagy", *Qazaqstan Tarikhy*, January 10, 2019, <https://e-history.kz/kz/news/show/910/>. It must be noted that Esenberlin belonged to an earlier generation of orphans, hence, his case is indeed not within the scope of my research.

some scholars even think that this trilogy formed the basis of independent Kazakhstan's national identity.⁶ Lastly, besides their service in the Great Patriotic War, it is not clear what the source of their Soviet identity and patriotism was.

This dissertation discusses all these questions. Historians have tried to understand the nature of the Soviet regime in Central Asia by focusing on political, intellectual, and cultural activists.⁷ A primary goal of this project is to move beyond elites and activists by examining the everyday experiences of large segments of the society. Secondly, my research seeks to understand what Sovietization meant in the Kazakh context. I achieve this by exploring how the images of childhood, and the upbringing of future Soviet citizens, contributed to the development of a Soviet Kazakh identity. Thirdly, my dissertation analyzes the impact of two critical events on Kazakhs' experiences of Soviet rule: the famine of 1930-33, and World War II. By tracing the effects of the famine and the Great Patriotic War, this dissertation intends to understand the dynamics of the Soviet regime and changing conceptions of culture and identity in Kazakhstan. Intrinsic to a

⁶ Dinara T. Kudaibergenova, "Imagining Community in Soviet Kazakhstan: A Historical Analysis of Narrative on Nationalism in Kazakh-Soviet Literature," *Nationalities Papers* 41, no. 5 (2013); Gulnar Dadabayeva and Dina Sharipova, "The Imagined Nation-State in Soviet Literature: The Case of *Koshpendiler*," *Nationalities Papers* 44, no. 1 (2016). Both studies discuss Esenberlin's nationalism within a resistance paradigm and particularly Dadabayeva and Sharipova treat him like a super hero who came out of nowhere and single-handedly created a narrative for the nation. Elsewhere I provided a critique of this approach. Esenberlin did not "resist" the Soviet regime with his literary works, but rather acted within the boundaries of what was acceptable. Regardless of how talented he was, he did not come out of nowhere, but instead, his imagination was significantly structured by the available Soviet Kazakh national discourse. See: Mehmet Volkan Kasıkcı, "The Soviet and the Post-Soviet: Street Names and National Discourse in Almaty," *Europe-Asia Studies* 71, no. 8 (2019): 1358. For Esenberlin's Soviet patriotism, see: Qashqymbaev, "İl'iyas Esenberlinniñ balalyq shagy."

⁷ By activists, I refer to people who actively and enthusiastically participated in the implementation of Soviet political or cultural policies. The largest group in this category was Communist Party and Komsomol members themselves even though one can find activists who were not in these organizations. Kazakhs themselves usually refer to government officials or party members as activists (*belsendiler*). One document about the perceptions of Kazakhs defines *belsendi* as an *aūyl* activist who participate in carrying out campaigns. RGASPI, f. 17, op. 120, d. 80, ll. 84-88 (Letter to Stalin about interethnic relations in Kazakhstan, August 20, 1932), <https://islamperspectives.org/rpi/items/show/11826>. I use the term activist for anyone willingly participating in carrying out Soviet campaigns.

study of children in a non-Russian republic is the discussion of topics such as ideology, education, cultural revolution, and the nationalities question, all central aspects of Sovietization.

By discussing images of, and for children, and by focusing on children's fates during and after the famine, I argue that Sovietization in the sense of creating the new Soviet person and making children socialist subjects had only limited impact throughout the 1930s. This approach invites us to reconsider the debate over Sovietization in Central Asia. The historiography attributes too much importance to Soviet ideological and cultural policies in the 1920s and 1930s. It assumes that culture, education and ideology had the power to create ideal Soviet citizens during a period when all kinds of material, institutional and administrative shortcomings in the periphery were accompanied by immense violence and destruction.⁸ I do not argue that the 1930s were not transformative for Kazakh society; in contrast, particularly for Kazakhstan this was a period of massive transformation and the collapse of the nomadic society. Nevertheless, recent studies on

⁸ Representative works in this trend include Marianne Kamp, *The New Women in Uzbekistan: Islam, Modernity, and Unveiling under Communism* (Seattle: University of Washington Press, 2008); Ali Igmen, *Speaking Soviet with an Accent: Culture and Power in Kyrgyzstan* (Pittsburgh: University of Pittsburgh Press, 2012); Victoria Clement, *Learning to Become Turkmen: Literacy, Language, and Power, 1914-2014*, (Pittsburgh: University of Pittsburgh Press, 2018). Although Rebekah Ramsay's research is unfinished and therefore unavailable to read for now, her research report suggests that she takes a similar approach to the early Soviet rule in Kazakhstan. See, Rebekah Ramsay, "Cultural Revolution in Early Soviet Kazakhstan, 1921-1941" (Research report), http://researchfellowships.americancouncils.org/sites/researchfellowships.americancouncils.org/files/Ramsay_Final%20Report.pdf, [accessed 12.11.16]. Adeeb Khalid's study of Soviet Uzbekistan takes a much broader political and intellectual history view, but it still prioritizes the elite's story. Adeeb Khalid, *Making Uzbekistan: Nation, Empire, and Revolution in the Early USSR* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2015). An exceptional study is Adrienne Edgar's work on Turkmenistan which combines the Turkmen elite's participation in the Soviet policies with rural Turkmen's resistance. Adrienne Lynn Edgar, *Tribal Nation: The Making of Soviet Turkmenistan* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2004).

the Kazakh famine are too quick to conclude that the famine Sovietized Kazakhs.⁹ These scholars rightly argue that famine brought the Kazakh steppe under Soviet rule politically and economically. But they equate political and economic control with Sovietization and assume that such a destruction automatically entailed the adoption of Soviet identity.

It was only during the war years that the framework for Soviet Kazakh citizenship was embraced by larger segments of society. The war mobilized Kazakhs, brought homogenization to the meaning of being a Soviet child, and importantly transformed the meaning of being Soviet itself. In this respect, I agree with a group of scholars who argue that the war made it possible for Central Asians to join the Soviet community, at a time when state-society relations were transformed simultaneously in the region.¹⁰ I argue that the meaning of being Soviet was substantially transformed by the war and this paved the way for the integration of Kazakh masses into the Soviet social and political body. From then on, Soviet patriotism did not necessarily require revolutionary zeal or belief in socialist utopias. In any case, I show that even in the 1930s being a Soviet Kazakh child rarely meant embracing Marxist doctrine. Simultaneously, the famine and the war made Kazakhstan a truly multiethnic republic and this structural transformation, and not an

⁹ Robert Kindler, *Stalin's Nomads: Power and Famine in Kazakhstan*, trans. Cynthia Klohr (Pittsburgh: University of Pittsburgh Press, 2018); Sarah Cameron, *The Hungry Steppe: Famine, Violence, and the Making of Soviet Kazakhstan* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2018).

¹⁰ For works focusing primarily on soldiers see, Moritz Florin, "Becoming Soviet through War: The Kyrgyz and the Great Fatherland War," *Kritika: Explorations in Russian and Eurasian History* 17, no. 3 (2016); Charles Shaw, "Soldiers' Letters to Inobatxon and O'g'ulxon: Gender and Nationality in the Birth of a Soviet Romantic Culture," *Kritika: Explorations in Russian and Eurasian History* 17, no. 3 (2016). For works that focus on social changes at the local level see, Paul Stronski, *Tashkent: Forging a Soviet City, 1930-1966* (Pittsburgh: University of Pittsburgh Press, 2010); Eren Tasar, *Soviet and Muslim: The Institutionalization of Islam in Central Asia, 1943-1991* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2017). Roberto Carmack's book discusses both soldiers and mobilization within Kazakhstan. Roberto J. Carmack, *Kazakhstan in World War II: Mobilization and Ethnicity in the Soviet Empire* (Lawrence: University Press of Kansas, 2019).

official policy of education, paved the way for linguistic Russification in the country which further contributed to Kazakhs' integration into Soviet society.

Research on Sovietization of Kazakh children in Soviet institutions is very limited. The unproblematic vision of the Soviet cultural revolution still has a dominant impact on Kazakh scholarship and relevant works share a clear tendency to perceive the history of education and cultural policies as one of an enlightenment process usually separate from the famine, Terror or social and economic transformation of the country.¹¹ Counter arguments are available from an anti-Soviet perspective that present policies of education, cultural revolution, and “enlightenment” as one of Kazakh intellectuals' and politicians' own achievements: Kazakh politicians and intellectuals worked for their nation while continuously resisting the Bolshevik rule. In fact, this is just a nationalist version of the Soviet narrative.¹² There is only one dissertation devoted to besprizorniks in Kazakhstan and although it focuses on detdoms, it does not discuss topics such as identity, ideology, Sovietization or Russification.¹³

Cold War scholarship on Central Asia emphasized resistance and expected a “Muslim challenge” to Soviet rule.¹⁴ Armed with this understanding of the region, which was usually not more than wishful thinking, Cold War scholars were unable to grasp the

¹¹ For example, see, D. A. Atabaev and E. G. Esenghalieva, *Qazaqstan Mädeni Qurylys Tarikhynan* (Almaty, 2000).

¹² Qadyr Äbilzhanuly Akhmetov, “XX Ghasyrdyn 20-30 Zhyldaryndaghy Qazaqstan Mädenieti (“Mädeni Revolyutsiyanyñ” Kontseptsiyasy, İdeologiyasy, Zhüzege Asyrylyu)” (PhD diss., Valikhanov Atyndaghy Tarikh zhäne Etnologiya İnstituty, Almaty, 2002).

¹³ Gülbanū Bayanqyzy Sügiralimova, “Qazaqstandaghy panasyz balalar: Mäseleni sheshü tarikhy, täzhiribesi, qortyndysy (1920-1940 zhyldar)” (PhD diss., Sätbäev atyndaghy ĩnzhenerlik tekhnikalıyq ĩnstitut, Ekibastuz, 2006).

I have preferred to discuss detdoms as a case study and although I frequently refer to schools in various chapters, the school as a Soviet institution is not discussed in this dissertation.

¹⁴ For the development of Central Asian historiography during the Cold War, see, Will Myer, *Islam and Colonialism: Western Perspectives on Soviet Asia* (London: Routledge, 2002); Michael Kemper, *Studying Islam in the Soviet Union* (Amsterdam: Vossiuspers UvA, 2009).

curious stability of the region under the Soviet regime. In the last decades, historians have successfully challenged these Cold War assumptions, and have presented a more complex relationship between Central Asia and Moscow. Recently, in line with the transformation of Soviet historiography, historians of Soviet Central Asia have tried to understand the sources of a prevalent Soviet identity and have emphasized the role of local political and cultural actors in the formation of national identities. Indeed, the proposition that national identities and cultures were not the products of a top-down Soviet colonialism, and that Central Asians themselves were active participants in the process, has become so mainstream that it sometimes only focuses on the nature of Soviet rule without telling much about experiences of Central Asians themselves. It is now very well established in the literature that throughout the 1920s, local elites (either newly rising communists or more established Jadids) had a huge impact on the implementation of Soviet policies. Adeb Khalid's studies in particular have clearly shown that the nation-building process and modernization project in Uzbekistan had deep local roots.¹⁵

However, the new trend in historiography continues to prioritize the experiences of cultural or political elites at the expense of larger segments of the society. Some of these works also provide a too harmonious and successful picture of Soviet modernization and nation-building in Central Asia, in which cultural revolution or the productive cultural policies of the Soviet regime are seen as the main sources of Soviet identities in the region. This new trend in historiography usually ignores the social and

¹⁵ Khalid, *Making Uzbekistan*.

economic transformations and violence that accompanied these transformations.¹⁶ I argue that in order to understand and explain Kazakh identity and Kazakhs' attitudes towards their Soviet past, it is urgent to understand how ordinary Kazakhs experienced the Soviet rule, and how they made sense of their lives under the Soviet experiment.¹⁷

In her dissertation in progress, Rebekah Ramsay argues that cultural revolutionary projects, and especially the mass literacy campaigns and the establishment of a state education system, helped to build a framework for Kazakh Soviet citizenship.¹⁸ It might be correct that these policies established a framework, however, I argue that at best the influence of that framework was quite limited and remained abstract for the masses before the war. Thus, I would like to suggest that we need to question cultural revolution's central role in the formation of Soviet identities and general stability in Central Asia. On the other hand, the famine created the necessary conditions for social and economic transformation of the country and brought the steppe under more direct Soviet rule; however, the collapse it brought to the Kazakh society was so great that assuming that Kazakhs became Soviet through famine underestimates the destruction that it caused. In her study of Soviet peasants, Sheila Fitzpatrick argues that no real “peasants into Soviets” process is observable until the war.¹⁹ Similarly, I argue that, no real

¹⁶ Balanced accounts of early Soviet rule that discuss the developments both in cities and in rural areas include Edgar, *Tribal Nation*; Benjamin Loring, “Building Socialism in Kyrgyzstan: Nation-Making, Rural Development, and Social Changes, 1921-1932” (PhD diss., Brandeis University, 2008).

¹⁷ For some historians, the term “ordinary people” is controversial, because frequently the works that claim to study ordinary people look at extraordinary experiences, and also it can be claimed that no human experience is ordinary in the sense that experience is very subjective. For a critique of the studies of ordinary people in Soviet historiography, see, Yanni Kotsonis, “Ordinary People in Russian and Soviet History,” *Kritika: Explorations in Russian and Eurasian History* 12, no. 3 (2011). In this dissertation, “ordinary people” denotes people outside of the political and the cultural elite, or the shared experiences of a numerically considerable segment of the society.

¹⁸ Ramsay, “Cultural Revolution in Early Soviet Kazakhstan”.

¹⁹ Sheila Fitzpatrick, *Stalin's Peasants: Resistance and Survival in the Russian Village after Collectivization* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1994).

“nomads into Soviets” process is observable before the war. The Great Patriotic War not only incorporated the masses into the war effort and changed the meaning of being Soviet, but very significantly it also provided a myth that Kazakhs could finally identify with to embrace Soviet identity.²⁰

The nature of the Soviet regime, and specifically whether it was colonial or not, has dominated post-Soviet scholarship on Soviet Central Asia. The discussion of colonialism and modernity has established itself as a dichotomy in the field. On the one hand, Douglas Northrop and Paula Michaels argue that the Soviet regime acted as a colonial power in Central Asia. Northrop suggests that gender politics in Central Asia became a tool of colonial power for the regime, and he tackles the issue within a broader context of the Muslim world's encounter with European colonialism. According to Northrop, everyday life became a tool of destroying the old structures and generating colonial domination over Central Asian society.²¹ Paula Michaels discusses how biomedicine became a tool of colonial power in Kazakhstan. In her opinion, the Soviet regime mobilized biomedicine in order to facilitate the economic exploitation of the region to create a loyal, productive polity.²² Michaels suggests that discourse and practice

²⁰ Kate Brown's study of the Western borderlands provides a model for this dissertation. Brown's book is a study of how a region, known as *kresy*, that was dominated by traditional social structures, linguistic and ethnic diversity was transformed into a homogenous Soviet unit. Consequently, this heterogenous social structure was destroyed to create a modern polity and society and to bring the region under the Soviet rule. However, bringing the region under strict rule is not equal to Sovietization. Historical actors in Brown's study eventually came to embrace Soviet identity, or in other words, they were eventually Sovietized, but only after they were provided a myth to associate themselves with the Soviet rule. In their case, this was the myth of the Virgin Lands and how these people transformed the “empty” steppe into a productive space. Kate Brown, *A Biography of No Place: From Ethnic Borderland to Soviet Heartland* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2009).

²¹ Douglas Northrop, *Veiled Empire: Gender & Empire in Stalinist Central Asia* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2004).

²² Paula Michaels, *Curative Powers: Medicine and Empire in Stalin's Central Asia* (Pittsburgh: University of Pittsburgh Press, 2003).

of biomedicine was about the assertion of one group's rule over another, and it resembled similar processes of the establishment of European domination elsewhere.

Other historians argue that unlike the Tsarist period, the Soviet regime cannot be understood by post-colonial studies.²³ Marianne Kamp's account of gender politics in early Soviet Uzbekistan, and specifically the case of *hujum*, is probably the most extreme example of the "modernization/native participation" camp.²⁴ Kamp argues that *hujum* was actually a conflict within Uzbek society between modernists and traditionalists. Another significant work in this camp discusses the formation of Kyrgyz cultural identity. Ali Igmen argues that Kyrgyz people were highly active in "crafting" Kyrgyzzness during the early Soviet phase. Based on a study of Soviet houses of culture in Kyrgyzstan and a discussion of Chingiz Aitmatov's literary works, Igmen claims that the Kyrgyz were more than willing to participate in an environment which was simultaneously Soviet and Kyrgyz.²⁵ Usually employing oral histories with a limited number of party members and cultural activists, the second camp focuses on what is called the cultural revolution and this approach has been gaining support within the field in the last decade.

Simultaneously being Soviet and national is now a very popular theme in historiography. In fact, Central Asia is most successfully integrated into general Soviet debates in the case of the nationalities question.²⁶ Studies such as Edgar's work on the

²³ For example, see, Adeeb Khalid, "Introduction: Locating the (Post-)Colonial in Soviet History," *Central Asian Survey* 26, no. 4 (2007).

²⁴ Kamp, *The New Woman in Uzbekistan*.

²⁵ Igmen, *Speaking Soviet with an Accent*. Igmen strangely uses Aitmatov's works to discuss the 1930s.

²⁶ Among others, Terry Martin's and Francine Hirsch's works benefit largely from the developments in Central Asia. Terry Martin, *The Affirmative Action Empire: Nations and Nationalism in the Soviet Union, 1923-1939* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2002); Francine Hirsch, *Empire of Nations: Ethnographic Knowledge and the Making of the Soviet Union* (Cornell University Press, 2005).

making of Turkmenistan as a national republic and Arne Haugen's work on the establishment of national republics showed how top-down, Moscow-centered interpretations of Central Asian borders and national identities are baseless.²⁷ This top-down approach, which was largely consolidated during the Cold War, is still powerful in popular imagination as a widespread cliché about Central Asian history.²⁸ However, some of the works in this "Soviet and national" trend do not problematize concepts such as "national" or "traditional" and still treat "Soviet" as an alien or top-down concept. For

²⁷ Edgar, *Tribal Nation*; Arne Haugen, *The Establishment of National Republics in Soviet Central Asia* (London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2003).

The nationalities question regarding Kazakhstan is relatively well-studied too. In the Kazakh case, historians of national identity generally award the creation of national history central place. The early Soviet period witnessed an anti-imperialist nation-building project with the active participation of Kazakh intellectuals. See: Zifa-Alua Auezova, "Conceiving a People's History: The 1920-36 Discourse on the Kazakh Past," in *The Heritage of Soviet Oriental Studies*, eds. Michael Kemper and Stephen Conermann (London: Routledge, 2011). However, in contrast to popular assumptions in the historiography, anti-imperialist history writing did not come to an end in the 1930s. Anti-Russian uprisings of the nineteenth century continued to be a dominant narrative and a very popular research subject. See, Harun Yilmaz, *National Identities in Soviet Historiography: The Rise of Nations under Stalin* (London: Routledge, 2015), 97-98. See also, Dina Amanzholova, "Kazakhskaiia Avtonomiia: Ot Zamysla Natsionalov k Samoopedeleniiu Po-Sovetski," *Acta Slavica Iaponica* 21 (2004); Saule Yessenova, "Soviet Nationality, Identity and Ethnicity in Central Asia: Historic Narratives and Kazakh Ethnic Identity," *Journal of Muslim Minority Affairs* 22, no. 1 (2002); Alfrid K. Bustanov, *Soviet Orientalism and the Creation of Central Asian Nations* (London: Routledge, 2014).

²⁸ One historian of Central Asia calls this cliché as "Stalin's giant pencil" as if Stalin himself drew the borders of Central Asia at his table without any local participation or local considerations. Alexander Morrison, "Stalin's Giant Pencil: Debunking a Myth About Central Asia's Borders", February 13, 2017, <https://eurasianet.org/stalins-giant-pencil-debunking-a-myth-about-central-asias-borders>.

The Cold War narrative of the Soviet Union as "nation breaker" has now been largely abandoned in Western historiography even though it is prevalent in popular perceptions of the region and in nationalist historiographies. An exceptional study which is more or less loyal to Cold War perceptions of Soviet nationalities policies is Audrey Altstadt's work on culture in early Soviet Azerbaijan. The author rejects the post-Cold War interpretations of Soviet nationalities policies although she limits her argument by saying that "Azerbaijan's experience is representative of the application of Soviet policies to people that already had a self-definition as a modern nation, replete with historical consciousness, written literature, budding scholarship, vibrant arts, and other cultural features of nationhood. Soviet policies represent a deliberate effort to destroy indigenously constructed national identity, and the people who embodied it, and replace it with values generated by a totalitarian party-state apparatus". Audrey L. Altstadt, *The Politics of Culture in Soviet Azerbaijan, 1920-1940* (London: Routledge, 2018), XVII. Although, to some extent, I agree that some historians working on Soviet cultural policies ignore violence and destruction brought by the Soviet regime and provide an overly harmonious picture of social life in the 1930s, Altstadt's understanding is based on the totalitarian model of Soviet power which sees a natural and essential conflict between national identities and the Soviet rule. Her understanding of Soviet literature as simply Russian literature and socialist realism as a policy of Russification is emblematic of her approach (50-51).

example, in his study of Tajik boarding schools, Tuychi Rashidov comes to the conclusion that Tajik officials, intellectuals, elites, specialists, managers and teachers transformed the *internat* system “from a purely Soviet ideological institution into a hybrid Soviet-local institution”.²⁹ Although Rashidov’s point about the influence of Tajiks in Soviet policies is well-taken, the concepts of Soviet and Tajik are in opposition to each other, although they eventually form a synthesis in which both concepts are treated in an essentialist way. Other historians, most importantly Ali Igmen and Victoria Clement, reduce becoming Soviet to the production of national culture and forms; national arts become the essence of the Soviet experience of the Kyrgyz and the making of a national language for the Turkmen.³⁰

This debate between the modernity-native participation camp and the colonialism camp limits the scope of scholarship. A recent issue of *Central Asian Survey* is devoted to overcoming this dichotomy in Central Asian historiography. The authors of this volume explicitly declare that the binary opposition between modernity and colonialism poses serious limitations. Botakoz Kassymbekova, the editor of the volume, writes that the authors of the volume distance themselves from the dichotomy between modernity and colonialism, and argue that:

Soviet citizens were involved in the construction of the Soviet Union under variegated terms and conditions, depending upon their status, location and relation to the state. As a result, their involvement could be voluntary or based on force and violence, inclusive or exclusionary, depending upon their status and interests in various localities. The combination of mobilization and differentiation, so the

²⁹ Tuychi Rashidov, “Soviet boarding schools as a forge of national professionals and intellectuals in Soviet Tajikistan in the 1950s and 1960s,” *Central Asian Survey* 38, no. 4 (2019): 502-504.

³⁰ Igmen, *Speaking Soviet with an Accent*; Clement, *Learning to Become Turkmen*.

general proposition goes, addressed the realities of a diverse polity and diverse centralization goals. This wide open-endedness and flexibility allowed co-option of difference (for some sooner, for others later) into the system. But the system of co-option and mobilization was itself based upon and produce the concept of and governance by differentiation.³¹

In my dissertation, I support the shift away from this dichotomy. In fact, Kassymbekova herself provided an account of early Soviet rule in Tajikistan in which she showed how the whole process was so complex; challenged, negotiated, represented and misrepresented in the local context.³²

Western historiography has recently turned to discussions on structural transformations. Previously, social and economic aspects of Soviet modernization were largely ignored, with the exception of studies on collectivization and famine in Kazakhstan.³³ In his study of Kyrgyzstan, Benjamin Loring tries to integrate Central Asia into the wider context of peasant resistance in the Soviet Union. His work offers an

³¹ Botakoz Kassymbekova, "Introduction: Understanding Stalinism in, from and of Central Asia: beyond failure, peripherality, and otherness," *Central Asian Survey* 35, no.4 (2016): p. 7.

³² Botakoz Kassymbekova, *Despite Cultures: Early Soviet Rule in Tajikistan* (Pittsburgh: University of Pittsburgh Press, 2016).

³³ Niccolo Pianciola provided the most important social and economic history of the famine in the early 2000s. Niccolo Pianciola, "Famine in the Steppe. The Collectivization of Agriculture and the Kazak Herdsmen, 1928-1934," *Cahiers du Monde russe* 45, no. 1-2 (2004). Robert Kindler's and Sarah Cameron's works contributed to this historiography. Kindler, *Stalin's Nomads*; Cameron, *The Hungry Steppe*. Pianciola has continued to develop his economic interpretation of the famine in two recent articles. Niccolo Pianciola, "Stalinist Spatial Hierarchies: Placing the Kazakhs and Kyrgyz in Soviet Economic Regionalization," *Central Asian Survey* 35, no. 4 (2016); Niccolo Pianciola, "The Benefits of Marginality: The Great Famine around the Aral Sea, 1930-1934," *Nationalities Papers* 48, no. 3 (2019). In addition to the works on Kazakh famine, Adrienne Edgar presented a detailed picture of collectivization in Turkmenistan, see Chapter 7 in Edgar, *Tribal Nation*. Matthew Payne's study of the Turksib railroad is still exceptional among Western historians. Matthew J. Payne, *Stalin's Railroad: Turksib and the Building of Socialism* (Pittsburgh: University of Pittsburgh Press, 2001). Although she primarily focuses on the late Tsarist era, Beatrice Penati also contributed to economic history of Soviet Central Asia. Beatrice Penati, "The Hunt for Red Orient: A Soviet industrial trest between Moscow and Bukhara (1922-1929)," *The Carl Beck Papers in Russian and East European Studies* 2406 (2016).

alternative narrative to Igmen's study of early Soviet Kyrgyzstan.³⁴ In her environmental history of Aral Sea Basin, Maya Peterson argues that early Soviet Central Asia remained a colony despite Soviet modernization projects. The region developed as a source of raw materials for the Soviet state even though it does not mean that the Soviet regime was the continuation of Tsarist colonialism.³⁵ In contrast, in his discussion of railroad building, Matthew Payne argues that the industrialization drive became an icon of the regime's commitment to end oppression and backwardness through economic development and political mobilization. Therefore, he suggests that the success of Soviet nation building was crucially tied to the industrialization drive of the pre-war period.³⁶ In another article, Loring argues that the Soviet rule in Central Asia transformed a Tsarist "overseas" colonialism into an internal colonial structure, although he does not define what he really means by "overseas" and "internal" colonization.³⁷ In his urban history of Tashkent, Paul Stronski shows the significance of urbanization and infrastructural development in the construction of Soviet society. According to him, building Tashkent was neither a totally top-down nor a bottom-up process, in which an Orientalist and colonialist discourse went hand in hand with an inclusive modernization project.³⁸ Despite these new studies, the enormous social and economic transformation of the region under the Soviet regime, and the everyday experiences of the masses are still quite understudied.³⁹

³⁴ Benjamin H. Loring, "Rural Dynamics and Peasant Resistance in Southern Kyrgyzstan, 1929-1930," *Cahiers du Monde russe* 49, no. 1 (2008).

³⁵ Maya K. Peterson, *Pipe Dreams: Water and Empire in Central Asia's Aral Sea Basin* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2019), 7-8.

³⁶ Payne, *Stalin's Railroad*.

³⁷ Benjamin Loring, "Colonizers with Party Cards": Soviet Internal Colonialism in Central Asia, 1917-1939," *Kritika: Explorations in Russian and Eurasian History* 15, no. 1 (2014).

³⁸ Stronski, *Tashkent: Forging a Soviet City*.

³⁹ Building on Soviet scholarship, local historians are more interested in social and economic change even though most of these studies do not go beyond descriptive histories and usually reproduce Soviet

However well-supported their case studies are, it is apparent that Northrop's and Michaels' arguments, which situate the Soviet experiment in Central Asia within a European colonial framework, cannot be generalized anymore. On the opposite side, the studies that primarily depend on oral histories with a limited number of communist activists and an examination of cultural policies at model institutions, at least to some extent, uncritically reproduce triumphalist Soviet narratives. These works contribute to our understanding of local participation in Soviet policies; however, they overemphasize the productive aspects of the Soviet regime in the 1930s.⁴⁰

Most Western histories of Soviet Central Asia start either in 1917 or 1921 and end in 1941. In this narrative, the Bolshevik Revolution and the intensification of cultural revolution are the major turning points. Even the Kazakh famine does not appear as a critical point in some studies. It is usually treated in isolation from the social and cultural development of the republic.⁴¹ In contrast, neither the Revolution, nor the intensification of cultural revolution are critical points in my study.

Even though the number of works on the war years is finally increasing, the post-

perceptions uncritically. For an exceptional study, see, Z. G. Saktaganova, *Ekonomicheskaia Modernizatsiia Kazakhstana, 1946-1970 gg.* (Karaganda, 2017). On the other hand, a local school of history of everyday life is emerging within Kazakhstan and Zauresh Saktaganova is the leading historian in this new trend. Z. G. Saktaganova and K. K. Abdrakhmanova, *Povsednevnaia Zhizn' Gorodov Tsentral'nogo Kazakhstana v 1945-1953 gg.* (Karaganda: Bolashaq-Baspa, 2010). This school primarily studies everyday life in post-War Kazakhstan; little attention is given to earlier period yet.

⁴⁰ For a critique of Igmen's book on arts and houses of culture in Kyrgyzstan, see, Niccolo Pianciola, Review of Ali Igmen, "Speaking Soviet with an Accent: Culture and Power in Kyrgyzstan," *Slavonica* 20, no. 1 (2014). I agree with the reviewer's criticism that Igmen overemphasizes the role of Kyrgyz artists and houses of culture in the formation of a Soviet Kyrgyz identity by almost completely ignoring political, social, and economic factors, notably the influence of collectivization (Pianciola also claims that Igmen's account indeed shows the ineffectiveness of these houses, the opposite of what he argues).

⁴¹ For example, in her study of medicine, culture, and power in Kazakhstan, Paula Michaels takes 1928 as the major turning point when cultural revolution was intensified in Central Asia. Her otherwise comprehensive study fails even to recognize the historical significance of the famine in Kazakh history. Michaels, *Curative Powers*.

1941 era of Soviet Central Asia is still quite understudied. Local historians, on the other hand, have intensely studied both the locals' participation in the war and the war's social and economic impact on Central Asia.⁴² We now have studies of Kazakh, Kyrgyz and Uzbek soldiers in the war which all show how the war was a turning point for the consolidation or even emergence of Soviet patriotism and how Central Asian soldiers were "Sovietized" in different ways during the war. Few historians have discussed the ideological and structural transformation that the war brought. According to Eren Tasar, the war created an accommodation between Soviet and Muslim belonging that allowed Central Asians to claim full membership in Soviet society. Studying the institutional foundation of Soviet Islam, Tasar shows how the war paved the way for the coexistence of Islam and Soviet patriotism accompanied by the relaxation of official pressure upon religion.⁴³ Paul Stronski's urban history of Tashkent also shows how the war created new spaces for local and religious expressions. While the Soviet planners' approach in the pre-War period was exactly the same as the Western colonial construction that they criticized and there was a certain hierarchy of nationalities,⁴⁴ the war brought a relatively free environment and local demands and perceptions started to be taken into account while some local practices, including veiling, reemerged in the city.⁴⁵ My understanding

⁴² Roberto Carmack provides a very comprehensive review of secondary literature on the war in local scholarship. To my knowledge, no other Western historian has discussed and benefited from local scholarship this intensely even though the author has a clear advantage due to the topic of his research. Carmack, *Kazakhstan in World War II*. As Carmack notes, even though local historiography on the war is rich, historians in independent Kazakhstan continue to uncritically reproduce the Soviet heroic narratives, hence the creativity of this literature is vague. A recent book on women in Kazakhstan during the war attempts to overcome these limitations, but mostly ends up incorporating previously ignored heroism and suffering of women into the mainstream story of heroism. Z. G. Saktaganova, Zh. Zh. Tursynova and A. Zh. Smagulov, *Zhenshchiny Tsentral'nogo Kazakhstana v Gody Velikoi Otechestvennoi Voyny, 1941-1945* (Karaganda, Izd-vo KarGU, 2016).

⁴³ Tasar, *Soviet and Muslim*.

⁴⁴ Stronski, *Tashkent: Forging a Soviet City*, 66; 122.

⁴⁵ *Ibid.*, 79.

of the impact of the war on identities in the region, the relatively weak role of socialist ideology in the “Sovietization” of Central Asians, the impact of wartime mobilization, and the emergence of new spaces for the expression of local culture and demand, are all in line with these historians’ arguments.⁴⁶

Only a few historians work on post-War Central Asia. Among them, Artemy Kalinovsky’s study of Soviet development in Tajikistan argues that even though the Soviet regime promised a welfare state from the beginning, it was only in the post-Stalin era that resources and organizational capacity to realize that goal became available. According to the author, this is particularly true for Central Asia, where the real spread of health clinics, schools and other social services beyond the cities happened only in the 1950s.⁴⁷ Kalinovsky too emphasizes the ideological flexibility of the post-Stalin years that deemphasized some aspects of socialist ideology such as atheism and made it possible for people to integrate into the society even though not everyone became “Soviet” and many remained marginalized.⁴⁸ Moritz Florin suggests Kyrgyz intellectuals understood de-Stalinization as de-colonization; he also emphasizes how local concerns instead of political debates in the center shaped the process in the republic.⁴⁹ Zbigniew Wojnowski, on the other hand, argues that Kazakhstan never really experienced de-Stalinization and locals were usually indifferent to central political and ideological

⁴⁶ Amir Weiner’s book is an obvious inspiration for this dissertation as it is for many of the historians of the impact of the war on Central Asia. Amir Weiner, *Making Sense of War: The Second World War and the Fate of the Bolshevik Revolution* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2001).

⁴⁷ Artemy M. Kalinovsky, *Laboratory of Socialist Development: Cold War Politics and Decolonization in Soviet Tajikistan* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2018), 8.

⁴⁸ *Ibid.*, 12-13.

⁴⁹ Moritz Florin, “What is Russia to Us?: Making Sense of Stalinism, Colonialism and Soviet Modernity in Kyrgyzstan, 1956-1965,” *Ab Imperio*, no. 3 (2016).

visions.⁵⁰ Although there are different views on the nature of post-War and post-Stalin Central Asia, scholars tend to agree that ideological fervor mattered little in Central Asia and local developments did not necessarily match central visions.⁵¹ My study contributes to this trend to understand how Central Asians themselves made sense of their Soviet experience instead of the visions and developments in the Soviet center.

Although gender and women are topics of intense debate in Central Asian historiography,⁵² no historian has tried to cover the images of childhood and the experiences of children in Soviet Central Asia.⁵³ In fact, that is not exclusive to Central

⁵⁰ Zbigniew Wojnowski, “De-Stalinization and the Failure of Soviet Identity Building in Kazakhstan,” *Journal of Contemporary History* 52, no. 4 (2017).

⁵¹ Paolo Sartori remarks how historians of Islam in the Soviet Union depend on the meta-narratives and periodization of Soviet historiography that do not necessarily match the experiences of Muslims. Paolo Sartori, “Towards a History of the Muslims' Soviet Union: A View from Central Asia,” *Die Welt Des Islams* 50, no. 3-4 (2010).

A pioneering, but less known, work on post-War Central Asia is Kathryn Dooley’s study of consumer culture in Uzbekistan and Kyrgyzstan. It significantly contributes to our understanding of the changing dynamics in the region. In her dissertation, Dooley discusses how ethnic particularism, including various practices and “national” symbols, was not only allowed, but even supported by Soviet authorities as an antidote to the rising consumerist (partially perceived as capitalist) culture in the post-War era. State institutions in Central Asia manufactured a set of locally specific “national goods”: porcelains, clothes, carpets, ornaments, various decorations and so on. Reproduction of national (or better to say “nationalized”) symbols and practices defined many aspects of everyday life from family relations to gender roles, from foodways to dress codes. Central Asians themselves more and more associated Uzbekness or Kyrgyzness with these national symbols and practices. It does not mean that this was the dominant ideology or way of life, but it existed along with, and often contrasted against a more European, modern outlook. Kathryn Dooley, “Consumer Culture, Ethnicity, and Self-Fashioning in Postwar Soviet Central Asia”, (PhD diss., Harvard University, 2016).

⁵² Gregory J. Massel, *The Surrogate Proletariat: Moslem Women and Revolutionary Strategies in Soviet Central Asia, 1919-1929* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1974); Northrop, *Veiled Empire*; Kamp, *The New Women in Uzbekistan*; Adrienne Edgar, “Bolshevism, Patriarchy, and the Nation: The Soviet ‘Emancipation’ of Muslim Women in Pan-Islamic Perspective,” *Slavic Review* 65, no. 2 (2006).

The women’s question is also a popular topic in Kazakh historiography. For the most part, the Soviet progressive rhetoric of women’s emancipation is still prevalent among Kazakh historians. For example, see, R. O. Balgozina, *Emansipatsiia Zhenshchin v Kazakhstane: Istoricheskii opyt i politicheskie uroki, 1917-1941* (Semipalatinsk, 2001). For an example going beyond the Soviet discourses, see, Kundakbayeva, *Modernizatsiia Rannei Epokhi v Sud’bakh Zhenshchin Kazakstana, 1920-1930 gody* (Almaty: Qazaq Universiteti, 2017). To a large extent, Kazakh historians are irrelevant to debates in Western historiography. This book is a promising exception in which the author discusses Soviet subjectivity and engages with Western historians’ works on this topic.

⁵³ Marianne Kamp studied orphans in early twentieth century Uzbekistan; but the chapter is mainly about the concept of orphanhood, adoption and legal practices in Uzbek cultural norms and how the Soviet regime influenced these conceptions. Marianne Kamp, “Kinship and Orphans: Rural Uzbeks and Loss of

Asian historiography; all works on Soviet childhood in English focus on European parts of the Soviet Union with the exception of a comparative study of children in Moscow and Kalmykia.⁵⁴ Therefore, my project is the first extensive examination of Soviet childhood in a non-Russian union-level republic.

In modern history, the perception of children's central place in political and ideological discourses and projects crosses ideological borders across the world. Children were both at the heart of colonial racial projects and of the critique of colonial rule.⁵⁵ Reformers of the old dynastic empires turned to children when they desired to change the established social structures.⁵⁶ When non-Western societies implemented Westernization projects, they understood that children were essential for their nation-building projects.⁵⁷ In Europe too, children were frequently at the center of nationalist rivalries, because they were perceived as essential for the very existence of the nation.⁵⁸

Parents in the 1920s and 1930s," in *The Family in Central Asia: New Perspectives*, ed. Sophie Roche (Berlin: Klaus Schwarz Verlag, 2017). In her dissertation in-progress on post-War Uzbekistan, Zukhra Kasimova also studies displaced children and adoption. See: Zukhra Kasimova, "Adoption and Integration of Displaced Soviet Children During the Great Patriotic War in the Uzbek SSR", *Peripheral Histories*, November 27 2018, <https://www.peripheralhistories.co.uk/post/adoption-integration-of-displaced-soviet-children-during-the-great-patriotic-war-in-the-uzbek-ssr>.

⁵⁴ Loraine de la Fe, "Empire's Children: Soviet Childhood in the Age of Revolution", (PhD diss., Florida International University, 2013). Other works on Soviet children to a large extent focus on Russian children which include rare references to other "European" nationalities. In her giant study of Soviet childhood, Catriona Kelly occasionally refers to Ukrainian, Belarussian, Jewish, and Tatar children. Catriona Kelly, *Children's World: Growing Up in Russia, 1890-1991* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2007).

⁵⁵ David M. Pomfret, *Youth and Empire: Trans-Colonial Childhoods in British and French Asia* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2015). Pomfret argues that in colonial contexts childhood functioned as a central interpretative device and a measure of the highest social and national values. Childhood and youth were used to project wider realms of colonial culture, beyond the "intimate" domain of the home to cultural authority, prestige and ideas about the future of empire (4).

⁵⁶ Anne Behnke Kinney, *Chinese Views of Childhood* (Honolulu: University of Hawaii Press, 1995).

⁵⁷ Brian Platt, "Japanese Childhood, Modern Childhood: The Nation-State, the School, and 19th-Century Globalization," *Journal of Social History* 38, no. 4 (2005); Nazan Çiçek, "Erken Cumhuriyet Döneminde Modern Çocukluk Nosyonunun Görünümleri Üzerine Bir Analiz," *Mülkiye Dergisi* 36, no. 4 (2012).

⁵⁸ Tara Zahra, *Kidnapped Souls: National Indifference and the Battle for Children in the Bohemian Lands, 1900-1948* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2011); Nick Baron ed., *Displaced Children in Russia and Eastern Europe, 1915-1953: Ideologies, Identities, Experiences* (Leiden: Brill, 2017).

Philippe Aries' well-known work on childhood in the medieval ages established the history of childhood as a field of study, although his argument that the concept of childhood did not exist before the seventeenth century, and parents did not have emotional ties with their children, has been modified significantly.⁵⁹ Most historians today accept that each culture has a conception of childhood regardless of how different these conceptions are. Therefore, childhood is a specific attribute neither of European culture, nor of modernity. Avner Giladi argues that Muslims were quite familiar with the concept of childhood as a distinct stage in the human life cycle and psychological bonds between parents and children were perceived as universal. In fact, Muslim societies created a relatively rich and varied body of knowledge regarding the uniqueness of childhood from the diagnosis and treatment of diseases to child psychology and emotional ties between parents and children.⁶⁰

The most obvious transformation of children's experiences in world history came with the Industrial Revolution. Peter Stearns argues that industrialization had wide-ranging effects on the labor market, the family and the school. The conversion of childhood from work to school, limiting family size to unprecedentedly low levels and the dramatic reduction of the infant mortality rate were the most important characteristics

⁵⁹ Philippe Aries, *Centuries of Childhood: A Social History of Family Life* (New York: Vintage, 1965). Philippe Aries' view has been so dominant in the discussions of history of childhood that Colin Heywood concludes that it created a quest for a turning point in the literature. Numerous works have been devoted to determining a turning point for the creation of modern childhood. However, Heywood argues that "far from 'discovering' the innocence and weakness of childhood at some particular period, people debated these and related issues from the early medieval period to the twentieth century". Thus, there is no "essential child" to be discovered. Colin Heywood, *A History of Childhood: Children and Childhood in the West from Medieval to Modern Times* (Cambridge: Polity Press, 2001), 170. For Hugh Cunningham, for example, the decisive turning point was the eighteenth century and it was primarily a transformation in ideas of childhood. Hugh Cunningham, *Children and Childhood in Western Society since 1500* (London: Routledge, 2005), 58.

⁶⁰ Avi Giladi, "Islam," in *Children and Childhood in World Religions: Primary Sources and Texts*, eds. Don S. Browning and Marcia J. Bunge (Rutgers University Press, 2011), 155-156.

of this transformation.⁶¹ Cunningham agrees that it is beyond question that compulsory schooling transformed the experience and the meanings attached to children more than any other factor.⁶² Another important transformation in this process was the emergence of what Viviana Zelizer calls the “economically worthless”, but “emotionally priceless” child.⁶³

Nevertheless, non-Western peoples in a sense “re-discovered” childhood in the process of modernization and Westernization. This re-discovery led non-Western societies to reconsider their conceptions of childhood in relation to modern, or Western, approaches to children. In this way, children and childhood became a central discussion within intellectual circles.⁶⁴ On their part, the Western liberal world established attitudes towards children as one of their central tenets while categorizing how “civilized” non-Western peoples were.⁶⁵ Modern Western conceptions of childhood became a model for the non-Western reformers across the world, just as Western conceptions of race or civilization did. Brian Platt argues that Meiji reformers thought that the power of the West was based on the nation-state's capacity for mobilizing human resources, and in order to accomplish this goal they recognized the particular significance of schools which extended the mobilization project to Japanese children. Consequently, opening children to public inquiry created a new awareness about childhood.⁶⁶ Similarly, in her treatment of

⁶¹ Peter Stearns, *Childhood in World History* (New York and London: Routledge, 2006), 55.

⁶² Cunningham, *Children and Childhood*.

⁶³ Viviana A. Zelizer, *Pricing the Priceless Child: The Changing Social Value of Children* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1994).

⁶⁴ Kinney, *Representations of Childhood and Youth in Early China*, 2.

⁶⁵ Caroline Kay Steedman, *Childhood, Culture, and Class in Britain, 1860-1931* (London: Virago, 1990), 63-64.

⁶⁶ Platt, "Japanese Childhood, Modern Childhood".

the childhood images of Kemalist Turkey, Nazan Çiçek emphasizes the goal of mobilization for the benefit of the nation-state in early Republican Turkey.⁶⁷

In *The Path of Abay*, probably the most widely read Kazakh novel ever, Mukhtar Auezov depicts the life of the pre-revolutionary “enlightener” Abay Qunanbay primarily as a struggle between generations.⁶⁸ Abay's rebellion against his ignorant and despotic father begins in his childhood. Narrating the “enlightenment” process of the Kazakh people by using little Abay's outrage against his father situates Kazakh intellectuals' desire for modernization not only within the longer framework of Russian literary and intellectual history, which had a long tradition of theme of generational conflict, but also within the larger story of non-Western peoples' encounter with the Western civilization.⁶⁹ In the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, children and youth everywhere across the non-Western world symbolized modernization and civilization, and the Kazakh path under Soviet rule was no different. Understanding the story of modernity, and of socialism particularly, requires an investigation of the history of childhood which represents the plans, hopes, and dreams of the modernizers.

Even though this dissertation's focus is children in Kazakhstan, it is not directly a work of history of childhood. My primary goal is not to understand how the conception of childhood was transformed; rather I use the theme of childhood as a way to understand the larger dynamics of the Soviet regime and society. As Peter Stearns suggests,

⁶⁷ However, she does not define this process as one of modernization of childhood, but according to her, Turkish children were expected to sacrifice their childhood for the sake of the nation, thus they were supposed to act like small adults. This is a modified version of Aries' argument. Çiçek, “Erken Cumhuriyet Döneminde Modern Çocukluk”.

⁶⁸ The biographic novel is composed of four volumes; the first volume came out in 1942, while the last one was published in 1952. All four volumes were again published in 1956 with the title *The Path of Abay*.

⁶⁹ For a comparative study of youth movements as agents of modernity, see, Touraj Atabaki ed., *Modernity and Its Agencies: Young Movements in the History of the South* (New Delhi: Manohar Publishers, 2010).

childhood mirrors society and explains the larger human experience.⁷⁰ Thus, what I am interested in is primarily a mirror of society and a discussion of larger human experience.⁷¹

In post-Soviet Kazakhstan, mostly ethnographers study childhood. These studies, to a large extent, focus on childhood rituals and folkloristic customs and are specifically interested in uncovering ethnic particularism: those childhood rituals are essentialized in time and place and become a component of being Kazakh.⁷² Kazakh childhood is, to a large extent associated, even equated with these rituals. Most of these rituals cover the period from pregnancy to the first few years of a newborn.⁷³ Yet, despite this preoccupation with childhood rituals, arguably, these rituals tell little about the real experiences of Kazakh children as rituals are primarily about their social functions and only secondarily about children themselves. Moreover, these rituals are, almost entirely,

⁷⁰ Stearns, *Childhood in World History*.

⁷¹ There are other works that have similar goals even though they focus on children and childhood. A notable example is Tara Zahra's study of children in Bohemia in which she is primarily interested in rivalling nationalist projects and national indifference of the masses. Zahra, *Kidnapped Souls*.

⁷² An exceptional work is S. P. Kul'sarieva's ethnography of childhood from the 1950s to 1980s in which even though she too pays considerable attention to childhood rituals; unlike many others, she continuously draws parallels with other societies and she is not only interested in what is essential in "Kazakhness", but also tries to understand changes. S. P. Kul'sarieva, *Etnografiia Detstva Kazakhov v 1950-1980 gg. (na materialakh Almatinskoi in Kyzylordinskoi oblasti)* (Almaty: Qazaq Universiteti, 2017).

The preoccupation with ethnic particularism and an overtly strong focus on rituals have led to the creation of the pseudo-scientific field "ethno-pedagogy" in the country. Although a comprehensive study of this literature is required to reach conclusions, my impression is that this allegedly academic field is not only a reflection of ethnocentrism, but also has the potential to provide means for exclusionary politics in the country. For an example in English, see, Klara Kozhakhmetova, Baktiyar Ortayev, Sandygul Kaliyeva, Raikhan Utaliyeva and Gulzhiyan Jonissova, "Ethnic Pedagogy as an Integrative, Developing Branch of Pedagogy," *Mediterranean Journal of Social Sciences* 6, no. 1 (2015). This "developing" field in contemporary Kazakhstan still waits scholars of education and pedagogy for a serious and critical examination.

⁷³ These childhood rituals with an extreme obsession with ethnic particularism are being popularized with all means available; one can find a vast array of popular media sources on the topic. For an academic discussion of childhood rituals see: A. V. Konovalov and N. Zh. Shakhanova, "Rebenok v Sisteme Traditsionnoi Obriadnosti Kazakhov (Rodil'nyi i ranniy vospitatel'nyi tsikly) in *Detstvo v Traditsionnoi Kul'ture Narodov Srednei Azii, Kazakhstana I Kavkaza*, ed. R. R. Rakhimov (St. Petersburg: Rossiiskaia Akademiia Nauk, 1998); Also, see, Kul'sarieva, *Etnografiia Detstva Kazakhov*, 17-80.

connected to the very early years of a child, hence a longer period of childhood in traditional Kazakh society has attracted very little scholarly attention. What we know is that, in the nomadic Kazakh society,⁷⁴ there was no fixed age limit for being a child and according to some sources it could be anywhere between 12 to 15.⁷⁵ In general, girls were married at 13-14 and boys were at 15-16. But there are also references to much earlier marriages among Kazakhs and it was commonly believed that earlier marriages were good for the morality of society.⁷⁶ Also we know that to easily adapt children to life, it was necessary from an early age to accustom children to work and instill certain skills.⁷⁷ Children as young as 5-year-olds were expected to contribute to their parents' tasks.

Just like in many premodern societies, the main function of the nomadic Kazakh family was producing children. This function of family was particularly emphasized in Kazakh society due to the importance of lineages. Scholars usually claim that a child was considered the main source of happiness for parents and the meaning of the family in the traditional Kazakh society.⁷⁸ This perception that Kazakhs *love* children is continuously reproduced in the popular imagination. Respondents of an oral history project in post-Soviet Kazakhstan time and again repeated this cliché that Kazakhs extraordinarily love children.⁷⁹ Yet, it is unclear in the literature whether what was so intensely loved were

⁷⁴ Scholarly literature itself is essentialist when it comes to the concept of traditional Kazakh society as if these traditions were fixed across centuries and geographies, mainly due to the lack of enough sources. Hence, any evidence from any century and geography is used to discuss what is a “nomadic Kazakh tradition”, although there are also regional studies.

⁷⁵ Alfred E. Hudson, *Kazak Social Structure* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1938), 42.

⁷⁶ Khalel A. Arghynbaev, *Qazaq Otbası* (Almaty: Kainar, 1996), 83.

⁷⁷ Kul'sarieva, *Etnografiia Detstva Kazakhov*, 7.

⁷⁸ Konovalov and Shakhanova, “Rebenok v Sisteme Traditsionnoi Obriadnosti Kazakhov,” 10.

⁷⁹ The oral history project was conducted mainly in the rural areas of Southern Kazakhstan that is widely perceived as one of the most traditional regions of Kazakhstan. The author has an extremely essentialist conception of “Kazakh culture” (which is seen equal to or at least part of Turkish culture) and uncritically reproduces the discourse of her interviewees, which is obviously structured by contemporary nationalist ethnocentric discourse of an ideal and happy patriarchal family. Yet, respondents' answers are still

children themselves or the desire to have as many children as possible. In other words, we do not have evidence to suggest that there were extraordinarily affectionate relations between parents and children in Kazakh society, even though emotional ties definitely existed. In nomadic Kazakh society, families with no children were considered the unhappiest of all; however, families with no sons were considered barely better than the previous.⁸⁰ This is a reflection of the patriarchal social structure and shows how strongly gendered nomadic society was; yet, it also suggests that the desire to have children is not the equivalent to loving children.

Another significant aspect of traditional Kazakh family is the absence of a conception of nuclear family. During my research I have faced a significant amount of ambiguity in texts regarding kinship terms due to this family structure. Often it is quite difficult to determine who the author of a text is referring to by which term. In memoirs and other sources, I have seen that Kazakhs can address their mothers as *äpke* (older sister), *täte* (aunt) and with other terms; and their fathers as *agha* (older brother), *ata* (grandfather) and with other terms. More challenging for a researcher, frequently when referring to their biological parents, they use these types of extended family terms more than the terms father and mother. This was just as common for the educated as it was for the uneducated. For example, in one of the letters Äzilkhan Nurshayyqov received from Orynkesh, the girl he had loved from childhood, when writing about future dreams and the desire to have children, Orynkesh wrote “I will be ‘Oryn täte’ (Aunt Oryn) for them,

interesting to see which national myths are continuously reproduced within the society. The author's uncritical stance probably contributed to the reproduction of the same discourse with almost all her interviewees. Hikmet Demirci, “Sosyokültürel deęişim sürecinde Kazak ailesi ve çocuk terbiyesi (Sözlü tarih araştırması)”, (PhD diss., Erciyes Üniversitesi, Kayseri, 2013), 234-263.

⁸⁰Arghynbaev, *Qazaq Otbasy*, 85.

you will be ‘Äzil aga’ (Brother Äzil).⁸¹ Academic Serik Qīrabaev (born in 1927)’s family is an example of how complicated family relations could be. His father Smayyl and uncles Zhäken and Zhaman raised their children collectively. In the subsection “My Fathers”, Qīrabaev explains how if there was no official birth certificate for children, there would have been no conception of one’s own children among his “fathers”.⁸²

There was a widespread tradition to give the first child to grandparents, and this is explained by early marriages. According to this logic, new parents themselves were still too young to care for a child and consequently grandparents raised the first child. This child was considered the grandparents’ and the child considered his or her biological father as an older brother and biological mother as an older sister.⁸³ Definitely, this tradition contributed to the ambiguity of kinship terms, but it does not explain it totally since ambiguity was not limited to the first child of a family. In addition, ambiguity is not only about fathers and mothers. While calling their father older brother, the same person can call his grandfather or uncle father or his uncles brothers. Any relative, including the ones who would be thought too distant in other cultures, can be seen as brothers. It is sometimes so complicated that a person can call his father anything but father while calling other relatives father (which is also true for mothers).⁸⁴

⁸¹ Äzilkhan Nurshayyqov, *Äskerī Kündelik* (Almaty: Öner, 2010), 443.

⁸² Serik Qīrabaev, *Ömir Taghylymdary: Estelikter* (Almaty: Bilim, 2006), 4-10.

⁸³ Kul’sarieva, *Etnografīia Detstva Kazakhov*, 84.

This tradition survived the Soviet regime and is obviously still alive in contemporary Kazakhstan even though it has been transformed. Considering biological parents as older siblings might be weakened in contemporary society (even though I personally know examples of this) but giving the first child to grandparents at least for a few years (usually in early childhood) is still very common. This is different from grandparents’ assistance in child upbringing which can be seen in many societies. This tradition further questions the myth that there were extraordinarily affectionate relations between parents and children in Kazakh society.

⁸⁴ Ambiguity about kinship terms are obviously less powerful in contemporary society which is directly related to the rise of nuclear families. However, while conducting interviews with Kazakhs from Xinjiang as a volunteer, quite often I faced similar difficulties (I assume these traditions are kept more strongly

According to Kul'sarieva, the real transformation of the Kazakh family structure occurred starting from the 1950s when young people started to migrate to cities and became freed from parental influences.⁸⁵ Hence, the real cause for the emergence or consolidation of the nuclear family in Kazakhstan was urbanization, not socialist ideology. Until the famine, the Kazakh family structure remained almost totally untouched; it was little influenced by the Revolution. The famine destroyed the nomadic society and left tens of thousands of children without any family. As I show in Chapter 2, all the rules and values of family life were transgressed: husbands sold their wives; mothers killed their own children. It would be naïve to assume that family life remained “normal” for the surviving population, yet Kul'sarieva suggests that until the war, traditions about birth and socialization of Kazakh children practically remained unchanged. Starting from the post-War years these traditions underwent gradual transformation.⁸⁶ However, despite all these transformations, the procreative function of family remained as one of the important determinants of Kazakh society.⁸⁷

The role of children in the Soviet utopia has been extensively researched. According to Soviet utopian socialists, children were the “real revolutionaries”.⁸⁸ Socialism's eventual triumph over capitalism was understood to be dependent largely on

among Chinese Kazakhs, but this assumption is not verified by research). Almost all my interviewees called their cousins, sometimes even distant cousins, as brothers or sisters that we again and again had to verify if they meant blood siblings. Commonly they called their uncles *agha* (older brother) or *kishi äke* (little/younger father) which is a proof of the weakness of nuclear family even today.

⁸⁵ Kul'sarieva, *Etnografiia Detstva Kazakhov*, 126; 135.

⁸⁶ *Ibid.*, 15.

⁸⁷ *Ibid.*, 18.

⁸⁸ Lynn Mally, *Culture of the Future: The Proletkult Movement in Revolutionary Russia* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1990), 180-81; for the utopian revolutionary visions of childhood in the 1920s, among others, see: Lisa A. Kirschenbaum, *Small Comrades: Revolutionizing Childhood in Soviet Russia, 1917-1932* (New York: Routledge, 2001).

making the new generation communist.⁸⁹ According to Catriona Kelly, childhood was not only a central area for the modernizing ambitions of the Soviet regime; the propagated happiness of children was at the heart of its very legitimacy.⁹⁰

Orphans occupied a special place in Soviet attitudes towards children. The theme of orphanhood had immense importance for Soviet literature (and for Soviet filmography), because it was closely connected to the project of creating a generation of new people.⁹¹ Some of the most influential early Soviet cultural productions, such as Grigory Belykh's and Leonid Panteleev's novel *The Republic of Skhid* (1926), and Nikolai Ekk's film *Road into Life* (1931), depict the life of orphan heroes who are idealized and romanticized as the harbingers of the new age.⁹² Although scholars have studied the images, ideologies and official policies regarding orphans, we still have few studies of orphans' or besprizorniks' experiences.⁹³ Alan Ball's study of abandoned children in Russia from 1918 to 1930 is very rich in how he reconstructs the lives and experiences of these children; particularly his treatment of street children is exceptional.⁹⁴ World War I, the Civil War and the accompanying famine created millions of homeless

⁸⁹ Anne E. Gorsuch, *Youth in Revolutionary Russia: Enthusiasts, Bohemians, Delinquents* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2000), 19.

⁹⁰ Kelly, *Children's World*.

⁹¹ Marina Balina, "Troubled Lives: The Legacy of Childhood in Soviet Literature," *The Slavic and East European Journal* 49 no. 2 (2005): 252.

⁹² For more information, see, Chapter 6: "Orphan Heroes, 1917-1935" in Kelly, *Children's World*.

⁹³ Experiences of orphans of the Stalinist terror is relatively well-researched though. See: Cathy A. Frierson, *Silence Was Salvation: Child Survivors of Stalin's Terror and World War II in the Soviet Union* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2015). Oral histories with child survivors of the Terror are also available in Kazakhstan. See: L. D. Degitaeva and E. M. Gribanova, *Stranitsy tragicheskikh sudeb: Sbornik vospominaniy zhertv politicheskikh repressiy v SSSR v. 1920-1950 gg.* (Almaty: Zheti Zharghy, 2002). These are usually the children of intelligentsia and in the Kazakh case most of them are children of the famous politicians and intellectuals. Even though, I occasionally turn to children of the Stalinist terror, I prefer to focus on the famine in this dissertation and the Terror is not discussed separately.

⁹⁴ Alan M. Ball, *And Now My Soul is Hardened: Abandoned Children in Soviet Russia, 1918-1930* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1994).

children; they kept roaming across Russia for years to come.⁹⁵ In a unique study on identities and subjectivities of detdom children under Stalin, Andrew Stone shows that the Soviet regime still perceived homeless children as the prime candidates to become “New Soviet People” as long as they were educated properly. According to Stone, despite many problems, the Soviet regime did create Soviet citizens in these institutions.⁹⁶ In this dissertation, I argue that that was not the case in post-famine Kazakhstan.

Soviet children’s experiences of World War II have attracted more attention. Olga Kucherenko's extensive study covers both the pre-war patriotic education of Soviet children and their experiences during the war. According to Kucherenko, “a sense of patriotic consciousness and ‘civic duty’ was fostered through moral and political education to which Soviet children were subjected most of their active time” in the pre-war period.⁹⁷ Kucherenko's book shows that although there were other motivations such as loss of family members or the spirit of adventure, Soviet ideology and patriotic education provided the main motivation for children to join the war effort. In Kucherenko's account, the prewar patriotic or political education appears as the main

⁹⁵ However, attitudes towards this wave of abandoned children were completely different than the orphans of collectivization famines. This wave of abandoned children was the product of long years of fighting and they were perceived as the remnants of capitalism. Therefore, officials or other witnesses produced a vast array of sources on these children that provides ample opportunities for historians. In contrast, Soviet authorities never acknowledged collectivization famines and for this reason we simply do not have the same sources for the 1930s.

Once again during the World War II, the regime intensely publicized children’s tragic fates; saving orphans turned into a national campaign. Rachel Faircloth Green, “‘There Will Not Be Orphans Among Us’: Soviet Orphanages, Foster Care, and Adoption, 1941-1956”, (PhD diss., The University of Chicago, 2006).

⁹⁶ Andrew B. Stone, “Growing Up Soviet? The Orphans of Stalin's Revolution and Understanding the Soviet Self”, (PhD diss., University of Washington, 2012).

⁹⁷ Olga Kucherenko, *Little Soldiers: How Soviet Children Went to War, 1941-1945* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2011), 67. In her subsequent book on street children during the war, Kucherenko mostly focuses on the shortcomings of the Soviet regime which depended on exploitation of children. Hence, the two books’ understanding of Soviet state’s capacity and goals regarding children are substantially different if not contradictory. Olga Kucherenko, *Soviet Street Children and the Second World War: Welfare and Social Control under Stalin* (London and New York: Bloomsbury Academic, 2016).

source of Soviet identity of children. In contrast, Soviet ideology mattered less for Kazakh children and Soviet patriotism was mostly the product of the war experience itself. Julie deGraffenried argues that the war represents a rupture in the Soviet conceptions of childhood. The war also provided a space for alternative conceptions of childhood by creating opportunities for local actors to involve in the process.⁹⁸ For Kazakhstan, I show that the war indeed homogenized conceptions of childhood.

This dissertation brings together images, experiences and memories of children in Kazakhstan. Soviet authorities accepted individuals as children until the age of 14 even though various laws made children younger than 14 responsible for criminal acts or for labor mobilization in certain periods. In this study, I accept this definition of a child; however, I occasionally include teenagers older than 14 years old since boundaries are not always clear. Some of the sources used in this study cannot be exclusively classified as children's literature, but we can assume they were also consumed by children. In addition, *detsdoms* frequently hosted teenagers throughout the 1930s (in some cases individuals as old as 21-years old). Also, while using testimonies and memoirs, I sometimes cross the boundary between childhood and youth mainly due to the scarcity of personal texts.

I discuss imagining childhood in Soviet Kazakhstan mainly in Chapter 1, "Socialist Visions in the Periphery: Imagining Childhood in Soviet Kazakhstan, 1928-1941" and Chapter 4, "Mobilization and Heroism: Kazakh Children during World War 2, 1941-1945" although other chapters too include references to different images of

⁹⁸ Julie K. deGraffenried. *Sacrificing Childhood: Children and the Soviet State in the Great Patriotic War* (Lawrence: University Press of Kansas, 2014).

children. Even though a primary goal of my project is going beyond a focus on the elite, images of and for children were produced by the educated segment of the society who were not exclusively, but mostly members of what can be considered as a political and intellectual elite. These visions were consumed by children and, to some extent, became part of their lives. Nonetheless, I never equate imagination of childhood with children's experiences, and other parts of the dissertation are used to produce an account of the lived experience of childhood in Kazakhstan. Debates over childhood in Soviet historiography are closely related to cultural revolution.

Lived experiences of children are most directly studied in Chapter 2, "Starving Little Bodies: Kazakh Children During the Famine, 1930-1933" and Chapter 3, "Orphans of Famine: Rethinking Sovietization in Central Asia, 1933-1941", but also in the last three chapters. Studying the experiences of Kazakh children gives us an opportunity to compare Soviet ambitions and Soviet realities. My study is informed by writing history from below and literature on history of everyday life provides a framework for it. I follow Michel De Certeau in order to grasp the meaning in everyday life. According to De Certeau's basic problematic, the presence and circulation of a representation tells us nothing about what it is for its users, thus we must analyze its manipulation by users who are not its makers. For him, the "making" in question is a production, but a hidden, devious, and dispersed one. It is everywhere, but it is silent and almost invisible.⁹⁹

In Soviet historiography, everyday life is commonly studied for the goal of understanding how ideology changed life. For example, Kiaer and Nayman view

⁹⁹ Michel de Certeau, *The Practice of Everyday Life*, trans., Steven F. Rendall (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2011), XII-XIII.

everyday life as a realm of internalization of the ideology, and the official ideology of the everyday was, broadly speaking, cultural revolution.¹⁰⁰ It is true that the everyday was problematized by the Soviet regime and that war against banality was at the heart of early Soviet self-fashioning. The solution offered to the problem of the everyday was to transform it.¹⁰¹

However, I follow Alexei Yurchak who argues that the performances or activities of citizens in the Soviet Union were indeed neither supportive nor resistant, but politically irrelevant and in this understanding, ideology is not what shaped everyday experience.¹⁰² More importantly, he shows how the signifiers of Soviet authoritative discourse were meticulously reproduced, while its signifieds were relatively unimportant.¹⁰³ Therefore, the meanings were continuously reproduced by people and the hegemony of the authoritative discourses does not necessarily mean that people consciously internalized them, as well as that they did not consciously oppose. Yurchak's work provides a framework to understand post-Stalinist society, however, I argue that it is also applicable to Kazakhstan (possibly to other peripheral regions too) in the age of Stalin.

¹⁰⁰ Christina Kiaer and Eric Nayman, "Introduction," in *Everyday Life in Early Soviet Russia: Taking the Revolution Inside* eds. Christina Kiaer and Eric Nayman (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2006), 1-22. Others are still primarily interested in state practices, although not directly ideology. In a widely read account of everyday life in the 1930s, Sheila Fitzpatrick explicitly states that she is interested in "everyday interactions that in some way involved the state". Sheila Fitzpatrick, *Everyday Stalinism: Ordinary Life in Extraordinary Times: Soviet Russia in the 1930s* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1999), 3.

¹⁰¹ Svetlana Boym, *Common Places: Mythologies of Everyday Life in Russia* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1994), 63.

¹⁰² Alexei Yurchak, *Everything Was Forever, Until It Was No More: The Last Soviet Generation* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2005).

¹⁰³ *Ibid.*, 114.

I understand eventual “Sovietization” of Kazakhs not as a product of socialist ideology and internalization of Soviet ideals, but rather routinization of life under the relatively relaxed environment of the hegemony of ideological obsessions. Routinization is vital to understand the everyday and to understand the stable nature of Soviet Central Asia. Repetitiveness is a central conception of *Alltagsgeschichte* literature that emphasizes the function of routine to “relieve” the individual of constant uncertainty and doubts. It is argued that routinization is a precondition of the stability of social groups and institutions.¹⁰⁴ The concept of everyday does not merely intend to bring to light what is routine. It is also a tool to understand historical change:

If the everyday is that which is most familiar and most recognizable, then what happens when that world is disturbed and disrupted by the *unfamiliar*? If the 'shock of the new' sends tremors to the core of the everyday, then what happens to the sense of the everyday as familiar and recognizable? In modernity the everyday becomes the setting for a dynamic process: for making the unfamiliar familiar; for getting accustomed to the disruption of custom; for struggling to incorporate the new; for adjusting to different way of living. The everyday marks the success and failure of this process.¹⁰⁵

Lüdtke poses the question which occupies a central place for this dissertation: “does the image of the ‘grand contours’ of historical life actually accord with the concrete *experience* of ‘the many’?”¹⁰⁶

¹⁰⁴ Alf Lüdtke, “Introduction: What is the History of Everyday Life and Who Are Its Practitioners?,” in *The History of Everyday Life: Reconstructing Historical Experiences and Ways of Life*, ed. Alf Lüdtke (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1995), 5.

¹⁰⁵ Ben Highmore, *Everyday Life and Cultural Theory: An Introduction* (London and New York: Routledge, 2002), 2.

¹⁰⁶ Lüdtke, “Introduction”, 7.

Childhood memories are used almost in all chapters. I discuss memory primarily to understand how Kazakhs made sense of their own Soviet experience. Although I am aware that memory is first and foremost about perceptions, ideas and desires about people's contemporary lives, I am less interested in discussing people's contemporary lives and more interested in what they choose to remember about their childhoods. I try to find dominant themes in various accounts and to understand what mattered for these people in their childhood. For sure, we cannot accept memories as facts, however, dismissing the credibility of their value means dismissing the voices and views of people.

Unlike scholars working on contemporary children, historians lack access to a wide range of sources and sources impose significant constraints and limitations on our research. In addition, most sources on children were written by adults.¹⁰⁷ Unfortunately (or naturally), the sources significantly constrain this study too. In fact, due to the lack of available sources I frequently had to be innovative and use different kinds of sources for different chapters. I am aware that there is an inconsistency regarding sources used for different topics and for different periods. This problem particularly appears in use of memoirs. There is no guide to published memoirs in Kazakhstan, and most of them were published in small editions and some cannot even be found at the national library.

¹⁰⁷ For methodological constraints of historians working on children, see: Nick Baron, "Placing the Child in Twentieth-Century History: Contexts and Framework," in Nick Baron ed., *Displaced Children*.

In recent years, social scientists and historians have emphasized the agency of children and tried to understand them as historical actors rather than being the passive witnesses of their own lives. One of the major goals of a recent volume on socialist and post-socialist childhoods is exactly this new framework. Iveta Silova, Nelli Piattoeva and Zsuzsa Millei eds., *Childhood and Schooling in Post(Socialist) Societies: Memories of Everyday Life* (Basingstoke, Hampshire: Palgrave Macmillan, 2017). However valuable the contribution of such an approach is, it is not too feasible for historians working with limited sources. The editors of the book come up with a very subjective solution to this problem: "The best intimation we can achieve is through memories of researchers' lived experiences as children" (p. 6). Hence, even though the approach is innovative, its use is very limited.

Moreover, I would say there is no autonomous memoir genre in Kazakhstan since quite often memoirs of a person are published in volumes that contain different types of writings including journalistic articles, academic studies and most frequently memoirs of other people about someone else. These are usually closer to festschriften than memoirs. Another problem is that it is almost impossible to reproduce the voices of children at detdoms, even though I have identified and used a number of petitions by detdom children, which were written mostly after they left these institutions.

In sum, this dissertation uses a wide range of sources including archives, document collections, all types of published primary sources, testimonies, memoirs and so on. There are two major archives in Kazakhstan for the Soviet period; both of them are located in Almaty. The Central State Archive of the Republic of Kazakhstan (TsGARK) hosts the state archives, while party archives are kept at the Presidential Archive (APRK). In these two archives, I have worked on documents related to children including party archives, Komsomol archives, archives of Sovnarkom and various ministries such as Narkompros and Narkomzdrav, archives of children's institutions such as Central Commission for the Improvement of Children's Life and Society of Children's Friends and various document collections. I have not been able to work in the Central State Archive of Films, Photos, and Sound Recordings of the Republic of Kazakhstan (TsGAKFDZRK) since I was planning to do so at the very end of my research; but the archives have been closed since March 2020 when the quarantine measures first started. Consequently, only photos that are available online are used from this archive.

Chapter 1, "Socialist Visions in the Periphery: Imagining Childhood in Soviet Kazakhstan, 1928-1941" depends almost exclusively on published sources and is based

on extensive research at the rare books section of the National Library of Kazakhstan. Published sources used for this chapter include children's literature, various published reports about schools, pioneer publications, pedagogical works, newspapers, journals, selected novels and other related material for or about children. Sources in native languages are rarely used by historians of Central Asia, thus my dissertation will be one of the few to do so; the chapter mostly discusses sources in Kazakh. The chapter discusses how socialism was introduced to Kazakh children and argues that revolutionary utopian visions of childhood, widespread in the Soviet Union in the 1920s, only partially influenced the discourse of childhood in Kazakhstan and the authority of family and school were never significantly challenged. Rather, Kazakhstan embraced the Stalinist conception of a childhood based on discipline and authority as the essence of Soviet childhood. This may help us understand not only the direct, and de-ideologized, connection between the Stalinist regime and post-Soviet Kazakhstan, but also the resilience of patriarchal family relations in contemporary Kazakhstan. Secondly, it helps us understand the nature and vision of socialist rule in Central Asia; I conclude that local debates were relatively indifferent to central political and ideological visions.¹⁰⁸

Chapter 2, "Starving Little Bodies: Kazakh Children During the Famine, 1930-1933" uses archival sources but depends more on published primary sources such as memoirs, oral history interviews, document collections and so on. There are quite a number of published document collections about the famine right now, and they allow me to get acquainted with the most important official documents about this tragedy. The real

¹⁰⁸ Locals' indifference to the center's visions is most explicitly asserted in Wojnowski, "De-Stalinization and the Failure of Soviet Identity Building in Kazakhstan".

contribution of this chapter is the wide use of famine testimonies that have been neglected by Western historians up to this point. Some historians of the famine used literally only one personal account of the famine which is now the most famous Kazakh memoir because it is available in English.¹⁰⁹ Among Western historians, there is a common belief that there are only few testimonies of the Kazakh famine: a number of oral history collections and various memoirs that include references to the famine are unknown to Western historians primarily because most of them are in Kazakh.¹¹⁰

Most of the testimonies I use are oral history interviews. The problem with these oral histories is that sometimes it is not possible to uncover the interview information (when, where, why and by whom it was conducted). There were a few attempts to collect oral histories of the famine in the early years of independence. Many interviews were collected in those years.¹¹¹ Yet, some of these testimonies remained unpublished for about two decades and were finally published in the 2010s.¹¹² In the meantime, some people published either their own testimonies or what they heard from their parents in periodicals, memoirs and on the internet. These are sometimes republished in different collections without providing the original source information. There was another oral

¹⁰⁹ Mukhamet Shayakhmetov, *The Silent Steppe: The Memoir of a Kazakh Nomad Under Stalin*, trans. Jan Butler (New York: The Rookery Press, 2007).

¹¹⁰ In her recent book, Sarah Cameron rightly claims that she is the first historian to use famine testimonies; however, she uses only one collection of testimonies and a few others published in periodicals. Cameron, *The Hungry Steppe*.

Local historians frequently publish these testimonies in primary source collections, but they rarely include them into a general discussion of the famine. An exception is B. G. Ayaghan, et. al., *1932-1933 Zhyldardaghy Asharshylyq Aqıqaty - Pravda o Golode, 1932-1933 Godov* (Almaty: TOO Litera-M, 2012).

¹¹¹ *Qyzylдар Qyrghyny* (Red Massacre), published in 1993, was the product of these early attempts. It includes some of the earliest, more detailed and more reliable testimonies of the famine. Cameron used this collection. Zakhardin Qystaubaev and Balzhan Khabdina eds., *Qyzylдар Qyrghyny* (Almaty: Öner, 1993)

¹¹² The materials from an oral history project conducted in the early 1990s were only published in 2014. T. E. Tölebaev and G. E. Sabdenova eds., *32-niñ zulmaty (Professor K. M. Atabaev zhetekshilik zhasaghan tarikhī-etnologiyalyq ekspeditsiya derekteri)* (Almaty: Qazaq Universiteti, 2014)

history project conducted by Kazakh historians in 2008 and these testimonies were published by the Presidential Archive.¹¹³ Even though the most important collections were published by academics, there are now also collections published by amateur researchers or public intellectuals.¹¹⁴ Testimonies collected in the early 1990s were mostly told by survivors themselves, but in time, famine memories that were told by parents or other elderly relatives to the next generation began to dominate. We understand that some of these testimonies were first written down or told to a third person during the Soviet era, but they were all published after 1991.

There are only a few Kazakh memoirs that are primarily devoted to the famine, but I use a number of other memoirs that include reminiscences of the famine in a broader life story. I also use some testimonies which are published in newspapers or available online as well as a few literary representations of the famine. These are all post-Soviet memoirs. No historian has ever used them. Reminiscences that were first published either in memoirs or in periodicals were usually written (or dictated) by famous writers, academics or other public figures. Writers were usually the first ones to tell their stories in the early 1990s. Oral history projects conducted by Kazakh historians also collected testimonies from ordinary people. These are usually shorter and less detailed.

The Kazakh famine is different from many other famines in world history because the Soviet regime never acknowledged the it, and there was no Kazakh diaspora to

¹¹³ This collection also used testimonies from an online project. *Qazaq Khalqynyñ Qasireti (Quzhattar men Materialdar Zhīnaghy: XX Ghasyrdyn 20-shy, 30-shy Zhyldaryndaghy Qazakstandaghy Asharshylyq)* (Almaty: Almaty Oblysynyñ Muraghattar Zhāne Quzhattama Basqarmasy, 2010)

¹¹⁴ These ones usually republish various documents and testimonies that they can find regardless of where they were first published (even facebook posts) and less sensitive about the source of a testimony. Saghat Zhūsip ed., *Asharshylyq Aqīqaty: Dereker men Dāyekter* (Almaty: Kursiv ZhShS, 2015)

introduce the Kazakh famine to the world during the Cold War. That makes analyzing post-Soviet famine testimonies even more urgent. The reliability of an oral history interview or a testimony is always questionable. However, I focus on images and themes that appear in multiple, sometimes even in the majority of testimonies. In addition, in the Kazakh case there are no overly influential accounts of the famine that shaped people's memories (such as Alexander Solzhenitsyn's books have shaped Gulag survivors' memories). Even though Kazakh testimonies were collected less systematically than the Ukrainian ones, the less politicized character of the famine in Kazakhstan is an advantage of Kazakh testimonies in terms of reliability. For all these reasons, I believe that these are more or less authentic ways of how Kazakhs remember the famine.

Partially descriptive, this chapter tries to shed light on children's experiences during the catastrophic years. The second half of the chapter focuses on how Kazakhs made sense of the catastrophe by using famine testimonies. In this section, I argue that Kazakhs primarily made sense of what they endured through images of starving and dead children and these images represent the total collapse of a society. My aim is to show the deeper effects of the famine on the society beyond a demographic catastrophe and in this way, I challenge historians who automatically equate famine with Sovietization.¹¹⁵

Chapter 3, "Orphans of Famine: Rethinking Sovietization in Central Asia, 1933-1941" looks at detdoms in post-famine Kazakhstan as a case study of Sovietization. My discussion of detdoms is almost exclusively an archival study with the support of a limited number of published primary sources and famine testimonies. The most important

¹¹⁵ The chapter is also in dialogue with cultural history of famines in a global scale and offers new dimensions to Kazakhs' experiences which are not necessarily directly tied to the main arguments of the dissertation.

documents for this chapter come from the Central Commission for the Improvement of Children's Life (from now on Children's Commission). The institution was not founded exclusively for orphans, however, the Kazakhstani branch mainly dealt with child homelessness and detdoms during and after the famine. Various reports, decrees, protocols, inspector reports and correspondence within the commission help us to reconstruct life at the orphanages. Although numerically not too many, the collections also include letters and petitions which were allegedly written by children themselves. Additional documents are used from Narkompros, Narkomzdrav, Sovnarkom and party archives. I argue that orphans and detdoms provide a good opportunity to understand what Sovietization meant in the Central Asian context. However, in contrast to the general assumptions, Sovietization in the sense of creating the new Soviet person or in the sense of a Soviet civilizing mission, to a large extent, failed in the orphanages of Kazakhstan in the 1930s. Thus, this chapter offers to question the role of cultural revolution or abstract conceptions of nationality in the consolidation of Soviet identities in the region.

Chapter 4, "Mobilization and Heroism: Kazakh Children during World War 2, 1941-1945" discusses the changing conceptions of images of childhood for children and for adults. This chapter is again mainly based on published primary sources; but I also use documents from Narkompros and party archives. I use children's literature, various instructional booklets published mainly by the Komsomol, published reports about children's participation in the war effort and newspapers. Kazakh soldiers' letters, memoirs or other types of writings are discussed in an attempt to examine how images of children shaped their motivations to fight and their mindsets in general. This chapter

shows that the Soviet Kazakh discourse of childhood lacked the image of a child martyr until the late 1930s and military training came late in comparison to the images produced in the center of the Soviet Union. The war inevitably brought the image of a child hero and military values ultimately defined who a Soviet Kazakh child was. In the absence of a long tradition of military images, Kazakh authors almost totally depended on translations of Russian texts. The decrease in publishing in the Kazakh language was a cause for the rupture in imagination of childhood in Kazakhstan. The war, for the first time, brought homogenization of images of childhood on a great scale across the Soviet Union. An examination of images of children for adults is provided to show how Kazakhs came to embrace the Soviet myth of the war and how Soviet Kazakh national discourse was consolidated.

Chapter 5, “Speaking Russian Without an Accent: The Origins of Linguistic Russification in Kazakhstan, 1928-1953”, is more straightforward in terms of sources used. Russian language education was one of the most popular themes for pedagogical journals in the second half of the 1930s and I have also found numerous unpublished reports in the archives mainly from Narkompros documents. Yet, I also use various memoirs to reconstruct how and why Kazakhs started speaking Russian. Other scholars have studied language policies in Central Asia, but this chapter provides a case study based on Kazakhstan and more importantly, provides a new viewpoint by using memoirs. Kazakhstan is widely accepted as the most Russified of all Central Asian republics. However, in contrast to popular assumptions which are dominant within Kazakhstan, I argue that there was never an official policy of Russification. Linguistic Russification did not have a real impact throughout the 1920s and 1930s (since it was not an official

policy), and only in the 1940s and 1950s did it start to have real significance, largely thanks to the multiethnic character of the country due to the famine and deportations.

Chapter 6, “From Kazakhstan with Happiness: The Myth of Happy Childhood and Its Reception in Kazakhstan”, discusses one of the most popular and resilient Stalinist myths: happy childhood. The first part of the chapter continues to discuss how Kazakhstan was integrated into the world of Stalinism. In a continuation of Chapter 1, this part uses published primary sources to discuss the making of the myth before the war. After that, I turn to a discussion of the impact and reception of this myth in Kazakhstan primarily based on published memoirs. I show that children of the 1930s establish a counter narrative of unhappy childhood. Then I discuss how the myth of happy childhood has influenced memories of Kazakhs and how it has come to define the conception of childhood even in post-Soviet Kazakhstan. The chapter helps us understand the transformation brought by the war and it raises the question of how Kazakhs made sense of their Soviet experience.

CHAPTER 1

SOCIALIST VISIONS IN THE PERIPHERY: IMAGINING CHILDHOOD IN SOVIET KAZAKHSTAN, 1928-1941

In her study of revolutionary childhood, Lisa Kirschenbaum argues that the Bolshevik regime in fact separated myths of childhood from children themselves, and the metaphorical children stood as icons of the revolutionary vision while debates on childhood were only partially about real children.¹¹⁶ This was probably nowhere more striking than it was in Kazakhstan in the 1930s. While Kazakh children faced mass destruction in reality, Kazakh children in images were being saved from the darkness of the past and starting a new life. This striking contrast for sure was not unique to Kazakhstan. Throughout the 1930s, Soviet people lived in a world of dual truth. Even when they were lucky enough to avoid starvation and direct repression, they endured a life of scarcities; this was their lived reality. Yet, at the same time, they were exposed to a revolutionary truth: the belief that they were building a new world. We cannot dismiss the revolutionary truth as mere propaganda. Many people's lives were shaped as much by this revolutionary truth as it was by their lived experiences.¹¹⁷

Yet, the lived experience was nowhere as unbearable as it was for areas where people were literally starving to death. Besides, the power of the revolutionary truth remained fallacious in many peripheral parts of the Soviet Union. The revolutionary truth, that made the lives of workers and the intelligentsia bearable in European parts of

¹¹⁶ Kirschenbaum, *Small Comrades*, 2-3.

¹¹⁷ See, particularly Chapter 3 in Fitzpatrick, *Everyday Stalinism*.

the country, meant nothing more than abstract and obscure promises for the masses of Kazakh nomads. As Kindler suggests, loyalty to the Bolshevik ideals was particularly questionable in Kazakhstan on the eve of the first five-year plan. The party was split along ethnic lines and competing clans used Soviet institutions for their own goals.¹¹⁸ The subsequent destruction brought by the famine further undermined the power of the revolutionary truth. This was not only a contrast between lived experience and propaganda. To some extent, even state sponsored images lost their power and revolutionary content in the periphery. Jonathon Dreeze argues that the transformative impact of Soviet propaganda remained quite weak throughout the 1930s. Soviet propaganda was plagued by chronic shortcomings such as the lack of properly trained cadres, shortages of resources and disinterest in propaganda work by local party officials.¹¹⁹

This chapter discusses how childhood was imagined in Soviet periphery from the beginning of first five-year plan to World War 2. By discussing how socialism and the Revolution were introduced to Kazakh children, it contributes to our understanding of how Bolshevik visions were translated into local context and how images of childhood were completely separated from the lived experiences of Kazakh children. The chapter also argues that utopian revolutionary visions of childhood had minimal impact on the discourse of childhood in Soviet Kazakhstan. Similar to how Soviet propaganda's power

¹¹⁸ Kindler, *Stalin's Nomads*, 4.

¹¹⁹ Dreeze argues that what mattered for the propaganda department was the number of propaganda events as a measure of success, hence, by the end of the decade, most problems were still unsolved. Jonathon Dreeze, "Problematic in Form, Irrelevant in Content? Soviet Propaganda in Kazakhstan, 1929-1939," paper presented at *Central Eurasian Studies Society Annual Conference held at George Washington University*, Washington DC, October 10-13, 2019.

was weakened by various shortcomings and disinterest in central visions in the periphery; imagination of childhood too partially lost its revolutionary content in Kazakhstan. Although, the image of the child as the real revolutionary was established and children were introduced to a discourse of class conflict in Kazakh society, the authority of family or school was never significantly challenged. More importantly, the cult around the leader and the state overshadowed any socialist content. Having examined published sources from the 1930s, this chapter suggests that revolutionary visions of childhood were not strong enough to leave a considerable mark in Kazakhstan. Rather, Kazakhstan embraced the Stalinist pedagogy that emphasizes discipline and authority, and relatedly, as discussed in the last chapter, the Stalinist myth of happy childhood as the essence of Soviet childhood. This may help us understand not only the direct, and de-ideologized, connection between the Stalinist regime and independent Kazakhstan, but also the resilience of patriarchal family relations in contemporary Kazakhstan. Secondly, it helps us understand the nature and vision of Soviet rule in Central Asia. Zbigniew Wojnowski, who studied the process of de-Stalinization, argued that Kazakhstan did not really experience de-Stalinization. This was mainly the result of locals' indifference to central political and ideological visions.¹²⁰ In line with this argument, this chapter propounds that visions and utopias produced in the Soviet center did not have a similar impact in the periphery. Yet, Kazakhstan certainly adopted to the Stalinist vision of the later 1930s.

Historians have shown that the early years of the Soviet regime were a period of utopianism and experimentalism.¹²¹ The early period also witnessed conflicting ideas and

¹²⁰ Wojnowski, "De-Stalinization and the Failure of Soviet Identity Building in Kazakhstan".

¹²¹ Richard Stites, *Revolutionary Dreams: Utopian Vision and Experimental Life in the Russian Revolution* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1991).

images of childhood in which utopian and revolutionary visions with an emphasis on child autonomy and the declining authority of family and school prevailed. Initially, Bolsheviks found “scientific” grounds for imagining children as independent, rational, and powerful agents of revolution, while they rejected some of the cherished, naturalized, and emotionally charged Western visions of childhood.¹²² In this utopian vision, state institutions such as kindergartens and orphanages were supposed to replace family as the institutions of child upbringing, although this was not universally accepted among Bolsheviks.

However, already in the mid-1920s (much before the heyday of the Stalinist childhood) the revolutionary free upbringing model faded, and the regime turned its attention to making children socialists.¹²³ The new dominant conception assumed that revolutionary transformation was compatible with, perhaps even dependent, upon discipline and social control. Now what was valued was not rebelliousness or liberation, but stability, enlightenment, and state-building.¹²⁴ Children’s literature remained a free territory throughout the early 1920s, but 1924 witnessed a drastic change with the party’s decision to claim children’s literature as an ideological field. Yet, the full control on children’s literature was consolidated only in 1932 when the resolution of “On the Improvement of the Press for Children and Youth” was published and the journal *Detskaia Literatura* was established.¹²⁵

¹²² Kirschenbaum, *Small Comrades*, 5.

¹²³ Ibid., 86; For Kelly, the establishment of the Young Pioneer organization in 1922 marks the beginning of a period of more intensive regulation. Kelly, *Children’s World*, 62.

¹²⁴ Kirschenbaum, *Small Comrades*, 105-106.

¹²⁵ Marina Balina, “Creativity through Restraint: The Beginnings of Soviet Children’s Literature,” in *Russian Children’s Literature and Culture*, eds. Marina Balina and Larissa Rudova (London: Routledge, 2007), 9-12.

Nevertheless, it does not mean that revolutionary zeal came to an end. According to Kelly, commitment to educational experiment under the Soviet regime was far greater than anywhere else in the world for about fifteen years.¹²⁶ In the 1920s, children, particularly pioneers, were encouraged to actively participate in the political campaigns, and they even exercised leadership over “backward” adults. The ideal model was an “assertive child”.¹²⁷ Even after the utopian vision of early 1920s was abandoned and family resurrected as a vital institution, children continued to be understood as the “real revolutionaries” who were supposed to rebel against the old-fashioned teachers and backward parents.¹²⁸

Labor was an essential component of revolutionary childhood and it remained more resilient than the commitment to free upbringing. The very process of labor, it was claimed in the “Regulation on the Comprehensive Labor-Oriented School” of 30 September 1918, would teach the child the inner discipline, and rationally ordered collective labor was impossible without the inner discipline. Schools were not only expected to raise future citizens, but also to prepare children for a life of productive labor.¹²⁹

Imagining Childhood in Kazakhstan in the 1920s

When the October Revolution took place, the nationalist Kazakh party, Alash-Orda, had considerable authority over Kazakhs. Although many national parties or

¹²⁶ Kelly, *Children's World*, 70.

¹²⁷ *Ibid.*, 76-78.

¹²⁸ Kirschenbaum, *Small Comrades*, 131.

¹²⁹ Kelly, *Children's World*, 66-67. Kelly also notes that there was a striking continuity between the pre-revolutionary reformist and early Soviet rhetoric in terms of their emphasis on labor.

intellectual groups in the lands of the former Russian Empire, even the more religiously oriented ones, leaned towards socialism,¹³⁰ Alash-Orda remained firm on their progressive, but apparently “bourgeois” nationalist views. Thus, it was not surprising that Alash-Orda took an openly anti-Bolshevik stance, collaborating with various White Cossack forces in the steppe. Initially, the Bolsheviks had almost no support among Kazakhs.¹³¹ Therefore, when the Bolshevik takeover of Kazakhstan was completed, the Bolsheviks at first needed Alash leaders to establish their authority over Kazakhs. Alash members remained active, especially in the field of education, for some more years until they were one by one purged in the second half of the 1920s.

A discussion of some of the important pedagogical works of the 1920s is necessary to show how leading Kazakh pedagogues of the early Soviet period were not too enthusiastic about revolutionary socialist conceptions. Indeed, “awakening” the Kazakh nation in a nationalist progressive manner was the most important motivation for the Alash leaders, and not surprisingly education was at the top of their agenda. The leading educator in the Alash circles was Akhmet Baytursynov who first and foremost directed his efforts to the establishment of a Kazakh written language and to increasing literacy among Kazakhs.¹³²

It was a prominent former Alash member turned editor of the new Soviet journal *Äyel Teñdigi* (Woman’s Equality) who produced the most sophisticated Kazakh

¹³⁰ For example, see, Adeeb Khalid, “The Fascination of Revolution: Central Asian Intellectuals, 1917-1924,” in *Empire, Islam, and Politics in Central Eurasia* ed. Tomohiko Uyama (Sapporo: Slavic Research Center, 2007).

¹³¹ Martha Brill Olcott, *The Kazakhs* (Stanford: Hoover Institution Press, 1995), 129-156.

¹³² For Baytursynov’s ideas, see, Steve Sabol, *Russian Colonization and the Genesis of Kazak National Consciousness* (London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2003), 93-116.

pedagogical works in the 1920s. Nāzīpa Qulzhanova published *Mektepten Burynghy Tārbīe* (Preschool Education) in 1923, and *Ana men Bala Tārbīesi* (Mother and Child Upbringing) in 1927. Both of the works deal with early childhood education and upbringing. While the second book is mostly devoted to the healthcare of mother and child and aims to decrease the very high infant mortality rates among Kazakhs, in the first book we can see a modern conception of childhood most explicitly. In this book, Qulzhanova, more than any other Kazakh author, very firmly formulates the idea (circulating in the Western world for a few centuries) that childhood constitutes a separate and special period in human life. The book is very sensitive to specific age groups, and proposes that it is very dangerous to shorten the period of childhood by a desire to immediately make children adults.¹³³ Qulzhanova criticizes those who force children to work, and argues that what children need is to play games.¹³⁴ Although the education of the pre-school age group was less ideological than that of school children under the Soviet rule, Qulzhanova's pro-leisure and anti-labor statements do not resemble early Soviet conceptions of childhood. The goals of pre-school education are summarized in the book as: 1- bodily health, 2- development of the child's senses, 3- learning the colors of objects, 4- setting aright the body's motions, 5- developing creativity, 6- increasing the knowledge of children, 7- developing the child's language abilities, 8- familiarizing with labor, 9- development of human feelings, 10- learning thankfulness, 11- "labor with community".¹³⁵

¹³³ Nāzīpa Qulzhanova, *Shygharmalary: Maqalalar, ocherkter, pedagogikalyq oy-payymdar, aūdarmalar* (Almaty: Ana Tili Baspasy, 2014), 23-24.

¹³⁴ *Ibid.*, 29.

¹³⁵ *Ibid.*, 45-48.

When we look at these eleven points, with the exception of the last one, we see nothing particularly socialist (“familiarizing with labor” is not really a strong definition). Even in the last point, although she uses the term “labor”, the explanation coming after primarily refers to collective games rather than collective labor. In fact, throughout the book, numerous times Qulzhanova refers to “civilized nations”, and not to socialism, as models for Kazakh pedagogy. It seems that having counted various “civilized nations”, she also adds post-Revolutionary Russia to her list just for the sake of political correctness. Nevertheless, it is questionable how far she even tries to be at least politically correct when she praises at length countries such as Italy, Switzerland, Scotland, Japan, Norway, Australia, Germany, France, and England, and brings examples from all of these countries as the new, modern, and progressive way of child upbringing.¹³⁶

Another significant pedagogical work of the decade is Zhüsipbek Aymaūytov’s (another former Alash member) *Tärbiege Zhetekshi* (1924). Aymaūytov too studies and praises Western (capitalist) countries. The most successful model for Aymaūytov is the German education system.¹³⁷ Yet, it must be noted that Aymaūytov’s book comes closer to a socialist worldview than does Qulzhanova’s. At the beginning, the book condemns individualistic and egoist upbringing, and emphasizes that a person is part of a society.¹³⁸ However, this part is a translation from a Russian pedagogue. The book continues with a translation of Nadezhda Krupskaya’s views on socialist education with a focus on class

¹³⁶ Ibid., 19-23.

¹³⁷ Zhüsipbek Aymaūytov, *Shygharmalary: Beshinshi Tom (Tärbiege Zhetekshi – Zhaña Aūyl)* (Almaty: El-shezhire, 2013), 8.

¹³⁸ Ibid., 10-11.

struggle, the importance of labor, and condemnation of exploitation in capitalist countries.¹³⁹ The difference between the content of translations and what Aymaūytov himself writes is striking (the difference and even antagonism between Krupskaya's and Qulzhanova's ideas are even more striking). The book includes additional pieces of translations from authors such as Russian pedagogue Pavel Petrovich Blonskii and Jan Jacque Rousseau.¹⁴⁰ Yet, what Aymaūytov himself writes is mostly about the importance of education and the role of school in the development of the country without any socialist content. Probably, his most socialist idea is the role of children's collectives in the schools. Yet, unlike revolutionary utopian pedagogy which foresaw the decline of the school and the teacher, for Aymaūytov, these collectives are nothing more than auxiliary organizations to the teacher with the aim of establishing discipline and cleanliness in the school. Thus, it can be said that for Aymaūytov, translating pieces about socialist education such as Krupskaya's views was a way to legitimate himself, and his much less ideological understanding of education.

Analyses of Qulzhanova's and Aymaūytov's pedagogical works, which were the most important Kazakh-language works on education and childhood in the 1920s, show that Kazakh pedagogues' conception of childhood fully accepted modern notions;

¹³⁹ Ibid., 17-21.

¹⁴⁰ Kirschenbaum shows that pre-revolutionary and bourgeois progressive pedagogical works were among the suggested readings for pre-school teachers in the early years of the Soviet regime. Froebel, Montessori and John Dewey were the most important authors, but Rousseau's *Emile* was also read. Kirschenbaum, *Small Comrades*, 69-70. However, by 1932 this was harshly criticized (p. 154). In the early years, Narkompros sided with contemporary European and American progressive educational movement: emphasized on child's individuality and creativity, development of child's social instincts, informal relations between students and teachers, activity methods of teaching, including the study of the surrounding environment to the school curriculum, physical and aesthetic education and labor training. See: Sheila Fitzpatrick, *The Commissariat of Enlightenment: Soviet Organization of Education and the Arts under Lunacharsky, 1917-1921* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1970).

however, the reference point for them was the “civilized” Western (capitalist) countries rather than Bolshevik ideas. In this respect, Kazakh pedagogy was, to a great extent, indifferent to the utopian phase of socialism, rather it was a continuation of Western-oriented Kazakh intelligentsia’s ideas.¹⁴¹

Although Baytursynov and other influential Alash intellectuals were purged, their influence on Kazakh education did not disappear so quickly. Maghzhan Zhumabaev had been a prominent Alash member, and one of the radicals among them with explicit pan-Turkist sentiments, and as late as 1929 his textbook for the pupils learning how to read and write could be republished in the Latin script in Moscow.¹⁴² Although the book condemns what is called “*töreshildik*” (aristocratism, aristocratic rule) in the Kazakh society, it is full of references to Kazakh symbols and lifestyle. Having criticized the insufficient circulation of textbooks in the country, a report about primary schools which was read at the fifth party committee plenum in 1933 asserts that due to the lack of necessary textbooks, some schools still used the ones written by prominent Alash-Ordists such as Baytursynov and Aymaūytov as late as 1933.¹⁴³ Consequently, during the 1920s, the conception of childhood was little influenced by the socialist content, and traditional Kazakh social structure remained powerful. It was reflected in the prominent Russian anthropologist Sergei Rudenko’s report of the Semipalatinsk expedition in 1927-28.

¹⁴¹ The continuity was obvious. Diana Kudaibergenova notes how Alash movements’ modernizing discourses were not very different from those canonized by Soviet writers in the 1930s. Diana T. Kudaibergenova, *Rewriting the Nation in Modern Kazakh Literature: Elites and Narratives* (New York and London: Lexington Books, 2017), 7.

¹⁴² Maghzhan Zhumabayuly, *Saūatty Bol!* (Moscow: Keñes odaghyndaghy elderdin kindik baspasy, 1929).

¹⁴³ Zh. Sädüaqsuly, *Bastaūysh mektep tūraly: Ölkelik partiya komitetiniñ V plenumunda zhasaghan bayandamasy zhäne plenumnyñ shygharghan qaūlysy* (Almaty: Ortalyq partiya komitetiniñ baspasy, 1933), 26.

According to Rudenko, the central place of family in Kazakh society remained untouched.¹⁴⁴

Introducing Socialism to Kazakh Children

Saving poor children from working as shepherds for the rich is the most common discourse of what the Bolshevik Revolution means in Kazakh-language sources of the Stalinist era. In Uzbekistan, saving Uzbek women from Uzbek men was the main justification point for the new Soviet regime.¹⁴⁵ In Kazakhstan too, the battle against bride price (*qalym*) and polygamy was celebrated as part of Soviet civilizing mission.¹⁴⁶ Yet, saving poor children from darkness was at least as important as women's emancipation in the Kazakh case. This discourse was in use since the early days of the Soviet regime, but in the 1930s, it was more and more accompanied by an image that encouraged Kazakh children to become shepherds. We do not know whether children reading these texts perceived this as a contradiction, but I argue that the main reason for this contradiction was the famine.¹⁴⁷ The economic catastrophe created by the famine became the priority of not only economists and other specialists, but also of writers and educators. In this way, an overwhelming emphasis on livestock breeding overshadowed some aspects of the revolutionary discourse. For example, while science and technology were central aspects for children's publications on the eve of the famine up until 1930-

¹⁴⁴ Cited in Olcott, *The Kazakhs*, 172.

¹⁴⁵ Massel, *The Surrogate Proletariat*; Northrop, *Veiled Empire*.

¹⁴⁶ For "emancipation" of Kazakh women, see: Balgozina, *Emansipatsiia zhenshchin v Kazakhstane*.

¹⁴⁷ The famine of 1930-33 is usually treated totally separately from the course of social and cultural development of Kazakhstan. Indeed, such a tendency reflects the sources themselves; in the Soviet era, the famine was a taboo topic. Consequently, we are stuck with a history of the Kazakh famine as if it only changed the demographic and economic character of the country, not in any way affecting the development of Kazakh culture and society.

1931; it was interrupted by the reality of the famine and became a dominant theme again only towards the end of the decade. In this section, I am first going to explain how Kazakh children were introduced to Bolshevik Revolution and then I am going to show how the famine reaffirmed a life path for Kazakh children as shepherds even though, ironically, the regime continuously legitimized itself by arguing that it saved poor Kazakh children from working as shepherds.

Comparing the old and the new was a dominant motive. In the opening ceremony of the all-Kazakhstan Pioneer Congress of 1935, Oraz Isaev, the chairman of Kazakh Sovnarkom, declared that in the past, children had raised sheep and cattle for the rich, and at that time those children had not known such celebrations (and happiness).¹⁴⁸ Short stories for Kazakh children are full of poor shepherd children emancipated by the Soviet regime. In one supposedly real-life story, his father gives Seysenbay to a rich person as a shepherd. Seysenbay never knows what it means to play games, thus indeed never lives his childhood. One day a wolf savages the sheep, and for this Seysenbay gets beaten by the wealthy man until he loses consciousness. Then, years after, we see him in Russian clothes at a regional youth committee meeting. We learn that after he had got beaten up, a [Soviet] court came to the village and the rich man who oppressed Seysenbay was imprisoned for six months. Seysenbay received his wage for his labor from the wealthy and was taken to the city to start school and had become an activist.¹⁴⁹

¹⁴⁸ I. Älibayuly, *Pionerler Sletinde: Bükil Qazaqstandyq Pionerler men Mektep Balalary Sletiniñ Materialdary* (Almaty: Qazaqstan Baspasy, 1935), 16.

¹⁴⁹ Sh. Sarybaev, *Oktyabr zhäne balalar: batyraq-kedey oqūshy balalardyn Oktyabr tönkerisin qay türde qarsylaghany tūraly (balalardyn öz aūyzdarynan)* (Tashkent: Özbekistan Memleket Baspasy, 1935), 11-16.



Image 1: A bay is beating a poor Kazakh orphan (1935)¹⁵⁰

The same collection of supposedly real-life stories of children includes many other examples. For example, a poor shepherd boy working for a rich man always lives half-starved although he works even “harder than an ox”. He waits for the rich to give bones to him as if “giving bones to a dog”. Insults and tortures are daily routines for him. One day he is saved from starving by two Russians. Subsequently, the October Revolution, which “first and foremost cares for orphans” like our boy, takes place. In 1922, he is taken to an orphanage, and not surprisingly, the teachers there become his new parents (even better than his real parents). He knows that this is all the result of Soviet government’s benevolence.¹⁵¹

In fact, this resilient narrative formed the basis of “speaking Bolshevik” for Kazakhs. We know that many, though not all, Kazakh Bolsheviks embraced this discourse to narrate their lives to defend themselves during the Terror in order to prove

¹⁵⁰ Ibid., 18. This is a common image in Soviet Kazakh children’s literature.

¹⁵¹ Ibid., 16-27

their legitimate membership in Soviet society. For example, in his petition to the prosecutor, Isa Tokhtybaev wrote that he served wealthy Kazakhs or “semi-feudal exploiters”. He carefully narrated all the difficulties he had at the hands of these exploiters.¹⁵² Neither the old Soviet Kazakh narrative of poor children being saved by the Soviet regime, nor the contrast between unhappy past and happy present was abandoned after Stalin’s death. In her memoirs published in 1969, Ziyada Mynzhasarova, who served the regime in many posts, remembers how her father had died very early and her mother had to feed six little children. Ziyada worked as a servant for the rich, then escaped to the streets and lived as a besprizornik. One day, a man approached Ziyada, who was then living on the streets, took her to his own house, and then to a detdom the next day. She later learned that the local Komsomol was collecting homeless children from the streets. That was how her new life started.¹⁵³

The old and the new were antithetic, but the Soviet regime had the power to transform darkness into light, or the old into the new. How Soviet rule transformed poor children’s lives is the theme of a Komsomol publication in 1940. It is allegedly a collection of real-life stories. For example, little Elzhan was orphaned in his childhood, and as usual, he became a shepherd for a wealthy man. Then he starts working at a factory and becomes a Stakhanovite. He meets Kalinin and asks Kalinin to provide him the opportunity to go to school. Due to Kalinin’s advice he starts his education by reading

¹⁵² Mambet Koigeldiev, *Krasnyi Terror: Iz istorii politicheskikh repres v Kazakhstane (Sbornik dokumental’nykh materialov 20-50-kh godov XX veka)* (Almaty: Alash baspasy, 2013), 332.

¹⁵³ She first joined the Pioneer, and then Komsomol organizations, and claims that they worked a lot to end besprizornost’. They travelled through the republic, built detdoms, collected children and gave them to educators. Z. Mynzhasarova, “Yunost’ Komsomol’skaia”, in *Gody Muzhaniia: Vospominaniia Uchastnikov Sotsialisticheskogo Stroitel’stvo v Kazakhstane* (Almaty: Qazaqstan, 1969), 246-250.

children's literature, and eventually he becomes capable of giving lectures himself.¹⁵⁴ Ädilbaev comes to the mine for work at a very early age. Yet, he proves himself by his patience, determination, and hard work; eventually he becomes a Stakhanovite too. In his biographer's description, the illiterate kid who came from a village five-six years ago, now reads the science of Marxism-Leninism. This kind of upbringing is only possible for the youth of the Soviet Union.¹⁵⁵ All the life stories of young men (all of them are men) in the book have the same structure. They begin with a description of how miserable children were; then, they start working in their childhood and eventually become Stakhanovites who are also highly educated and cultured.

It is worth noting that in many stories Russian characters appear as saviors or at least guides towards socialism. This is not only true for children's literature.¹⁵⁶ However, it cannot be said that socialism always means the liberation of poor Kazakhs from the tyranny of wealthy Kazakhs. In one "memoir", it is a wealthy Russian man named Ivan (a generic Russian name) who exploits the poor Kazakh child.¹⁵⁷ In another one, Russian kulaks come and take Kazakhs' lands after beating them.¹⁵⁸ However, in both cases poor Kazakh children are again saved by Russian figures. In the first one, a Russian soldier "who knows the Kazakh language" tells the boy that the government now belongs to the toilers, and the boy starts school together with "hundreds of other children" thanks to the help of the Russian soldier. In the second one, the boy is again given as a shepherd to a

¹⁵⁴ G. Musirepov, "Elzhan Muryimbaev," in *Qazaqstannyñ aldyñghy qatarly zhastary: Qazaqstannyñ danqty zhäne aldyñghy qatarly zhastarynyñ bir toby*, eds. A. Mambetov, E. Äbishev, A. Muzdybaev, K. Köshekov and G. Slanov (Almaty: Qazaqstan LQZhS Ortalyq Komitetiniñ Komsomol Baspasy, 1940).

¹⁵⁵ A. Temirzhanov, "Ädilbaev", *ibid.*, 13-14.

¹⁵⁶ This is a common theme in Soviet Kazakh novels too. Beyimbet Maylin's "Azamat Azamatych" (1934) is a good example in which a young hero is guided by a Russian figure.

¹⁵⁷ Sarybaev, *Oktyabr zhäne balalar*, 28-29.

¹⁵⁸ *Ibid.*, 35-37.

rich man, and his father does not allow him to go to school. One day, a Russian appears and takes the boy to Tashkent to attend school. Although Russians might appear as bad guys too, poor Kazakh shepherd boys need Russian saviors or guides for the road to socialism (from darkness to light).

One “memoir” also provides an interesting explanation for the Bolshevik cause. The young hero of the story writes that he was at an age when he did not think of anything else besides playing when the Revolution happened. One day he hears his father talking using the words “Bolshevik” and “Menshevik”. He understands that two parties were established with the names Bolshevik and Menshevik. From these two, the Menshevik party was the supporter of the rich whereas the Bolshevik party supported the poor. Even though the little boy could not understand the real meaning of the terms used, he felt sympathetic towards the Bolsheviks who were on the side of the poor.¹⁵⁹

During the collectivization, the publications for pioneers declared that Kazakhs (who had been living as nomads for centuries) did not know how to raise livestock properly. That was why cattle were so weak and unproductive. This was put forward as a justification for the collectivization policies, and children were invited to explain the benefits of settlement to the elderly.¹⁶⁰ This was a localized version of the assertive Soviet child. In children’s literature, animal husbandry was declared as one of the most urgent and important issues of Kazakhstan, and many short stories were published to

¹⁵⁹ Ibid., 54-56.

¹⁶⁰ *Zhalpy Qazaqstandyq pionerler sletiniñ nakazy* (Qyzylorda: Qazaqstan baspasy, 1931), 28-30.

teach Kazakh children how to raise cattle.¹⁶¹ It was argued that cattle must be reared scientifically.¹⁶²

After the famine, animal husbandry occupies a more central place in the imagination of childhood in Kazakhstan. In 1934, Kazakh pioneers were declared to be the guardians of animals.¹⁶³ Levon Mirzoyan, who was appointed as the secretary of Kazakh Communist Party in February 1933, himself was quoted to say at the party committee meeting in October 1933 that both boys and girls of kolkhozniks were required to take care of cattle.¹⁶⁴ Each pioneer was required to be responsible for either a few calves or lamb, or at least should rear rabbits or birds. They should also take care of the foals at their own homes. Each pioneer was required to write down details of their duties daily.¹⁶⁵ The booklet continues with detailed and separate information for pioneers who rear calves, sheep, rabbits, and birds separately. They were also supposed to teach the right way of livestock breeding to adults.

Exemplary children were presented as models to follow. For example, the daily routine of little Anya is like this: she gets up early, washes up, brushes her teeth, and then goes to look after their cow. Then she feeds hens and piglets. Her slogan, which is also the title of her story in the book, is “not even one piglet is to die”.¹⁶⁶ These are the duties of little Tamara¹⁶⁷ who was a fourth-year student: she is successful at school, helps her

¹⁶¹ For example, see the story “Syilyq,” *Ekpindi Zhas* 4 (1930): 1-3; 5 (1930): 10-14.

¹⁶² “Mal Zhaylysy,” *Ekpindi Zhas* 4 (1930): 4-5.

¹⁶³ *Qazaqstan pionerleri – Mal sharūashylyghynyñ qamqorshysy* (Almaty: Qazaqstan partiya baspasy, 1934).

¹⁶⁴ *Ibid.*, 3.

¹⁶⁵ *Ibid.*, 21.

¹⁶⁶ *Ibid.*, 13.

¹⁶⁷ Russian names appear in Kazakh-language sources as a reflection of internationalism. However, though the names in these stories are Russian names, they were used to instruct Kazakh children. But it is also

parents at home, she teaches her parents how to read and write, and she is the guardian of one piglet. Her father performs what he learns from Tamara about rearing cattle and pigs.¹⁶⁸ Children were taught to be good shepherds through poems too. In one of such children's poems, animal husbandry comes even before education: "You, get up, go to your lamb / You, get up, go to your sheep / You, get up, go to your horse / You, get up, go to your cattle / You, get up, go to your school".¹⁶⁹ Thus, whereas pioneers in European parts of the Soviet Union discussed serious political and social issues such as discussion on virtues of communism or political battles and scholastic debates on Marxist-Leninist theory,¹⁷⁰ Kazakh pioneers almost always thought about livestock breeding.

Towards the end of the decade, throughout the Soviet Union, the myth of happy childhood and the Stalin cult dominated the images of Soviet children, and it was no different in Kazakhstan. However, the image of the shepherd child never disappeared, although it was to some extent overshadowed. Even at the end of the decade the Kazakh-language journal *Pioner* presented shepherd Kazakh children as exemplary Soviet children. For example, Seysembay, who was a fourth-year student at the time, had reared foals starting from 1934. In 1934 (when he was probably only 6 or 7), he had been given a calf by the government, and thanks to his successful breeding, after five years he had six calves. Similarly, he had received one lamb in 1934, and he had 12 in 1939.¹⁷¹ Yet, by the end of the decade, it was also claimed that poor shepherd children could acquire more

possible that the emphasis on livestock breeding also influenced children of other nationalities in Kazakhstan.

¹⁶⁸ *Ibid.*, 12.

¹⁶⁹ I. Ālibayuly, *Balalar Öleñi* (Qyzylorda: Qazaqstan baspasy, 1935), 15.

¹⁷⁰ Kucherenko, *Little Soldiers*, 36.

¹⁷¹ Shynybek Kenzhebaev, "Körmege Layyqty Ekspontattar Äzirleyik," *Pioner* 6 (1939): 3.

prestigious professions too. A piece that celebrates successful teachers in the pedagogical journal narrates the life story of the exemplary teacher Zhaqym: his father died when he was six, and the Revolution happened the same year. He could not study due to poverty and worked as a shepherd for the rich people. It was only the Revolution that provided a humane life for the toilers' children.¹⁷²

Although the primary image of Kazakh children was a shepherd, after collectivization agriculture took a step forward in Kazakhstan and children were also presented as the guardians of agricultural products. In one short story, Kazakh child Erzhigit, who is himself a member of the kolkhoz, secretly patrols the fields in order to prevent crops from being stolen, and to warn the lazy adults. Adults were outraged by Erzhigit's capabilities.¹⁷³ In another story, a man who steals apples is caught by pioneers. The thief thinks to himself that unlike in the past stealing is not useful anymore because wherever he goes pioneers keep watch. At the end, he is fed up, gives up stealing, and decides to work at the kolkhoz. The thief states that particularly pioneer Esim who does not know exhaustion, sleep, and fear has led him to take this decision.¹⁷⁴

Indeed, ideally, all children were supposed to become pioneers, thus it is difficult to differentiate pioneers' duties from the image of an ideal child. At the Kazakhstan Komsomol conference in 1931, Aqyshqyzy stated that only 80.000 among 1.5 million children could be integrated into the pioneer organization.¹⁷⁵ Yet, the statistics based on gender and nationality that she provides in the rest of the report shows that the number of

¹⁷² M. Nurtazin, "Zhaqym ülgili mughalim," *Khalyq Mughalimi* 11 (1939): 59.

¹⁷³ I. Älibayuly, *Sary bala: ocherk ängimeler* (Qyzylorda: Qazaqstan baspasy, 1935), 7-8.

¹⁷⁴ Q. Qurmanbaev, *Pionerler* (Qyzylorda: Qazaqstan baspasy, 1936), 16-20.

¹⁷⁵ Z. Aqyshqyzy, *Pionerler Uyymdarynyñ Mindetteri: Zhalpy Qazaqstan Komsomoldarynyñ VI. Konferentsiyasyndaghy bayandamasy* (Qyzylorda: Qazaqstan baspasy, 1931), 17.

pioneers was even lower. According to these statistics, as of June 1930, there were 44464 pioneers in Kazakhstan and 42.5% of them were Kazakhs while 42.7% were Russians.¹⁷⁶ In another source, the number of Kazakhstani pioneers is given as 69.000 which is, according to the report, is equal to 5.5% of all children of the available age group.¹⁷⁷

Statistics are contradictory and unreliable, but it was clear that the pioneer organization's work was far from being satisfactory. In 1933, Komsomol members acknowledged that they were unsuccessful in guiding the pioneers. The report provides an example from Sayram district where authorities did not even know the number of pioneers. The pioneer organization was led neither by the party, nor by the Komsomol. Nobody was responsible for the organization.¹⁷⁸ Another report admits that authorities could assign counselors for only 60-70 percent of pioneer organizations in cities and for 20-30 percent of pioneers in rural areas. Those assigned counselors' qualifications were quite unsatisfactory.¹⁷⁹ In addition, only children in the schools were members of pioneer organizations, but there were orphans and lots of other children who could not attend the school (because "they were suppressed by the wealthy"). It was acknowledged that the pioneer organization did almost nothing for these children.¹⁸⁰

There were some other duties that pioneers were required to perform. Forming close relations with soldiers was one of their duties. Each pioneer was required to get acquainted with soldiers' lives and to write letters to them about the changes in their

¹⁷⁶ Ibid., 16

¹⁷⁷ *Zhalpy Qazaqstandyq*, 48.

¹⁷⁸ G. Qūatuly, *Komsomoldardyn kezektegi mindetteri tūraly: Qazaqstan ölkelik komsomoldar komitetiniñ VII бүкіл Qazaqstandyq komsomoldar konferensiyasyndaghy esepi bayandamasy* (Almaty and Moscow: Ortalyq partiya komitetiniñ baspasy, Qazaqstandyq bölim, 1933), 32-33.

¹⁷⁹ *Pioner barlyq balalarga ülgі bolsyn* (Almaty: Pioner gazetiniñ basqarmasy, 1933), 15.

¹⁸⁰ *Zhalpy Qazaqstandyq*, 50.

villages.¹⁸¹ Participating in the literacy campaign was another duty of the pioneers. Throughout the 1930s, this was one of the constant themes in the pioneer literature in Kazakhstan. In 1931, each pioneer was required to teach the alphabet to three people in one year.¹⁸² One of the interesting duties of the pioneers was to kill rats in order to preserve crops. In the spring of 1931, each pioneer was charged to kill five rats.¹⁸³ It was such an important duty that in 1935 children who joined the national pioneers' meeting proudly announced how many rats they had killed together with their successes in production and at school.¹⁸⁴ Kazakh children also read stories in which children eradicated all the rats.¹⁸⁵

Contradictorily, the Soviet regime that supposedly saved poor Kazakh children from shepherding established a life path for them as shepherds. Faced with more than alarming loss of livestock in the country, the regime bombarded Kazakh children with images of animal husbandry. This was, at least to a considerable extent, the result of the famine that destroyed livestock breeding in the country.¹⁸⁶ The immediate goal of reestablishing the economic structure of the country forced an image of the child as shepherd. Although children were also imagined to be successful students at school or teachers of literacy to their ignorant parents, in the first half of the 1930s being a Soviet child in Kazakhstan primarily meant being a shepherd who used rational and scientific

¹⁸¹ Ibid., 15-16.

¹⁸² Ibid., 36.

¹⁸³ Ibid., 27.

¹⁸⁴ Ālibayuly, *Pionerler Sletinde*, 33.

¹⁸⁵ Ālibayuly, *Sary Bala*, 9.

¹⁸⁶ The loss of livestock in Kazakhstan was far greater than anywhere else in the Soviet Union. The number of cattle decreased from 7.44 million in 1929 to 1.6 million in 1933; and the number of sheep decreased from 36.31 million in 1929 to 3.32 million in 1933. Martha Brill Olcott, "The Collectivization Drive in Kazakhstan," *Russian Review* 40, no. 2 (1981): 123.

methods. Utopian visions or discussions about Marxism-Leninism were overshadowed by this image although children were still perceived as revolutionaries.

The dominant image of a Kazakh child in the early 1930s is a shepherd, a rational and scientific-minded shepherd. It is true that labor was an essential aspect of what it meant to be a Soviet child in these years and Russian children too were instructed about raising livestock or farming. However, the intensity of that image in Kazakh-language sources for children is not comparable to the few images that Russian children had encountered. Niccolo Pianciola argues that the Soviet regime established spatial hierarchies in which Kazakhstan, unlike neighboring Kyrgyzstan, was categorized as a livestock breeding region, and this was a major cause of different paths of collectivization in these two countries, although traditionally nomadism had prevailed in both.¹⁸⁷ The famine reinforced such a spatial hierarchy. In this respect, in Kazakhstan, possibly more than in any other Soviet republic, economic priorities determined what it meant to be a Soviet child. It also means that the ideal role for Kazakh children within the Soviet body politic was determined as livestock breeding. It is possible to speculate that if World War II, which unexpectedly fostered industrialization in Kazakhstan and materialized the goal of internationalism, had not happened, such a socially and culturally determined role for Kazakhs could have been much more and longer influential on the definition of Soviet Kazakh identity.

“Flourish My Socialist Kazakhstan”: The Old and The New in the 1930s

¹⁸⁷ Pianciola, “Stalinist spatial hierarchies”.

Studies on post-Soviet Kazakh identity emphasize Nazarbayev regime’s forward-looking agenda. This future-oriented discourse promises a path from “a zone of backwardness and vulnerability” towards “a zone of progress and prosperity”.¹⁸⁸ However, in contrast to these scholars’ projection, this is in no sense a novel discourse. A forward-looking progressive narrative, from backwardness to development or from darkness to light, was an indispensable component of the Soviet discourse. Like the discourse of “happy childhood”, even the words used for slogans are exactly the same. “Flourish my *independent* Kazakhstan!” is a common catchphrase in post-Soviet Kazakhstan, but it is an obvious adaptation of the dominant Soviet slogan: “flourish my Soviet/socialist Kazakhstan”.



Image 2: Celebrating the October Revolution (1935)¹⁸⁹

¹⁸⁸ Sabina Insebayeva, “Imagining the Nation: Identity, Nation Building and Foreign Policy in Kazakstan,” *CAP Papers* 175 (2016).

¹⁸⁹ Sarybaev, *Oktyabr zhāne balalar*, 40.

This was exactly how the new regime taught socialism to children. One source declared that during the Tsarist era, 30 out of every 100 infants died whereas the Soviet government reduced this figure to 16 out of 100 children.¹⁹⁰ In fact, infant mortality was one of the alarming issues in the steppe. Nāzīpa Qulzhanova's *Education of Mother and Child* (1927) was primarily dedicated to this problem. According to Qulzhanova, in the 1920s, half of all Kazakh infants died.¹⁹¹ Paula Michaels argues that medical propaganda and the expansion of biomedicine were used to legitimize Soviet dominance in Kazakhstan. However, it was only in the post-war years that women's and children's health received enormous attention.¹⁹² Nevertheless, the number of women's and children's clinics grew remarkably during the Third Five-Year Plan (1938-1941).¹⁹³ However reliable, according to official statistics, the infant mortality rate dropped from 50 per 100 births in 1926 to 20.4 per 100 in 1940, to 9.5 per 100 in 1945, and to 5 per 100 in 1946.¹⁹⁴ Therefore, it is clear that there were improvements in infant mortality rate, but the official propaganda highly exaggerated it to legitimize the regime.

A theme that is frequently emphasized in Kazakh-language sources is the Russification policies of the Tsarist Russia. As discussed in Chapter 5, the Soviet regime continuously emphasized the point that Tsarist regime had the ultimate goal of Russifying the Kazakhs and the imperial schools were the agents of Russification. Throughout the 1930s, the Tsarist regime was continuously presented as the prison of nations and

¹⁹⁰ G. Elishbayuly, *Balalardyn zhazghy ish ötkizetin aūrūlarynan qalay saqtanuv kerek* (Qyzylorda: Qazaqstan Baspasy, 1933), 3.

¹⁹¹ Qulzhanova, *Shygharmalary*, 50-51. It is worth noting that, Qulzhanova's reference point for a model is again a capitalist country. She writes that in Norway, only 7 of all 100 infants died in the same period.

¹⁹² Michaels, *Curative Powers*, 66.

¹⁹³ *Ibid.*, 136. Kazakh scholar Kul'sarieva argues that the real spread of medical institutions for women and children happened only in the 1950s. Kul'sarieva, *Etnografiia Detstva Kazakhov*, 15.

¹⁹⁴ Michaels, *Curative Powers*, 147-148.

education of children was the most common theme to condemn the Tsarist colonialism.¹⁹⁵ In many texts, it was emphasized that unlike the Russification policies of the colonialist Tsarist regime, Kazakh children study in their native language under the Soviet rule. Not only the Russian Empire, but also Alash leaders were presented as agents against the progress of the Kazakh nation. Temirbek Zhürgenov, the minister of Enlightenment from 1933 to 1937, narrates an alleged conversation between Stalin and the Alash leader Alikhan Bökeikhanov that he himself heard from Levon Mirzoyan. According to the story, in 1919, Bökeikhanov tells Stalin that the Kazakh nation has no future. He says there is even no word for movement (*dvizhenie*) in the Kazakh language. In response, Stalin says that in the age of capitalism, repressed nations were weak, however, now it is time for the nations like Kazakhs to flourish.¹⁹⁶

The number of Kazakh children at Soviet schools is frequently used to establish a juxtaposition between the Tsarist past and the Soviet present. In 1935, Zhürgenov stated that in the Tsarist era only 13,000 children studied in all of Kazakhstan. Those children could not even dream of student clubs, libraries or kindergartens. These schools spent 10 hours in a week on religious education and the rest of the time was used to teach only the sciences “which were not against God”. Proudly he pointed out that there were now 6562 schools in Kazakhstan with 578,000 students. Among them, 254,000 were Kazakhs. In addition, 17500 of 25452 students who study at higher education institutions were

¹⁹⁵ Even during the Terror when nationalists were being executed, the Russian Empire was still condemned as “the prison of nations”. See, *Qazaqstan Sotsialistik Uly Oktyabr revolyutsiyasynyñ zhıyrma zhyldyghyna* (Almaty: Qazaqstan baspasy, 1937), 8. Another text during the Terror defines Kazakhstan as the least developed colony of the Tsarist government and introduces and praises Syrym Datov rebellion of the late 18th century as part of the Pugachev rebellion. B. Mustafin and Kh. Timofeev, *Qazaqtyn Sovettik Sotsialistik Respubliqasy* (Almaty: Qazaqstan partiya baspasy, 1938), 8-9.

¹⁹⁶ T. Zhürgenov, *Qazaqstanda Mädeniät Revolyutsiyasy: Qazaqstan Mädeniät qayratkerleriniñ 1 s'ezindegi bayandamasy* (Almaty: Qazaqstan baspasy, 1935), 3.

Kazakhs. There were numerous libraries, clubs, red corners, red teahouses, kindergartens and so on. In the past, there were only 10-15 books in the Kazakh language, but now 116 of 368 newspapers are in Kazakh. Alone the number of textbooks in Kazakh are 68 with a total circulation number of 1,892,100. In addition, 28 books have been published in Uyghur and 7 in Dungan.¹⁹⁷

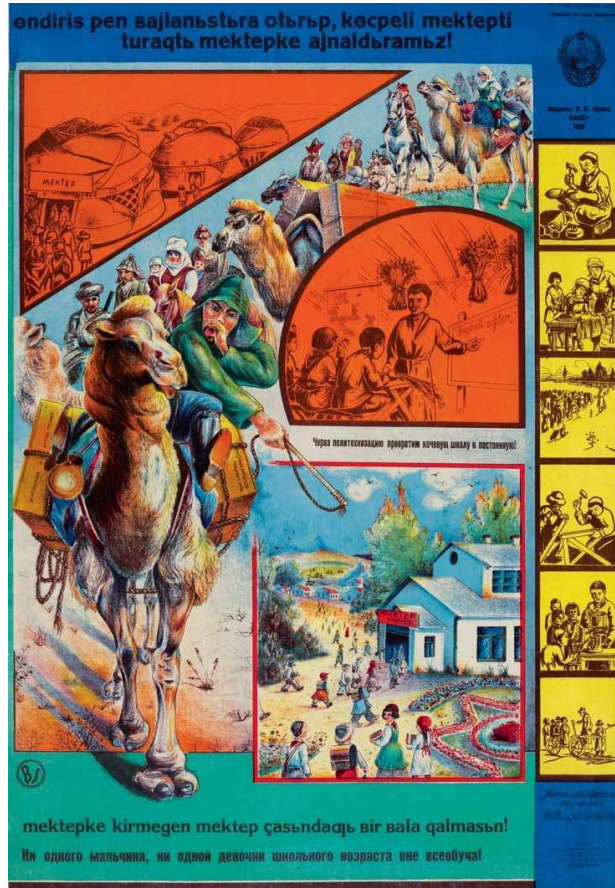


Image 3: “All boys and girls of school age must be schooled” (1931)¹⁹⁸

Yet, it was not only the Tsarist regime which was under attack. As soon as Filipp Goloshchekin, first secretary of the Kazakh Communist Party, was dismissed in 1933, he became another scapegoat for the deficiencies. He was accused of opening schools just in

¹⁹⁷ Ibid., 8-9.

¹⁹⁸ Poster published by Kazakh Narkompros, <https://islamperspectives.org/rpi/items/show/9945>.

name without paying attention to quality and most schools in his time were only one-year or two-year schools.¹⁹⁹ In a report by the Kazakh ASSR presented at the Presidium of the Council of Nationalities, nationalists were blamed for the problems in the development of education and culture in Kazakhstan. In this logic, it was nationalists who were responsible for the lack of widespread Kazakh language education.²⁰⁰ During the Terror, it was of course not difficult to find new scapegoats. In fact, Zhürgenov would find himself among the executed.²⁰¹

Zhürgenov's text fully presents the Soviet Kazakh narrative of children's education in the 1930s.²⁰² However, it must be noted that, in reality, throughout the 1930s education rarely meant more than teaching literacy especially in the rural areas. A great majority of schools only offered one or two years of education. In the same year when Zhürgenov made his speech above, it was declared that the primary task for Kazakh schools was to make rural Kazakh primary schools four-year institutions. In 1934-35, only 411 out of 3266 Kazakh schools (13.6%) were giving fully four years of education. 547 schools had only three years of education (16.7%), 1583 schools had two years

¹⁹⁹ Ibid., 19-20.

²⁰⁰ The report proudly declared that only between 1933 and 1935 [after Goloshchekin was sacked] masterpieces of Kazakh folk culture such as *Qyz Zhibek* and *Qozy Körpesh*, Kazakh traditional instrument *dombra*, Kazakh songs and national dance were elevated to the status they deserved. GARF, f. 3316, op. 28, d. 780, ll. 76-79 (Material k dokladu pravitel'stva Kazakhskoi ASSR v Prezidiume Soveta Natsional'nostei pri TsIK SSSR o sostoianii kul'tury). Available on <https://islamperspectives.org/rpi/items/show/22462>.

²⁰¹ For a text that attacks "nationalist-fascists", "bourgeois-nationalists", and "rightist bandits" including Zhürgenov, see, *Qazaqstan Sotsialistik Uly Oktyabr revolyutsiyasynyñ zhıyrma zhyldyghyna*, 14.

²⁰² For other examples of texts that legitimized the Soviet regime through children's education see: Ibid., 30; Mustafin and Timofeev, *Qazaqtyn Sovettik Sotsialistik Respubliqasy*, 77; *Qazaq SSR 20 zhyldyghy: Bayandamashylar men propagandister üshin material* (Almaty: Qazaq memlekettik sayası ädebiet baspasy, 1940), 28.

(48.3%) whereas 698 schools provided only one year of education.²⁰³ In 1935, the party and Sovnarkom declared that due to the faults of Goloshchekin's rule in the field of education, 75.3% of Kazakh schools were one-year, two-years, or three years schools, whereas 10 classes of education at Kazakh schools was only provided in Almaty.²⁰⁴ Hence, the situation was in no sense as bright as officials claimed to legitimize the Soviet rule.

Various reports about schools in the 1930s draw a very different picture from the official narrative. A report to the party plenum in 1933 makes it clear that no aspect of education in the country was properly functioning. So many schools did not have roofs, windows, and doors, thus it was not possible to continue education. Students were dropping out. Even the school No: 12 in Almaty, which was known as the leading school in the country, did not have any firewood or fuel gas. 8-9-year-old children were freezing in the dormitories.²⁰⁵ In 1936, the medical department of Almaty municipality investigated schools in Talghar, Tastaq, and Almaty city center. According to their report, the conditions of classes and corridors were indescribable. Schools neither had clean drinking water, nor hot meals. Hygiene conditions were alarming everywhere.²⁰⁶ In 1937, there was still no considerable improvement in hygiene and sanitation.²⁰⁷

²⁰³ "Iz Spravki Kazkraikoma VKP (b) v TsK VKP (b) o Sostoianii Shkol'nogo Dela v Kazakhstane," republished in Kh. Khabiev, *Kul'turnoe Stroitel'stvo v Kazakhstane, 1933-1941 gg.: Sbornik dokumentov i materialov* (Almaty, 1965), 92.

²⁰⁴ *Khalyq Aghartuv Qyzmetkerleriniñ Bilimin Köteriiv Zhayynda Basty Materialdardyn Zhinaghy* (Qyzylorda: Qazaqstan baspasy, 1936), 14.

²⁰⁵ Sädüaqsaly, *Bastaüysh mektep türaly*, 13-14. For the problems about rural schools see also I. Nyshanbayuly, *Aüyldaghy sayası aghartū zhūmystary* (Qyzylorda: Qazaqstan baspasy, 1932).

²⁰⁶ Usenov and Syzdyqov, "Qaraghandynyñ I-ülgili Qazaq mektebinde," *Aüył Mughalimi* 1-2 (1937): 86-87.

²⁰⁷ "Mektep Türaly (VK(b) P'nyñ Qazaqstan Ölkelik Komitetiniñ VII plenumynyñ qavlysy," *Aüył Mughalimi* 1-2 (1937): 3.

In many rural areas, it was almost impossible to conduct education. It was reported in 1934 that some school teachers were coming to Almaty from a distance of 300-400 kms to procure school materials. What is more, they could not find what they were looking for even in Almaty.²⁰⁸ At the rural schools, education was conducted only two hours daily instead of the required four hours. In addition, most of these schools functioned only 3-4 days a week.²⁰⁹ The number of students who were dropping out was alarming especially in the early 1930s (sources never mentioned famine as a reason for this though). In Akzhal (Eastern Kazakhstan Oblast), 44% of the students dropped out the fourth class in 1932-1933.²¹⁰ The majority of Kazakh students who dropped out were girls. In general, Kazakh students' average age was too high. For example, a sample of seven schools from the Eastern Kazakhstan oblast shows that 55.8% of Kazakh students at primary schools were teenagers, whereas the same statistic for Russian students was 27.5%.²¹¹

Inspectors visited several schools in order to measure the quality of education in the country, but the results were depressing. For example, in Qyzylorda, at a primary school, no student knew what a thermometer or wind meant. Students neither knew who a communist or a komsomolets was, nor had they heard about Moscow or Leningrad. Inspectors were not able to find one student who knew the city of Karaganda, the Türksib project, or the names of Soviet rivers, lakes and borders. In fact, “model” schools in

²⁰⁸ Sh. Elzhanuly, *Aūyl Mektepterin Politteknikalandyruv Zholdary* (Qyzylorda: Qazaqstan baspasy, 1934), 27.

²⁰⁹ *Ibid.*, 28.

²¹⁰ K. Momynuly, V. Semenova, B. Kurchakov and E. Sydyquly, *Aūyl mektepteri tūraly keybir maghlumattar* (Qyzylorda: Qazaqstan baspasy, 1934), 9.

²¹¹ *Ibid.*, 4.

Almaty were not promising either. Students of the third class read very slowly and they possessed weak writing skills and little knowledge of algebra.²¹² A report from Karaganda claims that new students who had finished fourth or fifth classes in Aqmola, Zhañaarqa and Qarqaraly did not know what poetry, fable, or composition meant.²¹³ The following are the questions addressed to students from an inspector's report in 1934. Students' answers clearly display the level of political and ideological education at the time:

- "Who ruled the country before the formation of the Soviet government?"

(Addressed to second-year students. Among the answers are Karl Marx and Lenin).

- "How are the living conditions of the workers in the capitalist countries?"

(Addressed to fourth-year students. Among answers are "they live well" and "their living conditions improve year by year").²¹⁴

As late as 1941, an investigative report by the Moscow-based newspaper *Uchitel'skaya Gazeta*, mostly based on letters they received from teachers in Kazakhstan and the information provided by their correspondents in Kazakhstan, singled out Kazakhstan for "the catastrophic state of education". The situation was particularly alarming in Karaganda, South Kazakhstan and Almaty oblasts among others.²¹⁵ Although the report's tone was definitely influenced by the moral panic of the late 1930s,²¹⁶ the

²¹² Sādūaqasuly, *Bastaūysh mektep tūraly*, 19.

²¹³ Usenov and Syzdyqov, "Qaraghandynyñ I-ülgili Qazaq mektebinde," 86.

²¹⁴ "Bastaūysh Mektepte Qogham Tanuv Sabaghy," *Aūyl Mughalimi* 2, no. 9 (1934): 22-23.

²¹⁵ The report was sent to CC Secretary and signed by the editor-in-chief V. Golenkina. From the report, we understand that several letters had been sent to Kazakh authorities before. RGASPI, f. 17, op. 126, d. 3, ll. 67-78 (Doklad sekretariu TsK VKP o sostoianii vospitatel'noi raboty v KazSSR). Available on <https://islamperspectives.org/rpi/items/show/11554>.

²¹⁶ For moral panic of the late 1930s, see, Chapter 4: "The Great Terror as a Moral Panic" in Seth Bernstein, *Raised under Stalin: Young Communists and the Defense of Socialism* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2017).

depth of investigation is impressive and its conclusions are more or less in line with various local reports.

Throughout the 1930s, qualifications of cadres were a constant problem, and teachers frequently came under attack. In 1935, 70% of teachers in Kazakhstan did not even have four years of education.²¹⁷ In Western Kazakhstan oblast, some teachers finished only literacy courses, thus they had no formal education at all.²¹⁸ There were high school teachers who did not have a high school education.²¹⁹ According to a poll conducted in Almaty, among 20 kindergarten teachers, 12 of them had not read any book at all in the last six months.²²⁰ The educational and intellectual levels of the teachers were alarming for party members. On the other hand, there is evidence that there was considerable pressure on teachers by local authorities which created further problems for education in Kazakhstan. In one instance, local authorities in Shymkent (Chimkent) threatened teachers to prosecute them “to the full extent of the law” if teachers did not reach a 100 percent pass rate in their classes. According to the investigation of the Moscow-based newspaper *Uchitel'skaya Gazeta*, teachers' fears of being fired and even imprisonment were totally justified. Many teachers lived in fear and did not have any enthusiasm for their profession.²²¹

However, despite deficiencies and exaggerations, mass schooling itself was revolutionary for Kazakh children as it was in many parts of the world at the time. It can

²¹⁷ *Khalyq Aghartuv Qyzmetkerleriniñ Bilimin Köterüv*, 52

²¹⁸ *Ibid.*, 59.

²¹⁹ M. Toghambayuly, *Mughalimderdin bilimderin tolyqtyruvdyn zholy men ädisi* (Qyzylorda: Qazaqstan baspasy, 1934), 4.

²²⁰ 4 of them read only one, 3 of them two, and 1 of them read more than three books. *Khalyq Aghartuv Qyzmetkerleriniñ Bilimin Köterüv*, 63.

²²¹ RGASPI, f. 17, op. 126, d. 3, ll. 62-64 (Pis'mo redaktora “Uchitel'skoi Gazety v TsK VKP o pis'me iz Kazakhstana o sostoianii obrazovaniia). Available on <https://islamperspectives.org/rpi/items/show/11553>.

be argued that mass schooling in the 1920s and 1930s was one of the most important developments for the transformation of childhood in Kazakhstan. The process was one of increasing authority of an interventionist state in the lives of its subjects. State intervention made children and childhood a matter of public concern in different parts of the world.²²² It was a project of building a national community, but schools were everywhere also the agents of creating a disciplined society. In the colonial contexts, education of children was used to discipline the native populations, thus, to maintain colonial systems of social power. Colonial education was key in civilizing indigenous children and transforming their “primitive” lives.²²³ Paula Michaels argues that Soviet Kazakhstan was not different from other colonial situations where indigenous cultures were criminalized, and a dominant European power used science as a tool of establishing dominance over indigenous populations and legitimized its rule through an ideology of civilizing mission.²²⁴ However, we have seen that the Soviet regime presented itself in opposition to the colonial past. In fact, although the Soviet regime shared some aspects of the colonial powers, its dedication to education in native languages, its ultimate success in almost universal literacy and mass schooling differentiates it from colonial situations. What I have tried to show is that although mass schooling had a huge impact, throughout the 1930s schools were far from being able to indoctrinate socialist ideals and their impact on creating the new Soviet person was quite limited.

²²² Platt, “Japanese Childhood, Modern Childhood”.

²²³ Helen May and Baljit Kaur, *Empire, Education, and Indigenous Childhoods: Nineteenth-Century Missionary Infant Schools in Three British Colonies* (New York and London: Routledge, 2016).

²²⁴ Michaels, *Curative Powers*.

Children's education dominates children's literature and the official texts celebrating Soviet Kazakhstan's successes. Yet, it should be noted that, in the second half of the decade, particularly building Karaganda (and some other minor cities like Ridder) as an industrial complex was also frequently emphasized in these texts. In one short story published in 1939, Kole Shivalov imagines that he visits the town of Akzhal in 1968. He cannot recognize the city, because it is not the small Rudnik where a few thousand people used to live; this has become a large city with a population of a few hundred thousand. If it was a useless steppe once upon a time, now big houses and large streets have been built; families of the miners live in these houses. In the past there was only a factory, a school, a club, and a few houses, but now (in 1968) it is such a large city that tramways and trolleybuses work regularly. He sees a few thousand multiple-story apartments, esthetically beautiful schools, the metro station, and electric trains. Thousands of children are having rest and working at the giant pioneer house, and a play is being staged at the pioneer theater. All the actors and actresses are children themselves. That is how Shivalov spends his time in the socialist city of Akzhal.²²⁵

Indeed, development and technology were an indispensable part of children's literature in the Soviet Union,²²⁶ and it fit particularly well for the Soviet Kazakh discourse since development of the "empty" steppe into modern industrial complexes and

²²⁵ Kole Zhivalov, "50 Zhyldan Son," in *Altyn дәуірен: Qazaqstan pionerleri men mektep oqūshylary tvorchestvosynyñ zhīnaghy*, eds. Zh. Saīn and T. Särsenov (Almaty: Qazaqstan LQZhS ortalyq komitetiniñ Komsomol baspasy, 1939), 60-61.

²²⁶ John McCannon, "Technological and scientific utopias in Soviet children's literature, 1921-1932," *Journal of Popular Culture* 34, no. 4 (2001). For scientific and technological utopias in early Soviet Union, see, Stites, *Revolutionary Dreams*.

modern cities was one of the most important sources of legitimacy.²²⁷ It can be said that this is one of the most stable narratives about Soviet Kazakhstan's development and successes. It provides a source of legitimacy for the Soviet regime almost from the beginning to the end.²²⁸ In 1931, Kazakhstani pioneers declared that dry deserts that had not been walked before were becoming settlements of the people. The power of rivers was turned into electric power and tractors were transforming useless steppe into arable lands.²²⁹

Before the catastrophe of famine, only one volume of a children's journal included pictures of factories of the Donbas, skyscrapers (almost in an American fashion), tramways, automobiles, 11-12 floor apartment buildings. It described how to build a windmill and how to obtain kerosene from petroleum, and explained why radio and telephone were vital for the villages.²³⁰ However, the dominance of livestock breeding after the famine overshadowed the scientific and technological content of Kazakh children's literature in the coming years until the last years of the decade when news about technological achievements of the Soviet Union started to appear constantly. For example, in 1939, when the first flight from Moscow to the US was conducted it was covered in numerous publications.²³¹ By the end of the decade, aviation was a topic of admiration: articles about various Soviet air movements were translated from newspapers

²²⁷ In her environmental history of the Aral Sea Basin, Maya Peterson suggests that there was an obvious continuity between the Tsarist regime and the Bolshevik ideology in terms of the belief in power of science and technology to create a perfect society. Peterson, *Pipe Dreams*, 20.

²²⁸ This narrative would again become dominant after the death of Stalin. See, Michaela Pohl, "From White Grave to Tselinograd to Astana: The Virgin Lands Opening, Khrushchev's Forgotten First Reform," in *The Thaw: Soviet Society and Culture during the 1950s and 1960s*, eds. Denis Kozlov and Eleonory Gilburd (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2013).

²²⁹ *Zhalpy Qazaqstandyq*, 3-4.

²³⁰ *Ekpindi Zhas* 4, 1930.

²³¹ "Mäskeü-Amerika Qurama Shtattary," *Pioner* 6 (1939): 12-13.

such as *Izvestiia* and *Pravda* and provided for Kazakh children's consumption.²³²

Technological development was such an important theme for children that they extensively read science fiction by Western authors too. Inasmuch that famous French adventure and science fiction author Jules Verne's 35th anniversary of death was commemorated by Kazakh children.²³³

Soviet pedagogy consecrates technology as the essence of aesthetics. It was propounded that Marxism did not acknowledge nature as beautiful in itself. Nature is neither beautiful nor ugly; humans create beauty through development and technology. One author of an article about aesthetic education in the pedagogical journal of the republic asks whether the railroad that is built to split a mountain into two, its rails, its locomotive are not beautiful. In the past, people used to call a river beautiful in its natural run, but now real beauty has come with the establishment of hydraulic power plants.²³⁴ Another pedagogue asks "aren't Turksib railroad or [new] factories gloriously beautiful?"²³⁵ It is interesting to note that, as discussed in Chapter 6, childhood memories of the Stalinist era are dominated by pastoral images which show that the Soviet conception of beauty and aesthetics was not internalized by Kazakh children.

This narrative was also reflected in children's stories. In a 1936 story with the title "Lenin and Makhmut", little Makhmut looks from the window and sees a train. Then, in his dream he gets on the train and comes to the city. He sees buses, tramways, ships and airplanes. Finally, he reaches Moscow, sees the Kremlin and dreams about Lenin. The

²³² Bekkhozhin ed., *Otan igiligine* (Almaty: Qazaqstan LKChS Ortalyq Komitetiniñ Komsomol Baspasy, 1938).

²³³ "Armanshyl Adam (Zhiül Vernniñ ölgenine 35 zhyl tolūyna)," *Pioner* 3-4 (1940): 28-31.

²³⁴ S. E. Elzhanov, "Estetikelik tärbiēniñ negizderi," *Aūyl Mughalimi* 3 (1937): 52-53.

²³⁵ S. Qozhakhmetov, *Pedagogika Mäseleleri* (Almaty: Qazaq Memleket Baspasy, 1940), 47.

whole story is accompanied by the pictures of giant buildings, factories, cars and so on.²³⁶

Almost like an industrial utopia, the story depicts Soviet development both textually and visually. Development of the steppe was a victory against nature,²³⁷ and one of the workers who participated in the construction of Turksib explained it very well in the journal *Pioner*. The text describes how difficult it was to build the railroad and ends with the sentence: “Eventually we won, the mountain Shoqpar was defeated”.²³⁸



Image 4: Drawings in *Lenin men Makhmut* (1936)²³⁹

²³⁶ K. Äbdiqadyrov, *Lenin men Makhmut* (Almaty: Qazaqstan baspasy, 1936).

²³⁷ In many parts of the world, industrialization required a war against nature and victory in this fight was perceived as a symbol of civilization’s dominance over wild lands. For how the Soviet regime transformed the steppe into an industrial and economically productive site and how it was part of a global industrialization and modernization trend, see, Kate Brown, “Gridded Lives: Why Kazakhstan and Montana are Nearly the Same Place?,” *The American Historical Review* 106, no. 1 (2001).

²³⁸ Zhumaqul Balgaev, “Este Qalghan Eki Kün,” *Pioner* 5-6 (1940): 4.

Construction of Türksib was another dominant theme in the imagination of Soviet achievements. On Türksib, see, Payne, *Stalin’s Railroad*.

²³⁹ Äbdiqadyrov, *Lenin men Makhmut*, 2-3.

Another way of contrasting the Soviet present and pre-revolutionary past was focusing on the cultural and artistic achievements of Soviet Kazakhstan. Temirbek Zhürgenov was again the most outspoken figure of the cultural development in the 1930s. He reports that as of 1934, 22 theaters were established, and 597 actors were educated. In addition, a Kazakh national orchestra was organized, musicals of Kazakh people's literary treasure were put into scenes such as "Qyz Zhibek" and "Ayman-Sholpan".²⁴⁰ According to this discourse, Kazakh literature, music, theater, all witnessed fantastic improvements. This is also reflected in the children's literature. Achievements of Kazakh artists frequently found a place in children's journals. In one instance, two Kazakh girls' travel to Moscow to join a concert of Kazakh artists is covered. They sing songs and play dombra. One of the girls was so amazed at the concert: "Guests at the concert clapped for us. They clapped for the young artists of the Kazakhs. They clapped for the whole children of Kazakhstan".²⁴¹ The description of this little girl's amazement indicates how achievements in arts were instrumentalized to trigger national honor.

Ethnic Identity and Interethnic Relations

It is true that Soviet attitudes towards Kazakh traditions embraced an Orientalist discourse and some aspects of everyday life in Kazakh culture were criminalized or at least condemned and declared to be backward. Kazakh children too were familiarized with this Orientalist interpretation of their traditional life. However, the Soviet authorities never anticipated the disappearance of Kazakh culture altogether. In addition,

²⁴⁰ "O Yazyke, Shkole i Bor'be za Kadry Rabotnikov Kul'tury" in Temirbek Zhürgenov, *Tandamaly* (Almaty: Arys baspasy, 2001), 95-104.

²⁴¹ Erkebay Ebenov, "Biz Körmede Boldyq," *Pioner* 3-4 (1940): 33.

Bolsheviks' perception of Russian peasant culture shared much with their attitudes towards Kazakh traditions.²⁴² Moreover, progressive ideology and condemnation of Kazakh traditions were not necessarily imposed from outside. Kazakh authors themselves were active in this process.²⁴³ Soviet Orientalism towards Kazakh culture was also not a total rupture, but rather it can be seen as the radicalized continuation of the early 20th century nationalist critique.

Orientalist discourse was most explicit in matters about domestic life, and Soviet perceptions of Kazakh domestic life was frequently used for hygiene campaigns and medical policies. It was common to associate diseases directly with Kazakh domestic lifestyle. A booklet published in 1932 declares that disease is not given by God but is a product of lifestyle. Particularly, Kazakh homes came under attack. According to the booklet, Kazakhs sit, sleep, wash dishes, and cook in the same room, thus the smell in the house becomes unbearable. Hence it was necessary to build large houses with windows.²⁴⁴

The effects of domestic life were also connected to the health of Kazakh children. The same author claims that Kazakh children never eat enough. Even though they eat bread and drink tea at school, children are always hungry at home. The same deficiencies of Kazakh homes are also mirrored in school buildings; hence, the number of cases of disease increase each year. Moreover, twelve-year old Kazakh children do the same work

²⁴² See the subsection "Primordial *muzhik* darkness" in Lynne Viola, *Peasant Rebels under Stalin: Collectivization and the Culture of Peasant Resistance* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1999), 14-19.

²⁴³ Kudaibergenova calls the attitude of Kazakh authors who were willingly engaged in Soviet modernization project and who strived to abandon their traditional ways of living as "self-orientalists". Kudaibergenova, *Rewriting the Nation*, 21-36.

²⁴⁴ A. Baygorin, *Üydin densäilyqqa beretin äseri* (Qyzylorda: Qazaqstan baspasy, 1932). The author adds that one of the harmful Kazakh customs is to spit anywhere (p. 20).

as an adult. As a result of all these, anemia was common among Kazakh children.²⁴⁵ Kazakh foodways came under criticism too. According to an anti-religion propaganda text, Kazakhs eat together, use the same handkerchief to clean their hands, and do not wash dishes properly.²⁴⁶ The same text also criticizes the tradition of respect to the elderly: religion taught children to obey their fathers like slaves.²⁴⁷

Nevertheless, not all authors associated diseases with Kazakh culture. Tuberculosis was widespread among Kazakh children, and the author of a booklet about protection of children from tuberculosis claims that this was the product of Tsarist Russia's capitalism.²⁴⁸ In fact, attributing diseases among Kazakhs to their living habits was a legacy of the Russian doctors' writings in the Tsarist era. From the 18th century onwards, they emphasized "uncleanliness and untidiness" of Kazakhs, yet from the beginning of the 20th century Russian imperial rule came to be seen as the main reason for diseases.²⁴⁹ Therefore, Soviet perceptions of diseases among Kazakhs waved between these two pre-revolutionary narratives.

Children's games came under attack too. According to Qudayqululy, old Kazakh games taught children to obey aristocrats. Some of those games made children cowards whereas some of them spoiled camaraderie between boys and girls. Himself a Kazakh author, the games Qudayqululy included to his collection were mostly taken from

²⁴⁵ A. Baygorin, *Mektep balalarynyñ densaũlyghyn saqtaũ zholy* (Qyzylorda: Qazaqstan baspasy, 1930), 4-7

²⁴⁶ Kratov, et. al., eds., *Dinge qarsy oqũ kitaby: Aũyldyq belsendiler men dinsizder üyirmeleri üshin* (Qyzylorda: Qazaqstan baspasy, 1934), 171.

²⁴⁷ *Ibid.*, 169.

²⁴⁸ E. A. Treilikh, *Balany tüberkülezden qalay saqtaũ kerek* (Almaty: Poligrafkniga, 1932), 2.

²⁴⁹ Anna Afanasyeva, "Qazaq Religious Beliefs in the Writings of Russian Doctors during the Imperial Age, 1731-1917," in *Islam, Society and States across the Qazaq Steppe (18th – Early 20th Centuries)*, eds. Niccolo Pianciola and Paolo Sartori (Vienna: Austrian Academy of Sciences Press, 2013), 161.

Russian authors. Although he selected some Kazakh games too, his attitude towards Kazakh traditional culture was mainly negative.²⁵⁰ On the other hand, a Russian author was more sympathetic towards Kazakh children's games. Vishnevskii offers that there are some beneficial and cheerful games in Kazakh culture such as “*batyrlar soghysy*” (heroes' fight) and wrestling.²⁵¹



Image 5: On the swing (1930)²⁵²

Contemporaries were aware of the consequences of the Orientalist paradigm. Isaev reports that there were various infectious diseases among Kazakhs; some people used this as a tool to label all Kazakhs as weak and sick. According to Isaev, these people argued that Kazakhs should not be given jobs because it was dangerous to come in contact with them, a perfect example of great Russian chauvinism. As a result of Russian chauvinism, some Kazakhs understood diseases as a matter of national honor and refused

²⁵⁰ Qudayqululy, *Mektep Balalarynyñ Oyyndary* (Qyzylorda: Qazaqstan baspasy, 1936).

²⁵¹ A. I. Vishnevskii, *Qazaqtar üshin dene tärbäsi oyyndary* (Almaty: Qazaq memleket baspasy, 1930), 14-16.

²⁵² TsGAKFDZRK, 5-3609 (Bagayev's personal file, from the series “Children's entertainment”).

treatment.²⁵³ Isaev provides a balanced account of medical policies in Kazakhstan: on the one hand, he is aware of the exclusionary promise of an Orientalist discourse; on the other hand, he does not reduce medical policies to a project of demolishing Kazakh culture.

In fact, the rhetoric over Kazakh domestic life was not the only example of national distrust between Kazakhs and Russians. Throughout the 1930s, ethnic hostility between the two remained salient, although official discourse masked any ethnic problem. Prejudices and distrust were reflected in children's deeds too. Officials were quick to attribute any ethnic problem to nationalists. Both great Russian chauvinism and Kazakh nationalism were condemned frequently, but ethnic problems could not be eradicated. There were Kazakhs who expressed their dissatisfaction with the ruling cadres. A few college students from Semey were reported to say that Kazakhstan's party cadres were full of Russians and Jews, hence Kazakhstan was not governed by Kazakhs themselves. In a 1930 booklet, the Kazakh Komsomol declared that the struggle against this kind of nationalism was crucial.²⁵⁴ On the other hand, negative attitudes towards Kazakhs were common among Russians and other nationalities. The image of Kazakhs as a lazy and incapable people was widespread, and consequently they were discriminated against in cities.

A report from 1933 about primary school education points out that children learn antisemitism, great Russian chauvinism, and Kazakh nationalism from their parents.²⁵⁵

²⁵³ O. Isaulý, *Qazaqstan sotsialdyq attanys zholynda* (Qyzylorda: Qazaqstan Baspasy, 1932) 55-56.

²⁵⁴ E. Bürkitbayuly, *Qazaqstan Komsomoly Oñshyldyqpen Küreste* (Qyzylorda: Qazaqstan baspasy, 1930), 13.

²⁵⁵ Säduäqasuly, *Bastaūysh mektep tūraly*, 32. This kind of statements was constantly emphasized throughout the 1930s. For example, see, *Oqytuvshylar üshin basshy materialdar zhīnaghy* (Oral: Oral

Mariyasina proclaims that great Russian chauvinism and local nationalism was a problem particularly in Kazakhstan. Although, the parents were to blame for such deficiencies, hostility towards children of other nationalities was also common among children. The author brings various examples of ethnic hostility among children: in Almaty, a five-years old Russian girl refused to take a rest with a “Kirgiz” girl. It was common among Russian parents to scare their children by saying “if you cry I will give you to a Kirgiz”, and among Kazakh parents to say, “if you play with a Russian, may God take your soul”. The author gives an example of Russian chauvinism from the city of Öskemen. A sick Kazakh girl goes to the doctor, but the doctor tells her “I cannot reply to you in Kazakh. I don’t like that language; I only know Russian”.²⁵⁶

Unlike Uzbeks, Kazakh women never wore burqas (*paranja*). Kazakh children’s literature made use of references to Uzbek women’s burqas to legitimize Soviet power. An ethnic hierarchy was established in which Uzbeks were placed lower than Kazakhs.²⁵⁷ The stories about Kazakh children’s experiences of the Revolution also included stories about unveiling ceremonies of Uzbek girls where “they left the dark world for the bright world”.²⁵⁸ In a story with the title “History of an Uzbek girl”, little Niyaz does all kinds of work, but it is forbidden for her to be seen by males. She does not look like a human; indeed no one would think she is a girl. She is lost in thought wondering if she could one day have a joyous life freely among people. Then some girls tell her that there is a house

baspakhanasy, 1936), 5-6. During the Great Terror, condemnation of local nationalism was intensified, and these accusations became a matter of life and death.

²⁵⁶ E. A. Mariyasina, *Qazaqstandaghy mektepke deyingi tärbäe qyzmetkerlerine kömek kitapsha* (Qyzylorda: Qazaqstan baspasy, 1933), 19-21.

²⁵⁷ An anti-religious propaganda text associates veiling with the religious fanatics of the Turks, Uzbeks and Tatars; and notes burqa was not accepted among Kazakhs as it was among Uzbeks. Kratov, et. al., eds., *Dinge qarsy oqūv kitaby*, 127.

²⁵⁸ “Oktebirde istegenimdi aytam,” in Sarybaev, *Oktiabr zhäne balalar*, 38-40.

where girls unveil and spend their time joyfully. When they arrive that house, she sees a Russian woman who is lecturing about unveiling.²⁵⁹ Even a story about building a dam to irrigate the desert starts with an example of burqa. An old man asks an Uzbek girl if she is not going to die from heat under her burqa. The girl replies she does not want to wear it, but if bigots see her unveiled, they would insult her.²⁶⁰

Veiling was not the only traditional Muslim practice that came under attack in children's literature. Qurban Ayt (feast of sacrifice) came under constant attack too. In a short story little Akhmet claims that in order to sacrifice an animal, poor Kazakhs work for the rich for two, three months. Mullahs then eat the meat and take the leather. In short, there is no benefit for the toilers in this feast; it is only useful for the rich and mullahs.²⁶¹ An interesting children's game published in a collection of games is "*molda quvū*" (kicking out the mullah). For this game, children beat a 50-cm wood that symbolizes a mullah with their sticks.²⁶² In another story, the positive character is called "Russian Osman" because he eats pork and does not believe in God. Yet, he is so honest that he never lies.²⁶³ Hence, Kazakh children were encouraged to eat pork too, a prohibition that is symbolically more important than many aspects of Islam.

Soviet Kazakh Pedagogy and Child Upbringing in the 1930s

²⁵⁹ "Niyaz Bībi (bir özbek qyzynyñ tarıkhy)," in A. Ädilbaev ed., *Balalar Ängimesi* (Qyzylorda: Qazaqstan baspasy, 1935), 33-39.

²⁶⁰ Qazbel Süleymanov, "Ülken Fergana Qanaly," *Pioner* 10 (1939): 4.

²⁶¹ "Eresek pen Piyener," *Ekpindi Zhas* 3 (1930): 6.

²⁶² Vishnevskii, *Qazaqtar üshin dene tärbīesi oyyndary*, 42-43.

²⁶³ Seitzhan Omarov, "Dala Qyzy," in Q. Äbdıqadyrov ed., *Qazaq Sovet zhazuvshylarynyñ zhīnaghy: orta mektep oquvshylaryna arnalghan zhīnaq* (Almaty: Qazaqstan körkem ädebīet baspasy, 1940), 127.

Teachers' role as the agents of modernization and Enlightenment was a constant throughout Soviet history.²⁶⁴ In 1936, Levon Mirzoyan explained the vital role of teachers for the Soviet civilizing process in Kazakh villages. Teachers were not only heads of schools, but the sources of Soviet social power in the villages who were supposed to lead the Soviet civilizing project. Teachers were charged to fight against polygamy, bride price (*qalym*) and other harmful traditions.²⁶⁵

However, by the end of the decade teachers were already primarily authority figures.²⁶⁶ Order, discipline and obedience characterized the heyday of Stalinism. While Kazakh pedagogy in the 1920s did not so closely follow the revolutionary visions of childhood circulating in Moscow and Leningrad, on the eve of World War II, Kazakh pedagogy fully adopted the new Stalinist conception of childhood that put obedience and discipline at the center. In his pedagogical work, Qozhakhmetov argues that order is the essence of education; if there is no order, nothing can be achieved at school. Whereas feudal and bourgeois systems establish order by exploiting, the Soviet method aims to make everyone participate in the establishment of order self-consciously.²⁶⁷ Qozhakhmetov criticizes a German pedagogue who is cited as arguing that the child has no consciousness and does whatever the teacher instructs. This methodology is reactionary because it makes children passive and fearful. In contrast, socialism needs active and strong personalities. Yet, he also criticizes Rousseau and Spencer because they

²⁶⁴ For more information on teachers, see, E. Thomas Ewing, *The Teachers of Stalinism: Policy, Practice and Power in Soviet Schools of the 1930s* (Peter Lang, 2002).

²⁶⁵ L. I. Mirzoyan, *Qazaqstannyñ mädeniät qyzmetshileriniñ kezektegi mindetteri: Qazaqstan mädeniät qyzmetshileriniñ I s'ezinde söylengen sözi* (Almaty: Qazaqstan baspasy, 1936), 18-19.

²⁶⁶ Teachers' authority was strengthened, but in return, they take the whole responsibility when things do not go well. See: Polenskii, "Pedagogiyashyl burmalavshylyqtar turaly," *Aūyl Mughalimi* 1-2 (1937): 73.

²⁶⁷ S. Qozhakhmetov, *Oqūshylardy sanaly tärtilpte tärbiäleü turaly* (Almaty: Qazaq memlekettik baspasy, 1940), 3-4.

do not appreciate that the central figure in education is the teacher.²⁶⁸ He continues to assert that it is necessary to use punishments against children who violate order.²⁶⁹ In another work, Qozhakhmetov attacks leftists who, according to the author, argued that the school was to disappear in the Soviet period, and books would not be necessary anymore. For Qozhakhmetov, these are anti-Marxist ideas of the leftists.²⁷⁰ In fact, in these years, attacks on leftist deviation in education and child upbringing were time and again repeated in Kazakh pedagogical works. For example, Begalīn harshly criticized the leftists in his article in which he emphasizes the central role of the teacher in education.²⁷¹ What is ironic is that such a leftist or more utopian conception of education and childhood had never taken root in Kazakhstan. Hence, Kazakh pedagogues were attacking leftists who never existed.

The other authoritarian institution which was substantially strengthened in this era was the family.²⁷² Kazakh pedagogues emphasized the authority of family and its role in the upbringing of children.²⁷³ It was suggested that in capitalist countries, the father does not take care of his children and does not help his wife with childrearing. On the contrary, in Soviet society the father and the mother share responsibilities and educate their children together.²⁷⁴ In return, children were supposed to obey their parents. Even Lenin was presented as an obedient son. In a translated story in the journal *Pioner* by the

²⁶⁸ Ibid., 8-10.

²⁶⁹ Ibid., 14.

²⁷⁰ S. Qozhakhmetov, *Pedagogika Mäseleleri* (Almaty: Qazaq memleket baspasy, 1940), 35-36.

²⁷¹ M. Begalīn, "Sovet didaktikasynyñ printsipteri," *Khalyq Mughalimi* 7-8 (1940): 44.

²⁷² See, Chapter 3: "Stalinist Family Values" in David L. Hoffmann, *Stalinist Values: The Cultural Norms of Soviet Modernity, 1917-1941* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2003), 88-117.

²⁷³ K. Mukhamedzhanov; *Klastan Tysqy Tärbiē Zhumystary Tūraly* (Almaty: Qazaqtyn birikken memlekettik baspasy, 1941); S. Qozhakhmetov, *Oqūshylardy sanaly tärtpite*.

²⁷⁴ P. P. Polianskii, "Sem'iada Kommünistik Tärbiē Tūraly," *Khalyq Mughalimi* 6 (1941): 2.

famous Soviet author Mikhail Zoshchenko, it is stated that Lenin and his mother faced economic hardship after Lenin's father's death. At the time Lenin is a smoker, and his mother tells him "it would help our budget if you quit smoking". Without any question, Lenin obeys his mother and quits smoking.²⁷⁵ The image of a rebellious revolutionary and the theme of generational conflict between parents and children had long been abandoned.

Thus far, we have seen that Soviet attitudes towards family by the end of the 1930s were similar to other societies which put emphasis on order and obedience. However, there is one distinctive aspect of the Soviet attitude towards family relations. Soviet pedagogy, even in the heyday of Stalinism, continued to see children as prospective citizens and hence discouraged what can be considered as selfish parental love. Qozhakhmetov criticizes the use of affectionate words by parents, because this attitude produces spoiled children. According to the author, they need Soviet citizens worthy of building communist society. Indulging and spoiling children is a remnant of bourgeois society. This attitude cannot create conscious, strong and self-sacrificing citizens. As he puts it, "The issue is not to love your children; a hen loves its chicks too. The issue is to raise children in the communist spirit".²⁷⁶

²⁷⁵ Mikhail Zoshchenko, "Leninniň Temekini Qalay Tastaghany Tūraly Ängime," *Pioner* 9 (1940): 3-4.

²⁷⁶ Qozhakhmetov, *Oqūshylardy sanaly tärtepte*, 32-33.



Image 6: The depiction of an ideal Kazakh family (1935)²⁷⁷

However, Soviet pedagogy's negative attitude towards affectionate relations was not reflected in Kazakh children's literature. A piece about happy childhood from *Pioner* claims that Soviet parents' affection and love towards their children is the strongest and the noblest form of love. Later, we read that Däüren's and Zhamal's mother cannot take her eyes from her children when they are going to the school. Her looks and feelings are described in the most affectionate way.²⁷⁸ In a story about the nineteenth century Kazakh bard Qurmanghazy, one of the main themes was the affectionate love between the bard and his mother.²⁷⁹ It is very common to find stories or poems which cover the theme of love between children and the mother.²⁸⁰ Therefore, Soviet pedagogues' conception of familial relations did not really have an impact on the imagination of family in children's literature, at least in Kazakhstan.

²⁷⁷ Sarybaev, *Oktyabr zhäne balalar*, 77.

²⁷⁸ Zhüsip, "Sabaq Bastaldy," *Pioner* 9 (1939): 1.

²⁷⁹ Zhumash Qonaqbaev, "Kompozitor Ana," *Pioner* 5-6 (1940): 6-7.

²⁸⁰ For example, see the poem "Ballad about the Mother". Töken Abdrakhmanov, "Ana Türaly Ballada," *Pioner* 2 (1940): 22.

What were the values that Soviet pedagogues emphasized in child upbringing? For Äbdilda TÄzhibäev, the head of Kazakhstan's Union of Writers from 1939 on, the most important values for children's education were justice and honesty.²⁸¹ According to Nurtazin, children must be taught not to lie, not to use bad language, and not to curse.²⁸² At a teachers' meeting, it was declared that children must be taught to love their people, justice, heroism, camaraderie and to love labor.²⁸³ The image of a negative child is seen in a story translated from Tatar, allegedly written by a student. In the story, Latyp is lazy and he does not want to wake up. He cannot find his books and notebooks because he is so disorderly. He lies to his teacher. He does not listen to the lecture and always wants to play. He does not know the simplest multiplication table in mathematics; he looks for Caucasian mountains in Africa in geography class. He shows Rome when he is asked to find Leningrad.²⁸⁴ In the description of Latyp, the ideal child is tidy, does not lie, and studies hard. However, being a successful student is not enough. In another story, Rakhima tells that her daughter has finished tenth class and her son is getting higher education in engineering. Yet, we learn that she is ashamed of her daughter because she burnt her brother's shirt while ironing. She again becomes ashamed when she learns that her son cannot drive a car.²⁸⁵

Apart from an interesting interpretation of a mother's evaluation of her children, the story also provides a very clear example of how gender roles were understood. Not

²⁸¹ T. TÄzhibäev, "Balalardy Adal, Shynshyl Etip TÄrbieleü Türaly," *Khalyq Mughalimi* 3-4 (1941): 34-41.

²⁸² M. Nurtazin, "Balalardy qudaqalaü zhäne tärbieleü meylinshe küsheitilsin," *Khalyq Mughalimi* 19-20 (1939): 128.

²⁸³ "Yanvar Ayyndaghy Mughalimder Soveshshanyasy," *Khalyq Mughalimi* 22 (1939): 9.

²⁸⁴ Makhmud Qusaynov, "Latyp Zhalqaü," *Pioner* 9 (1940): 18-20.

²⁸⁵ Zh. Qonaqbaev, "Äri bilimdi, äri maman bolü üshin," *Pioner* 9 (1940): 13-14.

only is ironing presented as a female duty, but also finishing the tenth grade is seen as enough for a girl. In fact, despite the dominant rhetoric of women's emancipation, throughout the 1930s gender roles were usually taken for granted. In the early 1930s, the issue of children's upbringing was discussed within the scope of ending women's slavery,²⁸⁶ but the author also complained that women did not understand this, and slavery persisted. She showed how traditional gender roles proved resilient among children. For example, girls were told that they could not become Red Army soldiers, so they did not participate in boys' games. In the games, boys always became members of the government, and they told girls to wash the dishes because it was a women's job. Boys drew pictures of automobiles, tractors, airplanes, tanks and Red Army soldiers; whereas girls drew pictures of flowers, houses and so on.²⁸⁷ By the end of the decade, these established gender roles were not even questioned. Coupled with pronatalist policies, the decade witnessed the rise of traditional gender roles on a grand scale. After the banning of abortion in 1936, Kazakh authors covered the allegedly harmful consequences of abortion. Myrzagereeva gives numerous examples of women who died because of abortion in Almaty and finishes her discussion by asserting that every toiling woman must be ready to become a mother in her happy life, and to raise healthy laborers for the great socialist motherland.²⁸⁸

Extracurricular activities were vital for political education. On the eve of the war, Mukhamedzhanov defined three major themes for extracurricular education: communist

²⁸⁶ Mariyasina, *Qazaqstandaghy mektepke deyingi tärbiä qyzmetkerlerine*, 4-5.

²⁸⁷ *Ibid.*, 28.

²⁸⁸ D. Myrzagereeva, *Abort zhäne onyñ ziyany* (Almaty: Qazaq memleket baspasy, 1939), 10-11.

morality, physical education, and aesthetics education.²⁸⁹ It has already been explained that what is understood by communist morality is primarily discipline, obedience, industriousness, patriotism and courage. In this respect, by the end of the decade, Kazakhstan was not distinctive. Nevertheless, as I have argued, Kazakh pedagogy did not follow more revolutionary conceptions of childhood in the 1920s, hence whereas historians understand the mid-1930s as a turning point for Soviet childhood, the contrast was less apparent in Kazakhstan. For example, while the cult of Pavlik Morozov with its assertiveness and revolutionary zeal was established in the center,²⁹⁰ it never spread to Kazakhstan. The first Kazakh translation of anything written on Morozov was published only in 1941.²⁹¹ By then, the content of the cult had already been transformed to adopt to the new Stalinist conception of childhood and family. Originally the Pavlik myth emphasized the child's denunciation of his own father who was supposedly sabotaging the collectivization effort. Soviet authorities made the young boy a model Soviet hero who was martyred by his own family. Yet, as Catriona Kelly shows, by 1936 the Pavlik legend was reinterpreted according to the changing conceptions of Soviet childhood and family relations and turned him into a model pupil and downplayed the junior vigilante's rebelliousness.²⁹² Hence, Kazakh children were never exposed to the earlier version of the Pavlik myth. In fact, President Tokayev is not wrong when he states that "the 'heroism' of Pavlik Morozov, who sold his own father, did not spread among the Kazakh youth".²⁹³

²⁸⁹ Mukhamedzhanov, *Klastan Tysqy Tärbiē*, 5-8.

²⁹⁰ Catriona Kelly, *Comrade Pavlik: The Rise and Fall of a Soviet Boy Hero* (Granta Books, 2005).

²⁹¹ E. Smirnov, *Pavlik Morozov* (Almaty: Qazaqtyn memlekettik birikken bapasy, 1941).

²⁹² Kelly, *Comrade Pavlik*, 155.

²⁹³ Tokayev, *Slovo ob otse*, 118.

Aesthetics and arts occupied a significant place in extracurricular activities, and the Soviet regime was more successful in this field. Unlike the qualification of pedagogical cadres or improvement of material conditions at schools, the Soviet regime partially achieved its goals with arts training. Mukhamedzhanov provides a wide coverage of arts in his discussion of extracurricular activities. There are separate parts for painting and drama, yet the greatest coverage is reserved for music. The author emphasizes the significance of musical training with explanations of instruments and choirs.²⁹⁴ In his *Pedagogical Issues*, Kozhakhmetov argues that music has a great impact on children’s characters and emotions. Music is also a great tool to develop patriotic feelings.²⁹⁵ He also suggests that theater is very important too, because it includes all types of arts and directly appeals to children’s emotions.²⁹⁶

Literature had a special place among all arts. Mukhamedzhanov reports that the favorite authors and poets of children in Kazakhstan were Pushkin, Gorky, Abay, Zhambyl, and Shevchenko.²⁹⁷ Kazakh children did not only read Kazakh or Russian literature. In fact, what they read was not too different from the children in other parts of the world. The following table shows which world classics were translated into Kazakh and read at Kazakh secondary and high schools.²⁹⁸

Table 1: World Literature in Kazakh Secondary Schools

	Author	Title	Circulation	Date
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²⁹⁴ Mukhamedzhanov, *Klastan Tysqy Tärbiē*.

²⁹⁵ Qozhakhmetov, *Pedagogika Mäseleleri*, 53.

²⁹⁶ Ibid., 55-56.

²⁹⁷ Mukhamedzhanov, *Klastan Tysqy Tärbiē*, 48.

²⁹⁸ P. V. Taran-Zaishenko, “Qazaqstan orta mektepterinde dünıe zhüzilik ädebıet,” *Khalyq Mughalimi* 5 (1940).

1	Romeain Rolland	Jean Christoph	15150	1937
2	Jules Verne	The Mysterious Island	10150	1936
3	Heinrich Heine	Germany	20150	1938
4	William Shakespeare	Hamlet	5000	1931
5	Mark Twain	Tom Sawyer	5150	1939
6	Jonathan Swift	Gulliver's Travels	5150	1937
7	Jack London	White Fang	5000	1938
8	Jack London	Call of the Wild	20150	1936
9	Jack London	The Human Drift	20150	1937
10	Charles Dickens	A Tale of Two Cities	10000	1932
11	Daniel Defoe	Robinson Cruse	10000	1932
12	Francois Rabelais	Gargantua and Pantagruel	20150	1938
13	Victor Hugo	Gavrosh	20150	1937
14	Guy de Maupassant	Five Stories	10150	1937
15	Brothers Grimm	Fairy Tales	20150	1937
16	Brothers Grimm	The Brave Little Tailor	20150	1936
17	Rudyard Kipling	The Elephant's Child	15150	1937

Soviet Modernization: Rupture or Continuity?

A Soviet discourse of Kazakh modernization was consolidated in the 1930s. This discourse emphasized continuity in the history of Kazakh modernization in contrast to a revolutionary rupture. The establishment of socialism in the country turned into only one episode of this story. Towards the end of the decade, under the influence of what is

known as “the Great Retreat”, prerevolutionary cultural aspects were more and more integrated into this discourse. Saule Yessenova argues that the Soviet regime indeed continued the work of early nationalists in the formation of Kazakh national identity.²⁹⁹ It is now very well known that “national in form, socialist in content” was the general logic of Soviet cultural policies. Historians have different explanations for the causes of this formula. However, whatever the Bolshevik logic behind this policy was, it certainly created what Yuri Slezkine calls a chronic ethnophilia which proved enormously resilient and strong.³⁰⁰ Some historians dismiss the national form altogether to argue that what mattered was only the socialist content.³⁰¹ Yet, I argue that the national form was indeed more important than anticipated by many historians; eventually it outlived the socialist content.

The fairy-tale is a good example of the continuity between pre-Soviet and Soviet discourses in Kazakhstan. The genre of fairy-tale that had been condemned in the early years of Soviet rule triumphed in the late 1930s.³⁰² In Kazakhstan too, fairy tales and legendary stories became popular. Giant animals and miracles were told in the traditional poetic form. In a sense, the form of Oriental legendary stories kept their presence under a communist regime usually with no ideological content at all.³⁰³

The revival of folk literature did not face any reaction from an ideological perspective. It was declared that Kazakh oral literature included figures like “God”,

²⁹⁹ Yessenova, “Soviet Nationality, Identity and Ethnicity”.

³⁰⁰ Yuri Slezkine, “The USSR as a Communal Apartment, or How a Socialist State Promoted Ethnic Particularism,” *Slavic Review* 53, no. 2 (1994).

³⁰¹ Audrey Altstadt’s book provides a pure example for this logic. Altstadt, *The Politics of Culture in Soviet Azerbaijan*.

³⁰² Kelly, *Children’s World*, 97-99.

³⁰³ For example, see: Asqar Toqmaghambetov, *Alyptar Tūraly Ertegi* (Almaty: QLZhS Komitetiniñ Komsomol baspasy, 1941).

prophets, khans, *bays* as their heroes; and none of the content should be changed for ideological concerns.³⁰⁴ Consequently, not only dragons, but also khans and *bays* became models in the fairy-tales published for Kazakh children.³⁰⁵ Ideological concerns were so weak that children read the fairy-tale “Goodness and Evil” (*Zhaqsylyq pen Zhamandyq*) in which, at the end, *zhamandyq* is eaten by dogs and birds, while *zhaqsylyq* attains his desire by becoming wealthy. Even making a fortune was presented to Kazakh children as a life goal and desire.³⁰⁶

In contrast to popular beliefs, in Kazakhstan, ethnocentric history writing did not cease in the 1930s, and the pre-war years brought the construction of Kazakh batyrs into a national narrative, parallel to the rise of Russian national identity.³⁰⁷ Children’s literature was no exception. One of the texts in *Pioner* which aims to indoctrinate the red flag as the symbol of not only socialism, but also of children’s honor, starts with Kalinin’s sentences about how the red “galstuk” tie and red flag are colored with thousands of heroes’ blood, and continues by suggesting that the nineteenth-century Kazakh batyrs Isatay and Makhambet kept the flag flying too, just like Peter I and Kutuzov.³⁰⁸ Kazakh batyrs had become central to conceptions of history and to Kazakh national identity, but its real triumph would come during the war.

Another way of establishing continuity with the pre-Soviet past was claiming the nineteenth-century “enlighteners”’ legacy for the socialist regime. It is no secret that the

³⁰⁴ Esmaghambet Smayilov, “Qalq Ādebīetin Zhīnaūdaghy Mindetimiz,” *Khalyq Mughalimi* 5 (1940): 67.

³⁰⁵ For example, see, “Auez Khannyñ Qyryq Uly,” *Pioner* 10 (1939): 19-20.

³⁰⁶ “Zhaqsylyq pen Zhamandyq,” *Pioner* 7 (1939): 23-24.

³⁰⁷ See Chapter 5, “The rise of red batyrs in the Kazakh steppe,” in Yilmaz, *National Identities in Soviet Historiography*.

³⁰⁸ “Tūlarymyz Tūraly,” *Pioner* 2 (1941): 11.

Bolsheviks claimed the heritage of Enlightenment and embraced many “progressive” non-socialists figures in world history. In these years, Kazakhs also secured the position of pre-Soviet modernist Kazakh intellectuals’ heritage. Although this is not an issue directly related to childhood, since most of the earliest Kazakh intellectuals thought and wrote about education, it had a direct influence on Kazakh pedagogy.

It was Mukhtar Auezov’s “The Path of Abay” that was primarily responsible for the canonization of Abay. Children’s publications also declared Abay as a “pedagogue poet”. What made Abay a pedagogue in the minds of Kazakh intellectuals was Abay’s call to education. Abay is presented as a great thinker who greatly sympathized with the sufferings of the children of the poor (in contrast to children of the wealthy).³⁰⁹ In the pedagogical journal, Abay is praised for his call to learning the Russian language and Russian culture, for Russians were the source of all sciences.³¹⁰ This may sound like a reflection of Russian dominance, yet, the author’s goal was to include Abay into the Soviet Kazakh canon. The text continues with the description of a very simple learning process advised by Abay, and the author argues that Soviet pedagogy supports Abay’s ideas. Thus, Soviet pedagogy was to make use of such a “golden treasure”.³¹¹ A memoir was published in the same volume, which was allegedly written by Abay’s granddaughter. In this text, Kazakh children became familiar with not only Abay’s

³⁰⁹ Alisher Toqmaghambetov, “Kemenger Qalq Aqyny,” *Pioner* 7-8 (1940): 22.

³¹⁰ Äbishev Tezhimbet, “Abaydyn pedagogikalyq közqarasy,” *Khalyq Mughalimi* 11-12 (1940): 18. Indeed, Kazakh intellectuals of the 19th century, including Abay, widely argued that Russian language had much to offer to Kazakhs and emphasized the importance of learning Russian. Ian W. Campbell, *Knowledge and the Ends of Empire: Kazak Intermediaries and Russian Rule on the Steppe, 1731-1917* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2017), 108.

³¹¹ Toqmaghambetov, “Kemenger Qalq Aqyny,” 19.

progressive deeds such as educating his daughters, but also with a description of a quite patriarchal (and wealthy) family and a very strong, even authoritarian, householder.³¹²

It was not only Abay that Kazakh educators claimed for the Soviet Kazakh canon. Ybyray Altynsarin also had a very honorable place in the literature. He was called the first pedagogue-enlightener of the Kazakhs.³¹³ A literary work published in 1938 claimed that Altynsarin was the representative of the newly developing Kazakh bourgeoisie in the 19th century. The Kazakh pedagogical journal was not happy with that description and declared that Altynsarin was never a bourgeois, but rather he had always fought against religion and feudalism.³¹⁴ He was also praised for his Russian education and for being influenced by Russian populists. We know that Soviet pedagogues even in the 1920s accepted old “bourgeois” pedagogues’ scientific contributions. Bourgeois origins did not discredit their value. However, for Kazakh intellectuals it was not enough to accept the “scientific” value of a “bourgeois” pedagogue. They created an anti-feudal and anti-religious pedagogue, and in this way contributed to an idea of continuous Kazakh enlightenment history. Such a discourse of progress and enlightenment is most explicit in a text written by Mukhtar Auezov and Qalizhan Bekkhozhin in 1940. The text starts with the description of the dark Kazakh past when Kazakhs knew nothing but boiling *qurt* (dried yoghurt). Enlightenment starts with Altynsarin in the nineteenth century, and all Soviet history is presented as nothing more than a continuation of Kazakh

³¹² “Äkem Tūraly Ängime (Abay qyzy Ūasilanyñ este qalghandarynan),” *Pioner* 7-8 (1940): 23-24.

³¹³ Qanafia Asqarov, “Qazaqtyn Pedagog-Aqyny,” *Khalyq Mughalimi* 9 (1939): 20.

³¹⁴ “Ybyray Altynsarin (1841-1889),” *Khalyq Mughalimi* 17-18 (1940): 55-61.

Altynsarin was indeed a deeply religious person. For more on Altynsarin, see, Campbell, *Knowledge and the Ends of Empire*, 63-90.

enlightenment.³¹⁵ It is easy to dismiss such rhetoric as self-orientalism, however, this dismissal would prevent us realizing how the writers were indeed forming a national discourse: a generic discourse of modernization and progress of the Kazakh nation with no specific reference to socialism was well-established.

Canonization of pre-Soviet Kazakh enlighteners has been so deeply normalized and naturalized in Kazakhstan that nobody questions whether it really fits into socialist ideology. However, this was not always the case. In the 1920s, particularly the ideas of Abay Qunanbay came under critical, and frequently, hostile review. As late as 1932, the authors who followed and praised Abay could be criticized as furthering Kazakh nationalists' goals.³¹⁶ In the late 1930s, it was not possible to find any negative comment, and Kazakh authors succeeded in making Abay and other pre-Soviet "enlighteners" a very significant part of the Soviet canon. In fact, as Gabriel McGuire notes, the historical Abay was an odd choice as the hero of a socialist realist novel (referring to Auezov's novel): he was from a wealthy and powerful family and the son of the district's Agha Sultan; studied at a madrasa, had multiple wives and even served as an administrator for the Tsarist regime.³¹⁷ There were also groups who disputed the revival and incorporation of traditional art as an integral part of the new culture. For example, they harshly criticized recital of epics such as *Ayman Sholpan* and *Qyz-Zhibek*. However, in the 1930s

³¹⁵ Mukhtar Auezov and Qalizhan Bekkhozhin, "Mädeniëtti Qazaqstan," *Khalyq Mughalimi* 19-20 (1940): 26-32.

³¹⁶ Thomas Winner, *The Oral Art and Literature of the Kazakhs of Russian Central Asia* (Durham: Duke University Press, 1958), 179-180.

³¹⁷ Gabriel McGuire, "Aqyn agha? Abai Zholy as socialist realism and as literary history", *Journal of Eurasian Studies* 9, no. 1 (2018): 3. Auezov's Abay, on the other hand, "has the energy of youth, is sympathetic to the poor, eager to learn, and who prophesies the dawn of a new era, while his antagonist is old, selfish, haunted by religious superstitions, and fearful of change" (p. 6).

traditional art forms became an essential component of Soviet Kazakh culture and criticisms simply disappeared.³¹⁸

Scholars of Soviet Central Asia sometimes focus too much on what was repressed, hence what was allowed and reproduced is rarely questioned. Although Kazakh nationalists had been purged first in the 1920s, and then again in 1937-8, Kazakh national discourse was well-established, and continued to develop although there were frequent fine-tuning adjustments. This was important, because it allowed Kazakh intellectuals to interpret the last century of Kazakhs as a history in primarily progressive (and not necessarily socialist) terms. It helped to create a linear history for the story of Kazakh modernity. Although most scholars focus on the content of literature and arts (socialist realism), the form was as important as the content which proved more resilient. The post-War period would bring even more opportunities for the expression of national discourse. So much so that, in 1949, one instructor of the Propaganda and Agitation Department was terrified by the predominance of prerevolutionary folkloric works and almost total absence of “Soviet” (meaning socialist) works in the repertoire of cultural activities in Kazakhstan.³¹⁹

Conclusion

This chapter has discussed how socialism was introduced to Kazakh children. Saving poor children from the exploitative bays was the main legitimization point for the

³¹⁸ Winner, *The Oral Art and Literature of the Kazakhs*, 151.

³¹⁹ RGASPI, f. 17, op. 132, d. 258, ll. 99-105 (Instruktor Otdely propaganda i agitatsii TsK VKP (b) Goncharok Sekretariyu TsK VKP(b) Malenkovu feodal’no-baiskikh i religioznykh perezhitkakh v Kazakhskoi SSR). Available on <https://islamperspectives.org/rpi/items/show/19948>.

Soviet regime in Kazakh children's literature. These children were also continuously reminded how terribly Kazakh children lived under the Tsarist regime and wealthy Kazakhs. Kazakh children learned how very few Kazakhs had the opportunity to study before, whereas the Soviet regime provided education for all. Other Soviet success stories that were introduced to Kazakh children included the emergence of new cities on the steppe such as Karaganda and the flourishing of Kazakh culture under the Soviet regime.

I have argued that utopian revolutionary conceptions of childhood had only a limited impact in Kazakhstan. A main reason for this was the weakness of state capacity in the periphery. In the Soviet center, the utopian ideas such as the abolishment of the family, raising the new generations in Soviet institutions, a completely new understanding of education, establishment of children's collectives, a radical rejection of the past and the revolt of the youth against backward parents were mostly associated with model institutions and various experiments.³²⁰ It is true that these experiments were all short-lived in the Soviet center too. Nevertheless, the early Soviet years did create a revolutionary vision through a radical pedagogy and these experiments, it never materialized in the Soviet periphery. Kazakh children were invited to take part in literacy campaigns and some other Soviet projects such as collectivization, but the authority of the family and school was never significantly challenged and independent children's collectives never emerged. As late as 1932, Soviet children came under the influence of the myth of Pavlik Morozov which was introduced to Kazakh children only in 1941 when the myth lost its radicalism. As discussed in Chapter 4, military themes too emerged in Kazakh children's literature quite late. Lastly, the consolidation of an image of the

³²⁰ Kelly calls such institutions as utopian "total institutions". Kelly, *Children's World*, 65.

shepherd child for Kazakh children displaced other discourses such as the previously dominant theme of science and technological developments for some years. During collectivization and the post-famine years, Kazakh children were primarily expected to contribute to livestock breeding. The regime that legitimized itself by claiming that it had saved Kazakh children from working as shepherds, bombarded them with images of shepherding.

Locals were not always interested in ideological debates circulating in Moscow and Leningrad. Yet, Stalinist childhood with its emphasis on discipline, order, patriotism and the leader cult was also consolidated in Kazakhstan. While Stalinist childhood was a break from the early visions for the general Soviet picture, in Kazakhstan, the change was less radical. The 1930s also witnessed a considerably de-ideologized imagination of Kazakh *national* modernization, enlightenment and progress.

State ownership of means of production, the planned economy, a sense of war against capitalism and the party's vanguard role in leading the country toward socialism were the essential aspects of Soviet socialism. During and after the first five-year plan Kazakhstan was tightly integrated into this system. However, curiously, seven decades of socialist rule did not create a tradition of left-wing politics in Kazakhstan. The almost total absence of socialist ideas in contemporary Kazakhstan can be at least partially understood once we recognize that being Soviet in Kazakhstan was rarely directly connected to Marxist ideology. Class conflict was the most widespread socialist value in the literature for Kazakh children. However, Stalinism also overshadowed class conflict while national discourses displaced Marxist conceptions of history and patriarchal family revived at the expense of gender equality.

The whole debate about the “great retreat” under Stalin is connected, on the one hand, to the issues about family, gender, and children; on the other hand, to the reemergence of Russian nationalism. The reemergence of the family as a central institution in the 1930s was presented as a proof of retreat from communism, and the resilience of tradition under Stalin's rule.³²¹ In her study of women and gender in the early Soviet Union, Wendy Goldman, writing about the re-strengthening of family and traditional gender roles, makes the assertion that “the greatest tragedy is that subsequent generations of Soviet women, cut off from the thinkers, the ideas, and the experiments generated by their own Revolution, learned to call this 'socialism' and to call this 'liberation’”.³²² For Goldman, this was certainly a retreat from socialism; and this retreat was directly caused by the practical problem of raising children, whereas it was the early Bolshevik vision that represents socialism, liberation, and modernity.³²³ However, the “great retreat” argument has been criticized in the recent decades. David Hoffman suggests that although the Soviet regime endorsed conventional norms and patriarchal families in the mid-1930s, in reality there was no retreat from socialism. Stalinist commitment to transform the society, to instill socialist values in all members, and to transform human nature itself was a constant throughout Stalin's rule; and the institution of the family became a tool of the state to instill those values.³²⁴

Gender relations in post-Soviet Kazakhstan present a curious example. While

³²¹ Nicholas S. Timasheff, *The Great Retreat: The Growth and Decline of Communism in Russia* (New York: E.P. Dutton, 1946).

³²² Wendy Z. Goldman, *Women, the State and Revolution: Soviet Family Policy and Social Life, 1917-1936* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1993), 343.

³²³ *Ibid.*, 12.

³²⁴ Hoffman, *Stalinist Values*, 4.

For a critique of Hoffman, see, Matthew E. Lenoe, “In Defense of Timasheff’s Great Retreat,” *Kritika: Explorations in Russian and Eurasian History* 5, no. 4 (2004).

women's participation in workforce and social life is much greater than in many Muslim societies, their low status within the family presents a contradiction to the image of "emancipated" women. Particularly, daughters-in-law's subordination to not only husbands but also in-laws symbolizes the power of patriarchy. Domestic violence and bride abduction too are ethnicized and defended as Kazakh traditions.³²⁵ It is striking that even educated female respondents of an oral history project conducted in the southern regions of the country not only defend women's roles as being good wives in a patriarchal family, but also early marriages; some even think that girls should marry as early as at the age of 13.³²⁶ Scholars usually explain this as a return to primordialism or a re-traditionalization in post-Soviet Kazakhstan. However, this "return to primordialism" is only apparent within the family, while in public Kazakh women, more or less, continue to live as "emancipated" subjects. In fact, there is more continuity between the Soviet and post-Soviet gender practices than anticipated by these scholars. As Kathryn Dooley suggests, in post-War Central Asia, the dependent position of the young daughter-in-law was not to be condemned as a vestige of women's subordinate position in traditional society, but shored up as "a source of tutelary guidance allowing the older generation to educate her".³²⁷ Various reports both from the 1930s show that customs such as polygamy

³²⁵ Cynthia Werner, "Bride abduction in post-Soviet Central Asia: Marking a shift towards patriarchy through local discourses of shame and tradition," *Journal of the Royal Anthropological Institute* 15, no. 2 (2009); Edward Snajdr, "Ethnicizing the subject: Domestic violence and the politics of primordialism in Kazakhstan," *Journal of the Royal Anthropological Institute* 13, no. 3 (2007); Diana T. Kudaibergenova, "Project *Kelin*: Marriage, Women, and Re-Traditionalization in Post-Soviet Kazakhstan," in *Women of Asia: Globalization, Development, and Gender Equity* eds. Mehrangiz Najafizadeh and Linda Lindsey (London: Routledge, 2018).

³²⁶ Demirci, "Sosyokültürel değişim sürecinde Kazak ailesi ve çocuk terbiyesi," 195-197.

³²⁷ Dooley, "Selling Socialism, Consuming Difference," 407.

Dooley argues that in post-Soviet Central Asia the main cultural difference was not anymore between Russian and Kazakh or modern and traditional, but between urban and rural. In my opinion, that is a very important observation to understand culture in Central Asia. It means that whereas a more "Europeanized" (or "Russified") lifestyle dominated life in the cities, a rural lifestyle coexisted, was tolerated and was even

and bride price that the Soviet regime had been fighting were alive; and in the post-War period they were admitted as part of local ways of living. Realizing that socialist values were never very strong in Kazakhstan and the authority of family was already recognized by the Soviet regime in the 1930s contributes to our understanding of the low status of Kazakh women within family. The patriarchal family survived the Soviet rule, at least in discourse, if not always in practice and the post-Soviet “re-traditionalization” inherited this legacy together with an emancipatory and progressive discourse.

David Brandenberger’s concept of national Bolshevism has influenced historiography and a widespread view of Stalin’s regime as a new version of Russian nationalism (which was already strong in Cold War Central Asian historiography) has gained support in the field.³²⁸ However, recent works, such as Harun Yilmaz’s comparative study of Ukrainian, Azerbaijani and Kazakh national identities have shown that this turn to the national was not specific to Russian culture and Russian identity. Among others, Kazakh historians too left Marxist concepts and turned to national(ist) history-writing.³²⁹ Although the triumph of Kazakh national discourse would come during the war, its origins go back to the pre-War period.

accepted legitimate by the authorities. Therefore, there is much more continuity between the rural culture of the post-War Central Asia and contemporary practices. For a study of how rural intellectuals interpreted national culture and how they transformed Soviet values after Stalin, see, Erin Hutchinson, “The Cultural Politics of the Nation in the Soviet Union after Stalinü 1952-1991,” (PhD diss., Harvard University, 2020).

³²⁸ David Brandenberger, *National Bolshevism: Stalinist Mass Culture and the Formation of Modern Russian National Identity, 1931-1956* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2002).

³²⁹ Yilmaz, *National Identities in Soviet Historiography*.

Most of the studies on Soviet nationalities question focus on the early Soviet period. According to the general perception of these works, the sincere support for national identities and national cultures came to a halt with Stalinism. Recent works, on the other hand, have shown how the later periods were even more important in the formation of national identities and discourses. In addition to Yilmaz’s book, see also: John M. Romero, “Soviet Music as National Achievement: The Development of Professional Music in the Tatar ASSR, 1928-1959,” *Kritika: Explorations in Russian and Eurasian History* 20, no. 1 (2019). For an excellent account of the state of national cultures in post-war Central Asia, see Dooley, “Selling Socialism, Consuming Difference”.

I do not argue that there was a retreat from socialism in Kazakhstan under Stalin as long as socialist system was secure. Rather I argue that it was never all-powerful as a package of ideas and values. Thus, ideas and institutions, that were non-socialist, even at times anti-socialist, co-existed with a socialist political and economic system. As long as the system existed, this was not a deviation from socialism. However, we should also note that Stalinism was a retreat from socialism not only for Russian emigres or Western socialists, but also for many members of the Soviet creative intelligentsia. The abandonment of Marxist ideals in discourse and the growing emphasis on Russian patriotism and Russian national history was understood as a deviation by at least some Soviet citizens.³³⁰

Yet, in Kazakhstan, Stalinism's return to primordialist national discourse and the weakening of Marxist historical conceptions was never questioned. Once the political and economic system was gone, socialist ideology could not find many supporters among Kazakhs even though a powerful nostalgia for the Soviet period emerged. In this respect, this was a retreat from socialism in the long run. Weakness of Marxist ideology helps us to understand why there was not that much of an ideological crisis when the socialist economy came to an end. Katherine Verdery's study of socialist Romania is very relevant here. Verdery argues that the discourse of the nation was so powerful in Romania under socialism that once the socialist economic system was gone, there was nothing left, other

³³⁰ The growing emphasis on Russian nationalism was also welcomed by many who were marginalized by the radicalism of the earlier decades. These people thought that the regime was now turning away from socialism. David Brandenberger, "Simplistic, Pseudosocialist Racism': Debates over the Direction of Soviet Ideology within Stalin's Creative Intelligentsia, 1936-39," *Kritika: Explorations in Russian and Eurasian History* 13, no. 2 (2012).

than the discourse of nation.³³¹ Similarly, in Kazakhstan, once the Soviet system collapsed, what remained was a discourse of family, state, leader, and nation. Metaphorically, superstructure has outlived the base. It can also be said that the form has outlived the content. Or maybe it is more appropriate to say that the content was never that much socialist.

³³¹ Katherine Verdery, *National Ideology under Socialism: Identity and Cultural Politics in Ceausescu's Romania* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1995).

CHAPTER 2

STARVING LITTLE BODIES: CHILD VICTIMS OF THE KAZAKH FAMINE, 1930-1933

When a newspaper reporter in 2012 interviewed the author of a new book about the Kazakh famine, the article was assigned the title “In the time of the Great Famine, fathers ate their own children”.³³² The author declared that “never in our history [before] were witnessed the terrible occurrence of parents eating their children”. Indeed, the newspaper’s emphasis on child victims is representative of collective memory of the famine. Surviving Kazakhs recall primarily images of children who perished during the famine including the ones who fell prey to cannibals. From the beginning children played an immensely important role in how Kazakhs made sense of what they faced. When Kazakhs first heard the word “kolkhoz”, nobody understood what it was. People were told that everything would be common property, including women and children. Later, Soviet authorities explained that provocateurs spread the word that children’s flesh would be used to prepare expensive medicines that were being imported from China.³³³ At first, Kazakhs’ understanding of the Soviet regime was shaped by their fears for children; and later, they recalled starving children in order to make sense of the famine. More than anything else, children’s tragic fate symbolized the collapse of Kazakh society.

³³² Il’ias Dosmukan, interview with Zhanna Kydyralina, “Vo vremia Velikogo Dzhuta ottsy poedali svoikh detei”, *Megapolis*, 2012, May 28, 13.

³³³ Dana-Bike Baykadamova’s testimony in Valerii Mikhailov, *Khronika Velikogo Dzhuta: Dokumental’naia Povest* (Almaty: Zhaly, 1996), 278-279.

This chapter starts with a short discussion of the effects of the famine of 1921-1922 on children in Kazakhstan and the problem of homeless children before the famine of 1930-1933. I suggest that before the catastrophe of the 1930s, *besprizornost'* in Kazakhstan was primarily a problem for Russian children and despite many difficulties, Kazakhstan had made progress in solving the problem on the eve of the famine. The second part of the chapter discusses children's experiences during the famine of 1930-33. In both the Ukrainian and Kazakh famines, stories of children are usually included in general histories of famines, but there is no direct study of children for either case. Hence, this chapter is one of rare attempts to understand what children endure during famines. I will briefly discuss child deaths and the experiences of starving and abandoned children. Because we have more detailed descriptions of Kazakhs who took refuge in neighboring regions, Kazakh children's experiences in other regions are included. Lastly, by using both archival evidence and testimonies, I propose to *gender* the famine by showing how little girls suffered more than boys. Therefore, although biologically adult females have an advantage over males for survival, social and cultural norms assured that their daughters had no advantage. In the third part of the chapter I turn to famine testimonies to understand how Kazakhs made sense of this catastrophe. In comparison to the Ukrainian case, we have fewer Kazakh famine testimonies. Although there is an increasing interest in the Kazakh famine among Western historians, many of them are unaware of the existence of these testimonies except a few that are available in English and Russian.³³⁴ However, I argue that although we have a limited number of testimonies,

³³⁴ Sarah Cameron is the first Western historian who used testimonies in Kazakh. However, she used only one collection in Kazakh and a few other testimonies published in periodicals. Cameron, *The Hungry Steppe*.

they can still help us to look at the famine from different angles. These testimonies provide a rare opportunity to recover the voices of the survivors. By analyzing what and how they remember about the famine, not only can we discuss the collective memory of the famine, but also, we can better understand the actual experience of starvation.

As discussed in the introduction of the dissertation, having as many children as possible was the main function of the family in nomadic Kazakh society. The importance of having children was highly emphasized among Kazakhs. That is why Kazakh testimonies, in almost all cases, turn to children to describe the extreme level of suffering that nomadic Kazakh society had endured. Yet, what was particularly important for Kazakhs was having a son: having no son was considered as a family tragedy because it marked the end of the lineage.³³⁵ That, at least partially, explains why many Kazakhs sacrificed their daughters in order to save their sons. The fate of Kazakh girls (and young wives) was a result of the patriarchal social relations which remained untouched by the Soviet rule up until that point; not only fathers, but also mothers preferred to save their sons when they had to choose.

Nevertheless, survivors' focus on the fate of children, regardless of their gender, to make sense of their experiences is particularly important to understand what the famine symbolized for Kazakhs. By choosing to portray the very weakest members of their society as victims, Kazakhs present the famine as the irrevocable destruction of their

Western historians are even not aware of the majority of famine testimonies in Russian. They use very few of them which appear in widely known studies such as Mikhailov's, *Khronika Velikogo Dzhuta*. Some of them only use Shayakhmetov's memoirs which are available in English. Mukhamet Shayakhmetov, *The Silent Steppe: The Memoir of a Kazakh Nomad Under Stalin*, trans. Jan Butler (New York: The Rookery Press, 2007).

³³⁵ Kul'sarieva, *Etnografiia Detstva Kazakhov*, 32.

society. The famine not only demographically or economically meant the end of nomadism, but also symbolically marked the end of the nomadic society. According to an established view in the literature, famines are predominantly feminized through the images of weak and starving women. Based on the most common images that emerge from Kazakh testimonies, I suggest that we need to question the universality of this argument. Representations of Kazakh famine are dominated not by desperate women, but by starving and dying children.

I will continue discussing the fate of these children in the aftermath of the famine in the next chapter. The two chapters together shed light on how the famine transformed the lives of Kazakh children. This chapter looks at how famine destroyed their previous lifestyle, separated them from their families, and consequently brought them directly under the supervision of Soviet institutions. Both Sarah Cameron and Robert Kindler claim that the famine Sovietized Kazakhs. In Kindler's words, it was "Sovietization through hunger".³³⁶ However, assuming that the famine automatically Sovietized Kazakhs is underestimating the destruction brought by the famine. Cameron and Kindler rightly argue that it was the famine which brought Kazakhstan under the direct political and economic control of the Soviet regime. Nevertheless, as I discuss in the next chapter, Sovietization is not equal to political and economic control. I suggest that the consequences of the calamity of famine were not so easy to cure in the post-famine period even though we lack sources to discuss post-famine trauma. Therefore, the famine created the necessary conditions for Sovietization in Kazakhstan, but it did not automatically lead to embracement of Soviet identity or socialist values.

³³⁶ Cameron, *The Hungry Steppe*; Kindler, *Stalin's Nomads*.

Before the Catastrophe

The famine of 1921-22 took millions of lives across the Soviet Union. One of the most terrifying consequences of the famine was the millions of abandoned children across the whole country. The famine that hit the Volga region most drastically was the most influential single cause, triggered by years of fighting, in depriving children of their homes. According to one estimate, the famine of 1921 annihilated 90-95 percent of children under the age of three, and almost one third of those older in the Volga region.³³⁷ Whole armies of starving homeless children roamed around cities, bazaars and train stations. According to one witness, “Children with their limbs shriveled to the size of sticks and their bellies horribly bloated by eating grass and herbs, which they were unable to digest”.³³⁸ Homeless children formed gangs, begged on the streets, gambled in groups, turned to thievery for survival. Thousands of little girls (and sometimes boys), as young as 7-years old, practiced prostitution.³³⁹

Within the Kazakh republic, the northern and western regions were hit most severely. Consequently, enormous number of *besprizorniks* spread across the region. A considerable number of these abandoned children escaped or were evacuated from neighboring regions in Russian SSR. The following table shows the number of *besprizorniks* in Kazakhstan in 1921.³⁴⁰

³³⁷ Goldman, *Women, the State and Revolution*, 67.

³³⁸ Quoted in Ball, *And Now My Soul is Hardened*, 9.

³³⁹ *Ibid.*, 56-60.

³⁴⁰ TsGARK, f. 509, op.1, d.5, l.11 (“Otchet: O deiatel’nosti tsentral’nogo komissii KTsiK za 1921). According to Sügiralimova, the total number of abandoned children on January 1, 1922 was 158564, however, there is an enormous gap between this number and the one she gives for March 1, 1922 (408022). The difference mostly occurs in Orenburg (a rise from 47112 to 208837). Although Orenburg was the capital of the Kazakh republic, Kazakhs constituted a minority in the region. In 1925, Orenburg joined the Russian SSR and the capital of Kazakhstan was transferred to Qyzylorda. Sügiralimova does not provide an

Table 2: The number of besprizorniks in Kazakhstan in 1921

Province	11.16.1921	12.01.1921	01.01.1922
Orenburg	32000	33000	47112
Oral	21100	29100	31479
Kostanay	12344	22464	27344
Semey	5316	5976	8316
Aqmola	8176	8670	12170
Bukeev	4105	4105	6105
Aqtöbe	14959	23109	22959
Adai county	2000	2400	3079
Total	100000	127873	158564

The extensive number of abandoned children quickly decreased in the aftermath of the Civil War. According to an official report, in Kazakhstan, there were 25190 besprizorniks in 1926/27, however, only 7455 (29.5%) of them were hosted in detdoms. Oral (Uralsk) and Aqmola (Akmolinsk) were the oblasts that had the most homeless children; 5000 and 3524 respectively. The report also makes it clear that besprizornost' was primarily a problem for Russian children. Fewer than 30% of besprizorniks were Kazakhs.³⁴¹ Another report from 1928 confirms that in Kazakhstan the proportion of Russian orphans was considerably higher, because the Russian children had come either

explanation why such a sudden increase happened between January 1 and March 1. Sügiralimova, "Qazaqstandaghy panasyz balalar," 38. In addition, Ball also gives the number of homeless children in Kazakhstan as 408.000 in December 1921. Ball, *And Now My Soul is Hardened*, 9-10. We should be cautious about this very high number, primarily because the increase in Orenburg is extraordinary and requires further explanation.

³⁴¹ TsGARK, f. 509, op. 1, d. 122, ll. 5-10 (Otchet o Deiatel'nosti Ts.D. K. za 1926/27 g.).

on their own or with their families during the famine of 1921-1922. 65% of besprizorniks were Russians, 20% of them were Kazakhs, and the remaining were of other nationalities.³⁴² Therefore, on the eve of the Kazakh famine, proportionally, besprizornost in Kazakhstan was primarily a problem for Russian and other nationalities' children.

Officials were trying to collect these homeless children to place them in detdoms. Oral was the oblast where the most besprizorniks were rescued; 170 of them were taken from the streets and hosted in detdoms in 1926/1927.³⁴³ The budget for the war against "child homelessness" was provided by three different sources: the federal government, the local government, and extrabudgetary funds.³⁴⁴ Despite the high number of homeless children in the previous years, in June 1928, Mikhail Kalinin declared that the extent of the problem of homeless children was significantly reduced across the Soviet Union thanks to the measures taken by the authorities.³⁴⁵

Yet, in Kazakhstan, as elsewhere, the situation was not as bright as Kalinin described. In December 1928, the authorities acknowledged that detdoms in Kazakhstan were destitute. So much so that children who were taken from the streets had spent the winter in the detdoms, and then escaped in the spring. In one detdom in Qyzylorda, only 2 out of 40 children stayed.³⁴⁶ When detdoms sent children from one place to another,

³⁴² TsGARK, f. 509, op. 1, d. 118, ll. 35-37 (Otchetnyi Doklad: Otdela Gosudarstvennogo Finansovogo Kontrol'ia pri Kharkomfinne Kazakhskoi Respubliki o rezultatakh revizii raskhotov na bor'bu s detskoii besprizornostyu v 1927-1928 biudzhetynym godu").

³⁴³ TsGARK, f. 509, op. 1, d. 122, l. 35 (Obiasnital'naia Zapiska: K trekhletnemu planu po bor'be s detskoii besprizornost'iu po linii okhrany Matmlada).

³⁴⁴ TsGARK, f. 509, op. 1, d. 118, ll. 31-34 (Protokol: Plenuma Tsentral'noi Detskoii Komissii, November 24, 1928).

³⁴⁵ TsGARK, f. 509, op. 1, d. 119, l. 68 (Tsirkuliarno: Tsentral'nym Iсполnitel'nym Komitetam Avtonomnykh Respublik, Kraevym, Oblastnym i Gubernskim Ispolitel'nym Komitetam).

³⁴⁶ TsGARK, f. 509, op. 1, d. 135, l. 4 (ob) (Vyvody i Predlozheniia o Sostoianii Bor'by s Detskoii Bezprizornost'yu v Kazrespublike i o rabote Detkomissii).

teenagers exploited the situation and moved wherever they wanted, and did not return.³⁴⁷ In the summer of 1928, detdoms were transferred to camps in which children stayed in traditional *yurts* that were unsuitable for living. Children could not find shelter from rain either day or night. Besides, they were not provided enough food. Children starved and tried to find their own food by fishing, collecting berries and so on. The experiment was a total failure and children had no political education in the camps.³⁴⁸

One of the problems for the Soviet authorities was children who had parents or relatives but escaped to the streets because of their parents' neglect. This was also common among rural Kazakhs.³⁴⁹ Another problem was that Society of Children's Friends (Obshestvo Drug Detei/ODD) did not play a significant role in Kazakhstan. Particularly in the rural areas it was absent.³⁵⁰ It was claimed that ODD only functioned in the city of Almaty.³⁵¹ ODD was found in Kazakhstan in 1924, however, it practically did not function in provincial areas.³⁵² According to Mendeshev, former chairman of Kazakh Sovnarkom and the head of the extraordinary commission to combat famine,

³⁴⁷ TsGARK, f. 509, op. 1, d. 119, l. 73 (From Tuturov, Deputy Head of Central Children's Commission, to All Children's Commissions, August 22, 1928).

³⁴⁸ TsGARK, f. 509, op. 1, d. 118, ll. 41-45 (Otchetnyi Doklad: Otdela Gosudarstvennogo Dinansovogo Kontrol'ia pri Kharkomfinne Kazakhskoi Respubliki o rezultatakh revizii raskhotov na bor'bu s detskoii besprizornostyu v 1927-1928 biudzhetnym godu).

³⁴⁹ TsGARK, f. 509, op. 1, d. 118, ll. 12-13 (From Narkomyust to all regional prosecutors, February 7, 1928). For another example that puts the blame on parents see: TsGARK, f. 509, op. 1, d. 119, ll. 4-5.

³⁵⁰ TsGARK, f. 509, op.1, d. 118, l. 64 (Vyvody i Predlozheniia: O sostaianii bor'by s detskoii bezprizornost'iu v Kazrespublike i o rabote Detkomissii, December 15, 1928).

ODD was formed on the initiative of Children's Commission in Moscow and Kharkiv in 1923 to aid abandoned children. It soon grew into a nationwide network of cells and the official membership reached one million by October 1926. In some parts of the Soviet Union, ODD turned into a mass organization and it was engaged in struggle to end child homelessness. For more on ODD, see, Ball, *And Now My Soul I Hardened*, 143-144.

³⁵¹ TsGARK, f. 509, op. 1, d. 136, l. 10 (Po otchetnomu dokladu Tsentral'nogo Soveta ODD).

³⁵² APRK, f. 141, op. 1, d. 2254, ll. 2930 (Protokol No 2: Zasedaniia Komissii Kraikoma VKP/b/ po proverke deiatel'nosti sostava dobrovol'nykh obshestv).

Sügirialimova mistakenly claims that ODD was founded in Kazakhstan in 1927. Sügirialimova, "Qazaqstandaghy panasyz balalar," 28.

ODD could not function in Kazakhstan, because they had no Kazakh members; having members among the indigenous population was essential.³⁵³

Yet, despite all these deficiencies, the conditions significantly improved in some detdoms towards the end of the 1920s. One report from Eastern Kazakhstan in 1932 claimed that bezprizornost' started during the Civil War, however, the period from 1923 to 1929 witnessed the decrease of the number of besprizorniks. It was only in 1930 and especially 1931 that bezprizornost grew immensely.³⁵⁴ The Uzbek detdom in Sayram was one of the model institutions in these years. Material conditions, food, school education, discipline and relations among children were all praised by the authorities.³⁵⁵ In addition, before the famine, life on the streets was considerably less difficult for children. Unlike street children in Russia, we have few descriptions of homeless children in Kazakhstan. In one of such rare descriptions, the famous author Il'ias Esenberlin's (born in 1915) life on the streets is even romanticized to a degree by his biographer. Il'ias was orphaned at the age of 8 and started to live under a bridge in Atbasar: "Joyful and happy, they ran after each other, in the evenings sat friendly around the fire, told scary stories and legends that they either heard from someone else or invented themselves. Sometimes they went to the city, went on a visit to relatives and acquaintances, they were often given some food or cloths. ... In the summer, their life was a pleasure near the river with the abundance of fish and birds flying around; but [all changed] with the start of first cold days, and after

³⁵³ TsGARK, f. 100, op. 1, d. 9, ll. 61-67 (Protokol No 1: Kazakskogo Kraevogo s'ezda O-va 'Drug Detei' 16-go Yanvar 1931 goda / go. Alma-Ata).

³⁵⁴ TsGARK, f. 509, op. 1, d. 178, l. 71 (Dokladnaia Zapiska o deiatel'nosti V. K. Oblastnoi Detskoi Komissii Po sostoianiiu na 28 iyulia 1932 goda).

³⁵⁵ TsGARK f. 509, op. 1, d. 136, ll. 67-69 (Sostoianie Detdomov).

the heavy winter hit them hard”.³⁵⁶ It is obvious that the author dramatizes the prospective novelist’s life on the streets, but still it shows how different street life was back in the first half of the 1920s in comparison to children’s experiences in the 1930s. Yet, despite all the niceties of street life, some of Ilīyas’ friends died in the winter, and Ilīyas was taken to Atbasar detdom in 1924. At first, he was afraid in the detdom, but the description of life in the detdom in those years was again not comparable in any sense to the 1930s.

“Hammer and Sickle, Death and Hunger”³⁵⁷: Catastrophe Hits

“The kid’s tiny helpless hands
Find a half-rotten spikelet.
A thin and trembling
Sickly kid’s voice is heard.
What is their fault? Why do they suffer so much?
Here in their motherland.
Oh, these tiny fingers and hands.
A sick girl is lying under the haystack.
Ribs showing through skin and sticking out shoulder blades
Kids’ bloated stomachs...
Tat’iana Nevadovskaia, March 1933³⁵⁸

We have literally a few diaries from early Soviet era Kazakhstan and a handful of foreign witnesses of the Kazakh famine. Nevadovskaia, quoted above, provided the strongest account of the famine written by a non-Kazakh. However, not all witnesses were as sensitive as this nineteen-year old Russian girl towards the enormous suffering of Kazakhs. The exiled SR, Vera Vladimirovna Rikhter, does not totally ignore the famine in her travelogue. However, she focuses on her own experiences and rarely describes

³⁵⁶ Asan Nomad, *Po Reke Zhizni* (Almaty: Izdatel’skii Dom “Kochevniki”, 2004), 127.

³⁵⁷ “Serp i molot / Smert’ i golod” was a widely used proverb in the early 1930s. Mikhailov, *Khronika Velikogo Dzhuta*, 323.

³⁵⁸ From Nevadovskaia’s unpublished diary. Available on https://adebiportal.kz/ru/news/view/tatyana_nevadovskaya_kto_smert_i_nishchetu_poslal_suda_kazhastans_kaya_tragediya_18862.

Kazakhs' suffering in the few pages that she devotes to the famine. We learn that she and her fellow exiles were not starving, but they were afraid of starving Kazakhs around them.³⁵⁹ The Swiss adventurer Ella Maillart described begging children and miserable Kazakh refugees at a train station, but she was not aware of the full extent of the tragedy.³⁶⁰ Kamil Ikramov, son of Uzbekistan's party secretary, witnessed the dead bodies in every train station he traveled through. He described crying and begging children and children's bodies strewn on the floors of train stations.³⁶¹ Although we have few foreign witnesses of the Kazakh famine, begging and starving children created the most horrible scenes for these witnesses.

In fact, famine spread to Kazakhstan a year earlier than Western parts of the Soviet Union. Hunger was already widespread among Kazakhs in the autumn of 1931.³⁶² The Kazakh famine endured for three years, from the fall of 1930 through the fall of 1933 that distinguished it from other collectivization famines. Crackdown on the nomadic Kazakh society had begun as early as August 1928, when the Soviet state started the campaign against *bays*.³⁶³ Kindler argues that indeed catastrophe in Kazakhstan was not sudden. A significant increase in malnourishment was recorded in the winter of 1929-1930, when the first deaths from starvation were reported. In June 1930, an estimated

³⁵⁹ "Zhizn' Tsentral'nogo Kazakhstana Glazami Ssyl'nogo Esera V. N. Rikhtera i Ego Rodstvennikov, 1930-1932 gg." in E. M. Gribanova and A. N. Ilmagambetova eds., *Istoriia Kazakhstan XX Veka v Dokumentakh – Sbornik* (Almaty: Arkhiv Prezidenta Respubliki Kazakhstan, 2005), 37-62.

³⁶⁰ Cited in Kindler, *Stalin's Nomads*, 172.

³⁶¹ Cited in Mikhailov, *Khronika Velikogo Dzhuta*, 341.

³⁶² Pianciola, "Famine in the Steppe," 167.

³⁶³ Attack on the *bays* (*debaiziation*) was celebrated as "the little October" of Kazakhstan. For *debaiziation*, see, Isabelle Ohayon, "Loyalty, solidarity and duplicity: lineages during the repression campaign against the rural elite in Kazakhstan, 1928," in *Loyalties and Solidarities in Russian Society, History and Culture*, eds. Philip Ross Bullock, Andy Byford and Claudio Nun-Ingerflom (London: UCL-SSEES, 2013).

100.000 people were starving in the northern regions and in 1932 everything collapsed.³⁶⁴ The main cause of this collapse was the livestock requisitions carried on in 1930 and 1931, but Pianciola suggests that grain requisition was also hugely important.³⁶⁵ These requisition drives quickly destroyed the very foundation of nomadic life in the Kazakh steppe. Without their animal flocks, Kazakh nomads simply could not survive on the steppe.³⁶⁶

Sedentarization of Kazakhs had four goals: freeing land for grain cultivation, recruitment of the nomads in collective farms, creating a work force for agriculture and industry and ending incompatibilities between nomads and peasants.³⁶⁷ The Soviet regime had decided that Kazakhstan was to become a provider of meat and animal products for the whole Union, and this could not be achieved within the nomadic economic system.³⁶⁸ Indeed, the logic of collectivization and sedentarization was not only economic. It was at the same time a measure to control the nomads. Managing nomads was a challenge for the regime; nomadism did not fit into the Soviet regime's logic of standardization and modernization. As late as November 1928, one party official used the phrase "organizational helplessness" to describe the state capabilities in Kazakhstan.³⁶⁹ Hence, the famine was a product of economic and administrative ambitions of what Matthew Payne calls a "visionary" campaign with the goal of imposing order over a

³⁶⁴ Kindler, *Stalin's Nomads*, 159-162.

³⁶⁵ Pianciola, "Famine in the Steppe," 161.

³⁶⁶ Kindler, *Stalin's Nomads*, 10.

³⁶⁷ Pianciola, "Famine in the Steppe", 155.

³⁶⁸ Kindler, *Stalin's Nomads*, 41.

³⁶⁹ Alun Thomas, "Kazakh Nomads and the New Soviet State, 1919-1934," (PhD diss., The University of Sheffield, 2015), 167-168. For a discussion of organizational helplessness in Soviet Central Asia, see, Botakoz Kassymbekova, "Helpless Imperialists. European State Workers in Soviet Central Asia in the 1920s and 1930s," *Central Asian Survey* 30, no. 1 (2011).

disorderly social structure.³⁷⁰ However, this visionary campaign was not easy to practice, therefore, throughout the famine years, Soviet regime's control over Kazakhstan was very similar to an occupation regime.³⁷¹ We now know that Stalin was well-aware of the catastrophe as early as the spring of 1930. In fact, Moscow single-mindedly pursued grain procurements despite the repeated warnings from the officials in Kazakhstan; Kazakhs' suffering did not really matter for the central authorities.³⁷²

Turar Rysqulov's letter to Stalin written in March 1933 is one of the most famous documents about the Kazakh famine. In this letter, Rysqulov provides an accurate account of the famine. He wrote that there was a significant death rate, particularly among children. Many otkochevniks were leaving their children "to the mercy of fate". He reported that in one detdom in Semey (Semipalatinsk), inspectors found 20 child corpses in the basement. Abandoned children were found in city centers, train stations and in front of government institutions. One report from Torghay stated that children were living under the most terrible conditions and every single abandoned child younger than 4-years old had perished. That is why detdoms hosted only children older than 4-years old. On average, a few children were dying daily in a detdom of 100-150 children. The catastrophe was so great that children faced total extinction.³⁷³

³⁷⁰ Matthew J. Payne, "Seeing Like a Soviet State: Settlement of Nomadic Kazakhs, 1928-1934" in *Writing the Stalin Era: Sheila Fitzpatrick and Soviet Historiography* eds. Golfo Alexopoulos, Julie Hessler and Kiril Tomoff (London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2011), 60.

³⁷¹ Niccolo Pianciola, "The OGPU, Islam and Qazaq 'Clans' in Sudak, 1930" in Pianciola and Sartori eds., *Islam, Society and States across the Qazaq Steppe*, 311.

³⁷² Cameron, *The Hungry Steppe*, 110.

³⁷³ Document No 41: "Pis'mo Predsedatelia Sovnarkoma RSFSR T. R. Rysqulova v TsK VKP (b) tov. Stalinu, s. kh. Otdel TsK VKP (b) t. Kaganovichu, SNK tov. Molotovu", March 9, 1933 in *Qazaq Khalqynyñ Qasireti*, 249-250.



Image 7: Children's graves in the Kazakh cemetery near the Muyanda resort, Pavlodar (1931)³⁷⁴

Little children perished in great numbers during the famine, but we do not have reliable statistics for the number of child deaths. It is speculated by scholars that 72% of all infants, and 60% of all children below seven perished during the famine.³⁷⁵ As early as 1929, a sharp increase in infant mortality rate was reported in the city of Almaty. In 1928, 244 infants died (14.7%) while in 1929 the number was 459 (25.3%).³⁷⁶ When the catastrophe hit, the infant mortality rate reached unbelievable rates. In 1932, it was 90% in one maternity ward in Almaty and 78% in Semey (decreased to 30% in August).³⁷⁷ In Southern Kazakhstan, 66 out of 100 infants died in January-February 1933; in March,

³⁷⁴ TsGAKFDZRK, 5-4383 (D. P. Bagayev's personal file).

We do not know if these are graves of children who perished during the famine. However, this image is reproduced in studies about the famine.

³⁷⁵ Qystaūbaev and Khabdīna eds., *Qyzyldar Qyrghyny*, 73. Sources for this kind of data are not clear, but similar statistics circulate in various publications. According to another source, 2/3 of infants, and half of school children perished in 1932-1933. Cited in Sügiralimova, "Qazaqstandaghy Panasyz Balalar," 65. According to an early authoritative study, the number of Kazakhs who died during the famine either from starvation or diseases is 1.750.000. Zh. Abylkozhin, M. Kozybaev and M. B. Tatimov, "Kazakhstanskaia tragediia," *Voprosy Istorii* 7 (1989): 67.

³⁷⁶ TsGARK, f. 509, op. 1, d. 141, l. 2.

³⁷⁷ TsGARK, f. 509, op. 1, d. 199, l. 26 (Proekt Rezolitsiis po Dokladu Narkomzdrav o Meropriiatiakh po Bor'be s Detskoii Besprizornost'iu).

infant mortality rate was 47%.³⁷⁸ In 1932, one doctor in Northern Kazakhstan reported that all children up to 2-3 years perished. During the winter, all children died in some villages.³⁷⁹ Lack of children in sight was striking. Edige Magauin’s grandfather graduated from a teacher’s college in 1932 and was sent to work in a village. However, he could not find one single pupil there, because all the children in the village had already died.³⁸⁰

Not all deaths were due to actual starvation. Famine-related diseases took as many lives. During famines a considerable portion of the deaths occur due to diseases, however, it is usually impossible to differentiate deaths caused by actual starvation from deaths caused by diseases. Shayakhmetov remembers the smallpox epidemic in winter 1932. Seven families in their community lost eight infants in total. He also lost three of his friends aged between 10 and 11, who only a short time ago had been playing with him.³⁸¹ Dysentery was another common epidemic during the famine that took thousands of children’s lives.³⁸² The situation was terrible in detdoms too. In Ayagöz region in 1933, up to 90% of 600 children were sick. Scurvy was the most common disease.³⁸³ The following is a table of the causes of death at a children’s hospital in Shymkent in August 1933:

Table 3³⁸⁴: The causes of death at a children’s hospital Shymkent in August 1933

Exhaustion with diarrhea	59
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³⁷⁸ TsGARK, f. 509, op. 1, d. 216, l. 273 (Stenogramma: Vechernogo Zasedaniia Kraevogo Soveshaniia Oblastnii Otveta, February 27, 1934).

³⁷⁹ Sergei Baymukhametov, “Wall Street Journal: samye strashnye poteri ot goloda pones Kazakhstan”, <https://newizv.ru/>, November 18, 2018, [accessed on April 22, 2019].

³⁸⁰ Edige Magauin, “Tragediia, kotoruiu Kazakhstan ne dolzhen zabyt,” <https://rus.azattyq.org/>, December 9, 2008, [accessed on April 22, 2019].

³⁸¹ Shayakhmetov, *The Silent Steppe*, 109-110.

³⁸² TsGARK, f. 509, op. 1, d. 178, ll. 28-29 (Report by OGPU representative Rachinokii, July 6, 1932).

³⁸³ TsGARK, f. 509, op. 1, d. 225, l. 136.

³⁸⁴ TsGARK, f. 509, op. 1, d. 209, l. 25.

Exhaustion with edema	32
Pellagra	4
Depletion of syphilis	3
Gangrene	6
Scurvy	2
Whooping cough	2
Chronical hunger	106
Total	216

The sight of a starving child was horrifying. Having examined the detdoms, Savchenko could not sleep for two nights, because children's skeletons haunted him, and his hands were shaking.³⁸⁵ Shayakhmetov provides one of the most vivid descriptions of starving children: "Starving children develop potbellies and wrinkled faces and looking increasingly like old dwarves on spindly little legs; eventually they grow so weak that they can no longer walk, and have to remain lying down all the time. It is terrible watching a baby who is too exhausted to cry anymore and makes strange little sounds instead; it is terrible watching his suffering before he dies, and the despair of his mother, helpless to do anything to save him".³⁸⁶ In the winter of 1933, Kempirbaev entered a detdom in Almaty oblast. He recalls how he saw starving children who were only ribs and skin and whose eyes waned. In the mornings, mentors opened children's eyes, took their pulse and checked if they were alive. Children were waking up near cold corpses of

³⁸⁵ Quoted in Sarah Isabel Cameron, "The Hungry Steppe: Soviet Kazakhstan and the Kazakh Famine, 1921-1934," (PhD diss., Yale University, 2010), 281.

³⁸⁶ Shayakhmetov, *The Silent Steppe*, 188-189.

other pupils.³⁸⁷ During the famine, the famous writer Anūar Älimzhanov's father saw a raven around a little child who was starving. The boy wanted to get rid of the raven, yet he was too exhausted. Älimzhanov's father repelled the raven and then saw the terrible scene: the boy's back had such wounds that his bones were visible and blood was congealed. The boy did not feel any pain. The father took him to the cart, but he was already dead.³⁸⁸

The number of abandoned children skyrocketed. According to one of the widely republished inspection reports from Pavlodar in 1932, “[H]ungry, half-frozen children are abandoned at [state] institutions. Detdoms are crowded and do not accept them. In the city, one everyday meets dozens of abandoned, frozen, emaciated, starving children of all ages. Their usual answer is “father is dead, mother is dead, no home, no bread” ... Other citizens pick up those children and naturally guide them to the police, but the latter does not accept them, just kicking them back to the street”.³⁸⁹

As of September 1, 1932, the official number of the abandoned children reached as high as 43.761. Among them 3.816 were sent to kolkhozes, and 7712 were not hosted by any institutions. In addition, there were also children sent to other republics or oblasts such as the Kyrgyz Republic, the Middle Volga, and Western Siberia.³⁹⁰ As of January 1, 1934, the number reached the catastrophic 96.483. The majority of them were in the detdoms run by Narkompros, and a small number were under the control of

³⁸⁷ K. Kempirbaev, “Georgievka selosy,” in T. E. Tölebaev and G. E. Sabdenova eds., *32-niñ zulmaty*, 156-157.

³⁸⁸ Anūar Älimzhanov, “Äkemnen Estigenderim,” in Zhüsip ed., *Asharshylyq Aqıqaty*, 119-120.

³⁸⁹ “Zaiavlenie politicheskikh ssyl'nykh V. A. Iogansena, Iu. N. Podbel'skogo, O. V. Selikhovoi, P. A. Semenin-Tkachenko, A. F. Flegontova v Prezidium Tsentral'nogo Iсполnitel'nogo Komiteta SSSR”, February 1, 1932, in Talas Omarbekov ed., *Golodomor v Kazakhstane: Prichiny, Masshtaby I Itogi (1930-1933 gg.) Khrestomatiia* (Almaty: Qazaq Universiteti, 2011), 99.

³⁹⁰ TsGARK, f. 509, op. 1, d. 163, ll. 3-5 (O Sostoianii Detskoi Bezprizornosti v Kazakstane v 1932 godu).

Narkomzdrav. The rest were either sent to schools and collective farms or returned to parents.³⁹¹ These numbers are most probably underestimated when we consider that officials were usually unaware of what was going on in the regions. In addition, the numbers obviously do not cover tens of thousands of children who lost their lives throughout this process, the children who escaped or were sent to other regions, and possibly additional thousands of street children who were not recorded. The majority of the abandoned children were Kazakhs and in proportion to the surviving Kazakh population, these children constituted a considerable proportion of the society.



Image 8: One of the consequences of famine – child homelessness (undated)³⁹²

Particularly in the winter and spring of 1932, there was an inflow of besprizorniks from rural areas to cities.³⁹³ Karaganda and Eastern Kazakhstan oblasts were hit most severely. In Karaganda there were nine thousand besprizorniks in September 1932

³⁹¹ 62202 children were in Narkompros detdoms, and 8847 children were reportedly returned to their parents. APRK, f. 141, op. 1, d. 7692, l. 2 (Otchetnyi Doklad: O Sostoianii Detskoi Besprizornosti po KASSR).

³⁹² Photo is taken from the archive of The Presidential Center of Culture of the Republic of Kazakhstan, <https://yvision.kz/post/251359>.

³⁹³ TsGARK, f. 509, op. 1, d. 165, ll. 94-94 (Letter from Vice Chairman of KazIsполkom Dzhangeldin to the Central Children's Commission).

according to official statistics. Yet, this was only the number hosted in detdoms. The number of besprizorniks were increasing steadily, and with the fear of the example of the previous year, people were leaving their children even in cases when they could actually feed them.³⁹⁴ As of December 1, 1932, the number of besprizorniks in Karaganda oblast was 12674 and it was clear that great majority were Kazakhs.³⁹⁵ The city of Semey in Eastern Kazakhstan was a popular destination for homeless children from other regions, because it was on the intersection of rail and water roads.³⁹⁶ There were up to 10 thousand besprizorniks in Eastern Kazakhstan in the summer of 1932 and many more thousands were on the streets.³⁹⁷

In fact, one newspaper (possibly a local one) admitted the besprizornik crises in 1931. The author wrote that it was not a lie that they were witnessing waves of homeless children on the roads of Aqmola, Borabay and Karaganda.³⁹⁸ The text was mainly criticizing detdoms, schools and local authorities (and in this respect many more were to be published in the coming years), yet, it was still exceptional, because nobody admitted the catastrophe publicly. Behind closed doors though, Levon Mirzoyan, the newly appointed head of Kazakhstan, admitted in a letter to Stalin that besprizornost was one of the alarming problems that Kazakh Republic faced. Kazakhs were abandoning their

³⁹⁴ Document No 65: “Dokladnaia zapiska v SNK KazASSR ob ustroistve vozvrativshikhsia bezhentsev v Karagandinskoi oblasti”, September 3, 1932, in M. K. Kozybaev ed., *Nasil'stvennaia Kollektivizatsia i Golod v Kazakhstane, 1931-1933 gg. - Sbornik Dokumentov i Materialov* (Almaty, 1998), 175.

³⁹⁵ TsGARK, f. 509, op. 1, d. 182, l. 7 (Dokladnaia Zapiska: O Sostoianii Bezprizornosti po Karagandinskoi Oblasti, po sostoianiiu na 1-2 dekabria 1932 g).

³⁹⁶ TsGARK, f. 509, op. 1, d. 148, ll. 2-6 (Semraidetkomissii o provedenii mesyachnika po bor'be s besprizornost'iu i beznadzornost'iu v Sem. Raione v 1931 g. i raboty Semdetkomissi za 30/31 god).

³⁹⁷ TsGARK, f. 509, op. 1, d. 178, l. 71 (Dokladnaia Zapiska o deiatel'nosti V. K. Oblastnoi Detskoi Komissii Po sostoianiiu na 28 iyulia 1932 goda).

³⁹⁸ Dūisembekuly, “Panasyzdyqty zhoyū aylyghyna zhurytshylyq tūgel qatyssyn”. Unfortunately, neither the date, nor the newspaper's name can be identified. A copy is found in TsGARK, f. 509, op. 1, d. 146, l. 149.

children in cities, train stations and regional centers. Mirzoyan declared that, as of March 29, 1933, 57000 homeless children had been picked up and placed in detdoms. Yet, the influx of street children had not stopped; it was even increasing in some regions such as Almaty and Southern Kazakhstan oblasts. He listed a series of measures they were taking to fight besprizornost.³⁹⁹ However, despite measures taken by the authorities, orphans were at the bottom of the hierarchy of food rationing system.⁴⁰⁰

We have only few descriptions of children on the street.⁴⁰¹ According to one report from July 1933, there were 1500 street children in the city of Almaty whereas the detdoms hosted 2800 abandoned children. These children lived on the streets, train station, markets, canteens, and breweries of the city. They formed gangs for theft, hooliganism, and bootlegging; worked as singers and storytellers, and got drunk frequently. They had ties with the adult criminal world, and according to the inspector, they themselves were turning into criminals. Particularly, children who were sent to detdoms outside of the city of Almaty (such as to Talghar and Qaskeleñ) escaped from these institutions regularly in order to return to Almaty. Hooligan “children” (some of them were older than 18) terrorized detdoms too.⁴⁰²

³⁹⁹ “Pis’mo Sekretaria Kazkraikoma VKP (b) v TsK VKP (b) tov. Stalinu, SNK tov. Molotovu”, March 29, 1933, in *Qazaq Khalqynyñ Qasireti*, 284-287.

⁴⁰⁰ Kindler, *Stalin’s Nomads*, 167.

⁴⁰¹ For the 1920s, sources are particularly rich for street children. Alan Ball utilizes numerous descriptions of the lives of children on the street by a broad array of witnesses including prominent public figures. For the detailed descriptions of street children see Chapter 1: “Children of the Street”, Chapter 2: “Beggars, Peddlers, and Prostitutes”, and Chapter 3: “From You I Can Expect No Pity” in his book. Ball, *And Now My Soul is Hardened*.

⁴⁰² TsGARK, f. 509, op. 1, d. 163, ll. 132-133 (Dokladnaia Zapiska: Alma-Atinskogo Gorodskogo Soveta po Borbe s Detskoï Bezprizornost’iu).

Children of Otkochevniki

The famine did not only take hundreds of thousands of lives, but also created waves of Kazakhs trying to escape their ultimate fates in a desperate hope to find some food. These refugee nomads would be known as *otkochevniki*, a term that include both those internally displaced within Kazakhstan, as well as those who took refuge in the neighboring republics and those who fled the Soviet borders. From the beginning of 1931 to the end of 1933, the problem of otkochevniki created a crisis both in Kazakhstan and in the neighboring regions. Hundreds of thousands of starving Kazakhs flooded Kyrgyzstan, Uzbekistan, Western Siberia, Chinese Turkestan and in some cases even as far as Kamchatka.⁴⁰³ There were also children sent by the authorities to other regions.⁴⁰⁴ Starting from October 1931, there were hundreds of reports about Kazakh refugees fleeing in every direction.⁴⁰⁵ A commission in 1934 calculated that 286.000 families (over a million people) had left Kazakhstan between 1930 and 1931, 78.000 in 1932 and 31.000 in 1933. In the following years up until 1936, 400.000 people returned or forcefully brought back to Kazakhstan.⁴⁰⁶

⁴⁰³ No study covers Kazakhs in regions as far as Kamchatka. However, one famine testimony claims that around a hundred Kazakh families took refuge in Kamchatka. These families were later relocated to Tomsk. Khalel Arghynbaev, "Bayanaüyldan Kamchatqagha Deyin," *Tūghan ölke* 2, no. 9 (2007).

⁴⁰⁴ TsGARK, f. 509, op. 1, d. 163, ll. 3-5 (O Sostoianii Detskoi Bezprizornosti v Kazakstane v 1932 godu).

⁴⁰⁵ Pianciola, "Famine in the Steppe", 165. See also N. N. Ablazhei, *S Vostok na Vostok: Rossiiskaia Emigratsiia v Kitae* (Novosibirsk: Izd-vo SO RAN, 2007), 32-45.

⁴⁰⁶ Pianciola asserts that this commission's data was more or less reliable. Pianciola, "Famine in the Steppe," 170-171.



Image 9: Otkochevniks, Pavlodar oblast (1930)⁴⁰⁷

Although there was considerable ethnic hatred towards refugee Kazakhs,⁴⁰⁸ at least in some cases escaping Kazakhstan provided some Kazakh children a chance of survival although thousands of them either perished on the roads to their destinations or on the lands that they arrived. Hundreds of thousands of otkochevniks created a miserable image across the Soviet Union, particularly in Siberia where most fled, and fed interethnic conflict. Bazaars and train stations were full of abandoned Kazakh children. Authorities in Western Siberia were collecting Kazakh children from the stations, but it was impossible to host all of them in detdoms.⁴⁰⁹ Everyday more and more half-frozen Kazakh women were asking help from authorities, some with their children's dead bodies in their arms.⁴¹⁰ Conditions in Siberian detdoms were far from being satisfactory,

⁴⁰⁷ TsGAKFDZRK, 5-3619 (D. P. Bagayev's personal file, "Otkochevka v gorod posle dzhuta").

⁴⁰⁸ See particularly Chapter 4 in M. P. Malysheva and V. S. Poznanskii, *Kazakhi-Bezhenstsy ot Goloda v Zapadnoi Sibiri (1931-1934 g.g.)* (Almaty: Ghylym, 1999).

⁴⁰⁹ *Ibid.*, 467-468.

⁴¹⁰ Kindler, *Stalin's Nomads*, 153

In May 1932, 2301 of 12925 children at detdoms in Western Siberia were Kazakhs. By January 1, 1931, the number of Kazakh children at schools reached to 8108 and by January 1, 1934 to 13181. Malysheva and Poznanskii, *Kazakhi-Bezhenstsy ot Goloda*, 478-483.

however, unlike detdoms in Kazakhstan, children were not dying every day. When authorities in Slavgorod wanted to send Kazakh children back in 1933, they received a reply from Pavlodar and Semey that children were starving in Kazakhstan's detdoms.⁴¹¹

According to the report of the secretary of Western Siberia Krai, Zaitsev, only in the Slavgorod raion (neighboring Kazakhstan) there were 10 thousand Kazakhs. They were spending the night on the street, and most of them were diseased and literally starving. The police were everyday collecting corpses of Kazakhs from the streets.⁴¹² Kazakhs were begging, breaking into houses and asking for food, and if there was no male at home, they took whatever they could find. A group of Kazakhs were organized to steal horses. The report stresses the hatred between refugee Kazakhs and local Russians. In Aleiskii raion, drunk Russians beat Kazakhs, in Baeiskii raion, villagers savagely beat Kazakhs who stole bread.⁴¹³

The most brutal offenses against Kazakhs occurred when there were rumors about Kazakhs harassing Russian women and children. So much so that the Baranaul prosecutor had to publish a proclamation that the rumors about Kazakhs killing Russians were false.⁴¹⁴ It is necessary to note that the party usually condemned anti-Kazakh sentiments as "great Russian chauvinism". However, local officials described Russians as

⁴¹¹ Ibid., 475.

⁴¹² APRK, f. 141, op. 1, d. 5192, l. 21 (Letter to the Secretary of Kazakh Regional Committee).

⁴¹³ "Dokladnaia zapiska kraevogo prokurora Sibiri sekretariu Zapsibkraikoma VKP (b) P. I. Eikhe 'O stikhnom pereselenii v predely Zapadno-Sibirskogo kraya kazakhov iz KazASSR i o polozhenii pereselivshikhsia v krae'" (March 29, 1932), published in Kozybaev, *Nasil'stvennaia Kollektivizatsia*, 126-128.

Kazakhs were openly discriminated against at factories. One of the rare voices from ordinary Kazakhs expressed this in a complaint letter: "Some companies only hire unmarried men and those who do not have a family. [...] Because of these conditions of life, many Kazakhs abandon their families, leaving them with nothing." Quoted in Pianciola, "Famine in the Steppe," 172

⁴¹⁴ "Dokladnaia zapiska kraevogo prokurora Sibiri sekretariu Zapsibkraikoma," 129.

the heroic defenders of those who were threatened by the cannibal appetite of the savage Kazakhs.⁴¹⁵ One Kazakh was walking home when a group of children started teasing and throwing rocks at him. As a joke, the Kazakh threatened the children that he was going to catch them with a rope he was holding. A Russian woman heard that, and started screaming, and subsequently Russian men came and beat the Kazakh. One Kazakh went into a workers' barrack to ask for bread. Inside there was only an 11-year old girl who was nursing a five-months infant (probably her sister). When the girl saw the Kazakh, she screamed. A neighbor heard the scream and ran into house. He thought the Kazakh was trying to kidnap the child and knocked the Kazakh down. When the police came, one "class enemy" among the crowd was shouting: "The Kirgiz stole the girl and strangled her. He must be shot, not tried".⁴¹⁶

In another report from March 1933, it is even clearer that local Russians made sense of the Kazakh refugee problem through images of children. Rumors were circulated (allegedly by "class enemies") that Kazakhs were kidnapping and eating Russian children. There were cases when Russians reported to local police about Russian children being eaten by Kazakhs. Consequently, based on these rumors Kazakhs were repelled and beaten in Kemerovo raion. Russian workers were reported to shout "Kazakhs must be killed" while beating them. In the village of Nikolaev, when a Kazakh beggar approached to a house, a woman ran away shouting "you want to eat my child!". Following that, people gathered and beat the Kazakh and after he was taken to a police station, he died. In another case, in Alekseevskii raion, two Kazakhs asked for mercy from the locals, but

⁴¹⁵ Malysheva and Poznanskii, *Kazakhi-Bezidentsy ot Goloda*, 321.

⁴¹⁶ *Ibid.*, 321-322.

when a four-year old child saw them, he started to cry. His mother called the neighbors and they beat the Kazakhs. One of the Kazakhs died, and the second one was imprisoned. Kazakhs were beaten not only in Siberia. In Trankova-Cherkasskom raion of Middle Volga, local population beat four Kazakhs and they died in a few days.⁴¹⁷ There were up to 50 thousand Kazakhs in Middle Volga region in the famine years. Many of them were begging at bazaars and stations. Their situation became harsher due to “great power chauvinism.”⁴¹⁸

The masses of otkochevniks streamed into Kyrgyzstan later than elsewhere.⁴¹⁹ Mass arrival happened in the second half of November 1932. In the city of Frunze (present-day Bishkek), there were around a thousand yurts, and on average, there were 8 people per yurt.⁴²⁰ Even though the numbers that they provide are contradictory, Elkeev and Aldazhumanov discuss soup kitchens founded for Kazakh children in Kyrgyzstan and they reproduce the benevolent self-image of Kyrgyz authorities.⁴²¹ Kyrgyz officials portrayed themselves as generous caregivers while blaming Kazakh refugees and Kazakh authorities for any problem.⁴²² They emphasized the increasing level of crime among Kazakh refugees. The situation was difficult especially in city bazaars where “Kazakhs

⁴¹⁷ TsGARK, f. 30, op. 2, d. 1132a, l. 40 (Letter to Qulymbetov from Moldaghaliev, Orenburg, February 24, 1934).

⁴¹⁸ Document No 51: “Iz pis'ma S. Mendesheva sekretariu Kazkraikoma VKP (b) F. I. Goloshchekin, predsedateliu Sovnarkoma U. I. Isaevu”, March 26, 1932, in Kozybaev ed., *Nasil'stvennaia Kollektivizatsia*, 122-124

Cameron notes that refugee Kazakhs were treated in the same way by non-refugee Kazakhs too. Hence, she questions the claim that violence was provoked by purely anti-Kazakh prejudices. Cameron, “The Hungry Steppe”, 273.

⁴¹⁹ Pianciola, “Famine in the Steppe,” 171.

⁴²⁰ Document No 88: “Dokladnaia zapiska rukovodiashikh militsii Kirgizii pomoshniku prokurora Soiuzna SSR Monastyrevu o polozhenii kazakhov-otkochevnikov v Kirgizii (1.10.1933) in Kozybaev ed., *Nasil'stvennaia Kollektivizatsia*, 237-238.

⁴²¹ Baban Elkeev and Qaydar Aldazhumanov, “Bosqyndar,” *Zhuldyz* 9 (1993): 144-146.

⁴²² Kindler, *Stalin's Nomads*, 200.

terrorized with beggary and robbery”. Officials complained that Frunze had turned into a city for mass beggary, among whom were a few thousand children.⁴²³

Yet, the situation was more chaotic than the image of Kyrgyz benevolence. 300 Kazakh children were hosted in Guliaev detdom in Chui raion, but there was nothing else besides flour to feed them. Children were naked and slept on the floor. Smallpox and dysentery were common, and the death rate was five (and on some days even more) children per day. All children were skin and bones.⁴²⁴ With snow having melted in February and March, at the end of Pushkin street in Frunze 53 corpses of Kazakhs were found and the authorities had no idea about the death rate of Kazakhs in the provinces. Children were escaping from detdoms because neither Children’s Commission nor GorONO did anything to help them.⁴²⁵

The road to Kyrgyzstan was not a cheap one. Qamza Alimuly’s father bribed a Russian machinist with gold and silver and that is how the family got on to a freight train to Kyrgyzstan. When they got off from the train in the city of Tokmok, they saw corpses of Kazakhs everywhere. Local people did not care about dead bodies.⁴²⁶ There were even children who took this journey alone. According to one testimony, two cousins, Tilebergen and Zeynep, had lost their parents during the famine. After that, the two

⁴²³ Authorities described how adult Kazakhs used children to play for sympathy. In one instance, one little Kazakh child screamed for a few hours, and finally it was found out that the woman who had borrowed the child from someone else for begging was using a needle to make the child scream. Document No 88: “Dokladnaia zapiska rukovodiashikh militsii Kirgizii”, 238-239.

⁴²⁴ Document No 42: “Iz Dokladnoi Zapiski Zamestiteliu Predsedatel’ia Komissii Ispolneniia pri SNK KazSSR tov. Egorovu ‘O Polozhenii v Chuiskom Raione’ (s Guliaevka, 12 Marta 1933)” in *Qazaq Khalqynyñ Qasireti*.

⁴²⁵ Children frequently escaped, but authorities rarely tried to find them. Only, two times Komsomol and once Epidemic Commission tried to collect them (with the complete absence of GorONO’s participation). Bu July 25, 4000 children were collected to be hosted in 10 detdoms, but only 1000 of them could be fed according to the plan. Document No 88: “Dokladnaia zapiska rukovodiashikh militsii Kirgizii”, 238-240.

⁴²⁶ Qamza Ālimuly’s testimony in *Qazaq Khalqynyñ Qasireti*, 69.

orphans set off to Kyrgyzstan because their parents had lived there before. The male, Tilepbergen, lost his life during the journey whereas Zeynep survived the famine.⁴²⁷ Families did not only fall apart in Kazakhstan or on the road to Kyrgyzstan. In one example, Kazakhstan's second president Qasym-Zhomart Tokayev's father Kemel and uncle Qasym were caught by the police when they were on the road to a bazaar. Even though the children tried to explain that they had parents, the police took them to an orphanage. They would never see their families again.⁴²⁸ This is an example of how carelessly children were taken to detdoms while thousands of orphans were without parents.

On April 19 in 1933, Kazakh otkochevniks from different raions of Kyrgyzstan got together in Frunze near railroads. There were more than 800 of them, and among them were many children and women. On one occasion, 11 of them died of hunger in one day. When asked, people told that they were called there by one Russian and one Kazakh official who had come from the Kazakh SSR to return them to Kazakhstan. They said they were supposed to be sent back to Kazakhstan, because in any case they would die in Kyrgyzstan.⁴²⁹

It seems that these people were tricked by unidentified people, but their words prove their desperate situation. In fact, the Goloshchekin government created a

⁴²⁷ Khusayyn Bizhanov, "Ortaq Qazan," in Qystaūbaev and Khabdīna eds., *Qyzylдар Qyrghyny*, 87.

⁴²⁸ This is only one part of the family tragedy. Here comes the hard to believe part of the story: On exactly the same day, fire broke out at their house. Kemel's sister died and his mother desperately watched it and then she passed away too due to sorrow. Following that, Kemel's father went to look for his sons. Her learned that they were forcibly carried away by someone (he was not aware that they were taken to a detdom). Having experienced so much sorrow in one day, he left his home silently, and nobody saw him again. Tokayev, *Slovo ob otse*, 110-111.

⁴²⁹ Document No: 80 "Soobshenie prokurora transportnogo otdela Turksiba Bezdtko v transportnyi otdel prokuratury Verkhovnogo suda SSSR o skoplenii na stantsii Pishpek golodaiushikh kazakhov", April 27, 1933, in Kozybaev ed., *Nasil'stvennaia Kollektivizatsia*, 223-224.

commission as early as March 1932 to bring back Kazakh otkochevniks from neighboring republics.⁴³⁰ For example, a special commission from Kazakhstan came at the end of December to Kyrgyzstan, and in the second half of February, 1933, they sent 12 wagons full of Kazakh refugees back to Kazakhstan.⁴³¹ There was also a plan to bring Kazakh children back from Kyrgyzstan in early 1933. According to the official numbers there were 2235 Kazakh children in Kyrgyzstan who fled the famine, and the plan was to accommodate 1721 of them in Äülĕ-Ata (contemporary Taraz), Merke and Qorday detdoms.⁴³² We do not know how many of them were collected to bring back, however it is clear that the children's chance of survival was higher on the streets or bazaars of Kyrgyzstan, because the three detdoms, particularly the one in Äülĕ-Ata, were among the worst across Kazakhstan. Äülĕ-Ata comes to the fore in the documents from subsequent months and years with the highest child death rates. Hence despite all the misery in the Kyrgyz Republic, at least in some cases, refugees owed their survival to having fled from Kazakhstan. For instance, Garipa Khamzina recalled in 2012 that five of them survived thanks to her father's younger sister who took them to Kyrgyzstan.⁴³³

The project to bring back Kazakhs was easier said than done. On March 12, 1933, Mirzoyan was telling other republics that the death toll in Kazakhstan was “considerable” and asked them not to send more Kazakhs back to Kazakhstan.⁴³⁴ At the same time, Kyrgyz officials were not only blaming Kazak refugees, but also criticizing Kazakh

⁴³⁰ Ablazhei, *S Vostok na Vostok*, 42.

⁴³¹ Document No 88: “Dokladnaia zapiska rukovodiashikh militsii Kirgizii”, 238.

⁴³² TsGARK, f. 509, op. 1, d. 229 (O Rabote Upolnomochennogo Kazdetkomissii v Kirgizii po Sboru i Pere Otpravke Besprizornyh I Beznadzornyh Kazakskikh Detei Obratno v Kazakstan, za period 22/1 po 21/2 – 33 g.).

⁴³³ Asylkhan Mamashuly, “Golod na dokumenty o Golode 1930-x godov”, <https://rus.azattyq.org/>, December 11, 2012, [accessed on April 27, 2019].

⁴³⁴ Cameron, “The Hungry Steppe”, 213.

authorities. In one case, they collected 500 Kazakh children and took them to Äülĕ-Ata with Kazakhstan's approval (not clear, but probably related to the plan discussed above). However, the Kazakh side did not accept the children, some of the children died, and the surviving ones were brought back to Frunze.⁴³⁵ In addition, the road back to Kazakhstan was a truly challenging one too. Qamza Alimuly lost his father and one of his brothers during the journey home. His mother and sister gave up and stayed in Kyrgyzstan, and Qamza made it back to Kazakhstan with one of his brothers. Finally, this brother passed away too, and little Qamza was left alone in his homeland.⁴³⁶

Depictions of children of refugee Kazakhs present the misery of Kazakh children. Yet, despite the deadly journeys, taking refuge in other republics was a means for survival for at least some of them. It is not possible to generalize about the attitudes of others towards starving Kazakhs both within and outside of Kazakhstan. Descriptions of city dwellers' indifference towards the misery of starving Kazakhs is common, but this category also included urban Kazakhs although there were few of them. Child survivors of the famine both remember cruel and cold-hearted Russians who were beating Kazakh children in bazaars and the ones who helped them survive. Similarly, the residents of neighboring Uzbekistan and Kyrgyzstan are sometimes remembered with outrage, sometimes with gratitude. On one extreme, we have Süleymen Bekenov who expresses his pure hatred towards Uzbeks on almost every page of his memoirs.⁴³⁷ On the other extreme, we have Baghdad Zhandosay, who was adopted by a Russian Cossack family in

⁴³⁵ Elkeev and Aldazhumanov, "Bosqyndar," 147.

⁴³⁶ Qamza Älimuly's testimony, 71.

⁴³⁷ Süleymen Bekenov, *Qazaq Tutqyny* (Almaty: Qazaq entsiklopediyasy, 2007). Bekenov took refuge in Uzbekistan during the famine. His memoirs are by far the most unapologetically chauvinistic Kazakh account used in this dissertation. Yet, his attitude towards Russians is different from his hatred for Uzbeks.

Almaty and who remembers this family with utmost gratitude (he was devastated when the Russian man was arrested in 1934 and he had to leave this family). Despite his firmly anti-communist views, Zhandosay never turns to ethnic hatred and rather promotes Kazakh-Russian friendship.⁴³⁸

Yet, depictions of *otkochevniks* in neighboring republics also show that the problem of interethnic conflict could not be solved by Soviet authorities. The 1920s were a period of widespread ethnic conflict and hostility in Kazakhstan. Various instances of ethnic violence in this decade are well-documented in Terry Martin's study on nationalities question. Yet, in contrast to popular assumptions, ethnic hatred, violence and discrimination was not only directed towards Kazakhs. Under the policy of *korenizatsiia*, Russians were discriminated against by Kazakhs and hatred towards them was at least tolerated by Kazakh cadres, if not directly supported.⁴³⁹ In August 1932, a letter signed by Grigorii Aronshtam was sent from Kazakhstan to Stalin. The author of the letter wrote about a "purely zoological hatred toward the Kazakhs" that led to pogroms and unprovoked murders of Kazakhs. According to a popular "theory" among Russians, Kazakhs lacked the ability for productive activity, so they preferred to do nothing and to die of hunger instead of working.⁴⁴⁰ During the famine, the most severe ethnically motivated hatred and violence against starving Kazakhs emerged in Western Siberia and this violence shares much with the explosions of ethnic conflicts of the 1920s between

⁴³⁸ Baghdad Zhandosay, *Shoshqanyñ Qumy* (Almaty: Zhas Alash, 1999), 99-103.

⁴³⁹ Martin, *The Affirmative Action Empire*, 61-66; 147-150, 161.

⁴⁴⁰ RGASPI, f. 17, op. 120, d. 80, ll. 84-88 (Letter to Stalin about interethnic relations in Kazakhstan, August 20, 1932). Available on <https://islamperspectives.org/rpi/items/show/11826>. Aronshtam was the first part secretary of the Turkmen Republic from 1928 to 1930. I could not identify in what capacity and from where exactly he wrote this letter.

Russians and Kazakhs. Hence, most clearly in Western Siberia, we see a continuation of the regime's failure to prevent ethnic conflict that will continue in the detdoms throughout the 1930s as we will see in the next chapter. The legacy of the famine was even deepening these hostilities that prevented the emergence of a common Soviet identity for Kazakhs and Russians.

Gendering the Famine

A key scene of a recently produced Kazakh documentary film about the famine depicts a moment when surrounded by wolves a mother has to decide whether she saves her son's or daughter's life.⁴⁴¹ Tragic and heartbreaking, the scene is the reconstruction of a real-life event; it is based on Mekemtas Myrzakhmetov's reminiscences. As a little child, Mekemtas could not understand why his mother used to say "it was better if I had left you there" whenever she got mad at him. When he was fifteen, Mekemtas asked his mother and found out the tragic story. In the spring of 1933, to escape from the terrible famine, his mother decided to leave their home for her relatives' in the neighboring village. On her way with her two and a half years old son, Mekemtas, and her infant daughter, she faced a group of wolves. There was nobody to hear her screams. Then she had to make that terrifying choice: either they would all die, or she could save one of her children by leaving the other one to the wolves. She left the little daughter there, took her son, and escaped. When Mekemtas asked why she had not left him, his mother answered, "a son was more needed then".⁴⁴²

⁴⁴¹ "Kazakhstan's 1930s Famine Gets Film Treatment as Memories Fade", available on <http://eurasianet.org>, March 23, 2018, [accessed on May 10, 2018].

⁴⁴² Mikhailov, *Khronika velikogo dzhuta*, 158-159.

In this section, I provide evidence for son preference during the Kazakh famine by using testimonies and archival documents.⁴⁴³ Although primarily about adult women, it is now widely accepted that females have a certain advantage in comparison to males in cases of famines. Almost in all cases males have higher mortality rates. The most common explanation for this is biological.⁴⁴⁴ However, cultural norms affect mortality rates as well. I argue that social and cultural norms and perceptions of necessity in times of catastrophes undermined this female mortality advantage in the Kazakh famine, and little Kazakh girls (and young Kazakh women) suffered more than Kazakh boys.

Cameron already suggested that during the famine many families preferred to save their sons, and girls suffered worse than boys. She claimed numerous memoirs and contemporary accounts suggest the famine disproportionately affected young women although she only cited Mekemtas' story. Cameron, "The Hungry Steppe", 278-279. In her book, Cameron included Mekemtas' story briefly in a footnote and took a step back from her argument. Cameron, *The Hungry Steppe*, 157 (Footnote 91 is on page 242).

⁴⁴³ What is called "son preference" is seen in many cultures, and some scholars note that in times of famines families tend to save their sons at the expense of their daughters. Ren Mu and Xiaobo Zhang, "Why does the Great Chinese Famine affect the male and female survivors differently? Mortality selection versus son preference," *Economics and Human Biology* 9 (2011).

However, it does not mean that culturally women are always in a disadvantaged position. Nor we can generalize about all women regardless of age groups. For instance, in China, Confucian texts from the late nineteenth-century famines are full of images of elderly mothers fed by filial sons while daughters-in-law are in danger of being eaten by family members. According to Edgerton-Tarpley, although reality was not the same as these images, Confucian ideals and the Chinese family system shaped the options available to Chinese women. County gazetteers included detailed stories about sons who sacrificed their wives and children, and sometimes their own lives in order to feed their mothers. Kathryn Edgerton-Tarpley, *Tears from Iron: Cultural Responses to Famine in Nineteenth-Century China*, (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2008), 162-165.

Although son preference is more common across the globe, in some cultures such as in central Tanzania during World War I, girls were deemed more valuable than boys. Cormac O Grada, *Famine: A Short History* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2009), 55-56.

⁴⁴⁴ According to this hypothesis, women biologically have an advantage because they have a higher proportion of body fat, their bodies are smaller, so they need less energy, they have a lower metabolic rate, and so on. The female advantage has been identified in almost all continents and in all periods. Kate Macintyre, "Famine and the Female Mortality Advantage," in *Famine Demography: Perspectives from the Past and Present*, eds. Tim Dyson and Cormac O Grada (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2002). The biological explanation has been criticized by some scholars though. Macintyre concludes that biological explanations are not enough, and female mortality advantage emerges from the combination of human physiology and gender-specific survival strategies such as migration, access to food, and willingness to seek assistance (p. 255).

Very few scholars have approached Soviet famines from a gendered perspective. One historian of the Ukrainian famine, Oksana Kis, discusses the central role of mothers in the absence of fathers, women's survival strategies, mothers' attitude towards their children, and sex relations.⁴⁴⁵ Another focuses on women and cannibalism.⁴⁴⁶ One theme that emerges in these studies that is also relevant for Kazakh girls is the sale of females by their family members and forced sexual relations. Ukrainian women were raped by party bosses or had sex with them in exchange for bread. Sex crimes and prostitution were common.⁴⁴⁷ According to Kis, having sex in exchange for food provided women a survival strategy.⁴⁴⁸

Although one of the well-known novels about the Kazakh famine, published in 2000, emphasizes rapes of Kazakh women (by Russian men),⁴⁴⁹ almost none of the famine testimonies refer to prostitution or rape. In one rare instance on February 2, 1932, diarist Fatima Gabitova came across a desperate mother. The mother had sent her two daughters to the city bazaar. When Gabitova naively asked "did you send your children to work?", the woman answered that her children were girls, and she was hoping that they

⁴⁴⁵ Oksana Kis, "Defying Death: Women's Experience of the Holodomor, 1932-1933," *Aspasia* 7 (2013).

⁴⁴⁶ Olga Bertelsen, "'Hyphenated' Identities during the Holodomor," in *Women and Genocide: Survivors, Victims, Perpetrators*, eds. Elissa Bemporad and Joyce W. Warren (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2018).

⁴⁴⁷ *Ibid.*, 81-82.

⁴⁴⁸ Kis, "Defying Death," 57.

In fact, destitute women's drive to prostitution is a widespread practice during famines throughout history. O Grada, *Famine*, 54. Confucian texts in China depicted young women who sell their bodies to survive as shameless whereas women who committed suicide in order to protect their chastity were glorified.

Edgerton-Tarpley, *Tears from Iron*, 162. However, in contrast to Confucian ideals, thousands of young women were being sold into prostitution by their families and images of these women became the utmost symbol of famine for both the foreign commentators and Chinese reformers. See particularly Chapter 8: "The 'Feminization of Famine' and the Feminization of Nationalism" in Edgerton-Tarpley, *Tears from Iron*.

⁴⁴⁹ The images in this novel is going to be discussed later. Zamanbek Zhakenov, *Zulmat* (Almaty: Däuir Kitap, 2016) (First published in 2000).

would practice *zhigitshilik*.⁴⁵⁰ The mother finished her words by saying that maybe she would become a human too one day, if she survives the famine. Deeply upset about what she witnessed, Gabitova finishes her notes in her diary with the words “[M]iserable mother, miserable mother! Her only possession to sell in the bazaar is the bodies of her two children”.⁴⁵¹

Nevertheless, sale of young wives and especially daughters in exchange for food was widespread. In Elübay’s novel, sale of daughters represent an utmost tragedy of the famine.⁴⁵² In Shayakhmetov’s words “[I]n those days it did not take long for a respectable mother of several children to turn into a wretched old beggar; for proud young women and pretty girls to turn into skeletons and be reduced to marrying men unworthy of them; for widows to become second wives to anyone at all just to save their children, or to marry their fourteen- or fifteen-year old daughters off to someone more prosperous”.⁴⁵³ Although, Shayakhmetov emphasizes women’s suffering, he actually downplays the gender aspect of the famine. There is no subject in his description; women were forced to marry unworthy men due to conditions (and not necessarily sold by males). However, other testimonies suggest that the majority of these women were sold by Kazakh men for food.⁴⁵⁴

In fact, it is not unusual that during famines desperate people sell either themselves or their children into some form of slavery, concubinage, or another type of

⁴⁵⁰ In slang language, *zhigitshilik* signifies love affairs. Although it is not clear here (and Gabitova did not understand it at first), it probably means that the mother sent her daughters to practice prostitution.

⁴⁵¹ Fatima Gabitova, *Alyptar Taghdıry (Kündelik depterden)* (Almaty: Zhazūshy, 1995), 48-49.

⁴⁵² Smagul Elubay, *Arasat Meydani*, trans. Gülzada Temenova (Ankara: Bengü Yayınları, 2015) (first published in Kazakh in 1991), 274.

⁴⁵³ Shayakhmetov, *The Silent Steppe*, 184.

⁴⁵⁴ Zhuldyzay Smayylova’s testimony in Zhüsip ed., *Asharshylyq Aqıqaty*, 222; See also, “Maldybay Qarıyanyñ Ängimesi,” *ibid.*, 86-87.

servitude as a survival strategy.⁴⁵⁵ In the Kazakh case, it was either young brides, as discussed above, or little girls who were sold by males. Selling a daughter for a loaf of bread is so shocking for the modern reader that people use it as an example to divert attention to the tragedy of the famine.⁴⁵⁶ According to Rozan uly Oraqbay, some Kazakhs who escaped to China sold their daughters there.⁴⁵⁷ Nurziya Qazhybaeva makes it even more explicit that these children were sold into slavery in China. Having reached China with nothing, her mother's cousin Khalel had to sell his six or seven-years old daughter Zipash for a bag of flour. Kazhibayeva remembers that the Chinese used to buy children for slavery, used them for hard work, and then married them when they grew up. Sometime later, Zipash's parents found and wanted to take her back, but the father was severely punished and imprisoned by the Chinese authorities.⁴⁵⁸ In less tragic cases, young girls were married (usually to old males) for a bucket of millet.⁴⁵⁹

Couples also did not trust each other during the famine. According to an oral history published in 2014, one day, Zhuldyz Bagasharova's father found out that, his wife (Zhuldyz's stepmother) had hidden the remaining wheat from them. He got mad and left her alone on the road. He took Zhuldyz and his wife's 12-13 years old daughter with him and went to the Arys station (Almaty oblast). Out of wheat, her father started to ask help from people, but not surprisingly nobody helped. The father fainted before the girls. Then Zhuldyz saw him talking to an old man and shaking hands as if they came to an

⁴⁵⁵ O Grada, *Famine*, 51.

⁴⁵⁶ "Golodomor v Kazakhstane: devochek otdavali za bulku khleba", <https://tengrinews.kz/>, May 29, 2015, [accessed on April 23, 2019].

⁴⁵⁷ Rozan uly Oraqbay's testimony in Tölebaev and Sabdenova eds., *32-niñ zulmaty*, 56.

⁴⁵⁸ Nazira Nurtazina, "Great Famine of 1931-1933 in Kazakhstan: A Contemporary's Reminiscences," *Acta Slavica Iaponica* 32 (2012): 126-127.

⁴⁵⁹ Dana-Bike Baykadamova's testimony, 169.

agreement. Eventually she found out that he had sold his stepdaughter for a pot of wheat.⁴⁶⁰

The attitudes towards daughters and young brides in Kazakh society shaped the fate of female members of Kazakh families during the famine. In nomadic Kazakh society, even if a family had many daughters, they could not really claim to have children if they did not have a son.⁴⁶¹ This is most probably why daughters were considered worthless in comparison to sons. Mekemtas' mother was not the only one who faced wolves during the famine. According to Khasen Mukhammedasqaruly's testimony, many of his old and weak female relatives fell victims to the wolves: during the famine it was a very common practice that when wolves attacked, men left either their daughters or wives to them in order to gain time to escape. Hence, many men survived by sacrificing female members of their families.⁴⁶² In another case, in the aftermath of the Aday uprising in 1931, many families left their homes for Iran, Turkmenistan, or another place within Kazakhstan. On the road to the city of Gur'ev, a mother again faced her tragic destiny. She understood that she could not save all her children, and decided to save her sons, and leave her daughter on the steppe alone. She poured sand on her daughter's body and clothes so that the little girl could not move and follow them. Zira Nauryzbaeva writes that leaving daughters under sand was indeed not exceptional at the time, many families did the same.⁴⁶³

⁴⁶⁰ Zhuldyz Bagasharova's testimony in Zhüsip ed., *Asharshylyq Aqıqaty*, 260-261.

⁴⁶¹ Arghynbaev, *Qazaq Otbası*, 85.

And as discussed in the previous chapter, the low status of young brides is still a very serious problem in contemporary Kazakhstan.

⁴⁶² "Nan Urlap Tiri Qalghan Bala" in Tölebaev and Sabdenova eds., *32-niñ zulmaty*, 25.

⁴⁶³ The mother reached Gur'ev with her three sons, but among them only the youngest would survive. Zira Nauryzbaeva, "Devochka v peskakh", available on <https://express-k.kz>, October 31, 2017, [accessed on June 13, 2018]. The mother's name was Akkenzhe, and she had told the story to her granddaughter Maira

Sending children to relatives is also widespread in times of famines. In the Ukrainian case, Kis interprets adoption of children from starving families by relatives, neighbors, or mere acquaintances as a manifestation of women's mutual help.⁴⁶⁴ Yet, in the Kazakh case children were also sent to male relatives. We can see son preference here too. Äzilkhan Nurshayyqov's father sent him together with a close male relative to a sovkhos, although his daughter was in worse condition (the father was thinking the girl might die soon). He told the relative that "whatever happens to us, let it happen. Just save this boy".⁴⁶⁵ As noted before, having no son marked the end of the lineage in the nomadic Kazakh society. Nurshayyqov's father's main motivation for choosing his son was probably a desire to save his lineage.

Depending on demographic evidence, Tätimov and Aliev already argued that during the famine families preferred to feed their sons at the expense of their daughters. According to demographic information from 1959, there were 1092 males to 1000 females from the famine generation.⁴⁶⁶ Additional evidence for the gendered nature of who survived can be found in the statistics from detdoms which show that boys were much more likely to survive than girls. The only comprehensive data that include the number of female and male children separately is from 1934. According to this report, the

later. The author who is a close relative of Maira learned about this story from her. I thank Zira Nauryzbaeva for this additional information.

⁴⁶⁴ Kis, "Defying Death," 54.

⁴⁶⁵ In this example, the daughter was lucky; although many people died in the village, both the father and the daughter survived, possibly because the father was a talented and strong man. Nurshayyqov, *Äskerĭ Kündelik*, 10.

Rafika Nurtazina and her family survived the famine thanks to her brother-in-law. Khairulla was a journalist working at the newspaper *Eñbekshi Qazaq*, and he saved the whole family from hunger. Rafika Nurtazina, *Vospominaniia* (Almaty: Arys Baspasy, 2001), 19. Other examples of children who survived thanks to male relatives: "Nan Urlap Tiri Qalghan Bala," 24-26; Qapiza Tokqtagülqyzy's testimony in *Qazaq Khalqynyñ Qasireti*, 26-27.

⁴⁶⁶ Maqash Tätimov and Zhumatay Aliev, *Därbestimiz – Demografiyada* (Almaty: Zheti Zharghy, 1999).

proportion of Kazakh children in detdoms was about 67% and more than 62% of children were boys.⁴⁶⁷ Following is a table for oblast level data.

Table 4: The number of Kazakh children and male ratio in detdoms (oblast level data)

Oblast	Year	Total	Kazakhs	Males	Females	Male ratio
Almaty ⁴⁶⁸	1933	5875	4992 (85%)	4229	1646	72%
Eastern Kazakhstan ⁴⁶⁹	1934	8236	4246 (51.5%)	4618	3618	56%
Aqtöbe ⁴⁷⁰	1935	4188	3324 (79%)	2539	1649	55%

In the first case where the proportion of Kazakhs was very high, we see that the female proportion of survivors is very low (only 28%). In the second case, we see that Kazakhs constitute a little bit higher than half of all children, and the proportion of girls this time is about 44%. It can be argued that the higher the percentage of Kazakhs, the higher the percentage of male children. For sure, this is not totally straightforward. In the third case, although the proportion of Kazakhs is very high (79%), the proportion of girls is not that low (45%). Yet, I still argue that these data, however incomplete, help us to understand that disproportionately more Kazakh boys than girls survived the famine. We have more evidence from individual detdoms.

⁴⁶⁷ According to this report, in 1934, there were 49362 children at detdoms in Kazakhstan including 33031 Kazakhs, 13398 Russians, and 2933 children of other nationalities. 30700 of all these children were males whereas only 18662 of them were females. TsGARK, f. 509, op. 1, d. 319, l. 128 (Dokladnaia Zapiska: Ob Itogakh Raboty Detdomov KASSR za 1934 god).

⁴⁶⁸ TsGARK, f. 509, op.1, d. 194, l. 13 (Plan: Raboty Alma-Atinskoy Oblastnoi Detkomissii na 1-e Polugodye 1933 goda).

⁴⁶⁹ APRK, f. 143, op.1, d. 2126, l. 38.

⁴⁷⁰ APRK, f. 143, op. 1, d. 2483, ll. 1-3 (Dokladnaa Zapiska: O sostoianii detdomov Aktiubinskoi oblasti).

Table 5: The number of Kazakh children and male ratio in individual detdoms

	Year	Total	Kazakhs	Males	Females
Oral detpriemnik ⁴⁷¹	1932	12	12 (100%)	11 (92%)	1
Kalpe detdom (Karatal'skii – Almaty) ⁴⁷²	1932	88	88 (100%)	65 (74%)	23
Üsh-Töbe detdom ⁴⁷³	1932	57	0 (0%)	29 (51%)	28
Malaia Stanitsa detpriemnik (Almaty) ⁴⁷⁴	1933	605	367 (60%)	438 (72%)	167
Semiozernyi raion ⁴⁷⁵	1934	389	363 (93%)	259 (66%)	129
A detdom in Qyzylorda ⁴⁷⁶	1936	310	300 (97%)	212 (69%)	95
Narkompros detdoms (Karaganda) ⁴⁷⁷	1935	6799	1825 (27%)	3389 (49%)	3410

The contrast between an all-Kazakh and an all-Russian detdom (Kalpe and Üsh-Töbe) is striking. In Semiozernyi, the proportion of Kazakhs is 93.5%, and that of males is 66.7%, while in Qyzylorda, the proportion of Kazakhs is 96.7%, and that of males is about 69%. In contrast, 27 Narkompros detdoms in Karaganda oblast hosted 6799 children in 1935: 4025 of them were Russian, 1862 were Kazakh, 187 were Tatar, and

⁴⁷¹ TsGARK, f. 509, op. 1, d. 161, ll. 27-30 (Akt: Obsledovaniia Detdomov Gorod Ural'ska Komissiei).

⁴⁷² TsGARK, f. 509, op. 1, d. 194, l. 98 (Dokladnaia Zapiska: Alma-Atinskoi obl. Det. Komissii o sostoianii detdomov i hode bor'ba s besprizornosty po 1932).

⁴⁷³ Ibid., l. 100.

⁴⁷⁴ TsGARK, f. 509, op. 1, d. 225, ll. 119-122.

⁴⁷⁵ TsGARK, f. 509, op. 1, d. 2126, ll. 103-107.

⁴⁷⁶ The inconsistency in numbers is from the document itself. TsGARK, f. 30, op. 4, d. 1003, ll. 81-83.

⁴⁷⁷ TsGARK, f. 509, op. 1, d. 397, l. 29 (Dokladnaia Zapiska: O rabote po bor'be s detskoii besprizornost'iu i beznadzornost'iu po Karagandinskoi oblasti za 1935 god).

725 were of other nationalities. Thus, where Kazakh children were a minority, the number of girls even surpassed that of boys.

For sure, there were also counter examples. However, although it is not possible to determine the exact proportion of Kazakh girls to Kazakh boys, throughout the 1930s, in almost all cases the proportion of girls decreases as the proportion of Kazakhs increases. In one of the very rare counter examples, the number of females was higher than males at one of the detdoms in Petropavlovsk in 1937 although the majority of children were Kazakhs. There were 76 Kazakhs, 40 Russians, and 3 children of other nationalities, but 61 of 119 children were girls.⁴⁷⁸

Making Sense of Catastrophe

It is now a well-established argument that famines are represented first and foremost through images of women, or in other words they are feminized. O'Grada suggests that an increasing squeamishness towards violent images of wars and famines in contemporary society is part of a "civilizing process" and it probably explains why we prefer more sanitized and "feminized" images of passive suffering during the famines.⁴⁷⁹ Margaret Kelleher is the most influential scholar of this literature and as she puts it:

“[D]epictions of the dry-breasted mother unable to feed her child, of a woman unable to

⁴⁷⁸ TsGARK, f. 509, op. 1, d. 419, l. 73 (Dokladnaia Zapiska: O polozhenii detskikh domov po Aktiubinskoï oblasti po sostoianiiu na 10 marta 1937 goda).

However, this is a very exceptional case, and the same report gives the statistics for a few other detdoms that are in line with the general trend. In Yaisan detdom, there were 78 Kazakh, 17 Russian, and 3 children of other nationalities. 76 of all these children were males whereas there were only 22 females (ll. 56-57). 96 of Tamdy detkommun's children were Kazakhs, and the remaining 50 were Russians. Among them 87 were boys and 59 were girls (l. 60). Great majority of the children at Uil'skii detdom were Kazakhs: there were 134 Kazakhs, and only 8 children of other nationalities (3 Russians). The number of boys was 97, and girls was 45 (l. 72).

⁴⁷⁹ O Grada, *Famine*, 41.

bury her child, of a mother torn between the competing claims of her children, or of a child suckling the breast of its dead mother occur not only throughout present-day accounts but also embody the worst consequences of famine in literary and historical texts”.⁴⁸⁰ It does not mean that representations of women are the only images of the famine. Yet, Kelleher suggests that “where famine’s effects are given a detailed, physical description, where the individual spectacle of a hungry body is created, this occurs, predominantly, through images of women”.⁴⁸¹ In this understanding, in the spectacle of famine, woman is an image whereas man is the bearer of the look.⁴⁸² However, in different contexts, famines are feminized through different images of women. In late nineteenth-century imperial China, Confucian scholars emphasized female chastity and sacrifice while journalists and reformers used feminized images of the famine to save China from national disgrace. Feminine images were exploited to nationalize the crises, and “saving” hungry women from the human traders became a matter of national honor against the endless foreign condemnations of China.⁴⁸³

This section argues that the universality of the argument about feminization of famine should be questioned. Based on Kazakh famine testimonies I argue that surviving victims of the famine primarily understood what they endured not through images of desperate women, but through images of starving and dead children. Famine testimonies

⁴⁸⁰ Margaret Kelleher, *The Feminization of Famine: Expressions of the Inexpressible?* (Cork: Cork University Press, 1997), 2.

⁴⁸¹ *Ibid.*, 8.

⁴⁸² *Ibid.*, 22.

⁴⁸³ Foreigners too used images of women sold by human traders as a proof of China’s old system’s brutality. Edgerton-Tarpley, *Tears from Iron*, 190-192

allow us to recover voices of the survivors and their focus on children to narrate the tragedy represents the symbolic destruction of Kazakh society.

Written in the late Soviet era, and first published in 1991, Smagül Elübay's *Aq Boz Üy* provides one of the earliest and most influential literary representations of the famine.⁴⁸⁴ In Elübay's depiction the main male character Pakhraddin is weak, whereas his wife Khansulu is strong. Although both perish at the end, it is Pakhraddin's misery and suffering that we read about in detail. On the other hand, the most heartbreaking scenes in the book depict the sufferings of desperate children.⁴⁸⁵ Thus, it is not possible to say that Elübay uses images of miserable women to make sense of the famine or that he feminizes the famine. Zamanbek Zhakenov's *Zulmat* provides a different interpretation of the famine. Zhakenov feminizes what happened, however rather than starvation itself Zhakenov emphasizes rapes of Kazakh women by Russian men. As noted above, none of the oral testimonies refer to an instance of rape. However, Zhakenov presents the collectivization campaign and the subsequent famine as a war of annihilation against Kazakhs by Russians (and not by Goloshchekin, by Stalin, or by the Soviet regime). In this respect, his stance is exceptional among Kazakh authors, and it is shared only by a few oral testimonies.⁴⁸⁶ For example, this is what a Russian soldier thinks about two living children after killing their pregnant mother: "Let the offspring of Kazakhs fall prey

⁴⁸⁴ Literary depictions of the famine emerged only after Perestroika. In fact, a few Kazakh authors used images of the famine in their works during the Soviet period. Yet, these were both very short and veiled descriptions. For a comprehensive, but non-analytical, study of literary works about the Kazakh famine, see, Nurdaulet Aqysh, *Zulmat Zhyldary Qazaq Prozasynnda: 1928-1933 zhyldar qasiretiniñ tabuy* (Almaty: Nur-Print 75, 2005).

⁴⁸⁵ Elübay, *Arasat Meydanı*.

⁴⁸⁶ It can be said that Zhakenov's attitude resembles the charges of genocide Ukrainians have made toward Russians.

to crows and ravens”.⁴⁸⁷ “Nationalization” of hatred brings feminization of the tragedy. In many instances, Russian soldiers proudly talk about how they raped Kazakh women. In one case, the author even describes a scene where a Russian soldier first kills a Kazakh girl due to her violent resistance to him, and then rapes the dead body.⁴⁸⁸ Similar to many nationalist narratives throughout the world, Zhakenov constructs his narrative of national hatred primarily as expressed toward women’s bodies. Nevertheless, it should also be noted that the images of women in Zhakenov’s narrative are not connected to the famine itself. Starving desperate women do not appear in his novel, rather his account focuses on the annihilation of Kazakh nation, with the annihilators represented by rapist men, and the victim Kazakhs represented by female bodies.⁴⁸⁹ In contrast, women’s bodies never symbolize the Kazakh nation in survivors’ accounts.

Surviving Kazakhs made sense of the famine primarily through images of starving and dead children (and not through desperate women) and three main images again and again appear in these accounts: an infant trying to suck his/her dead mother’s breast, a pile of child corpses taken from an orphanage by a cart to a desolate place, and cannibalism stories of consumed children.⁴⁹⁰

Besides descriptions of children’s sufferings, the most common image repeated in famine testimonies is the clog of dead bodies on the roads both in the rural areas and in

⁴⁸⁷ Zhakenov, *Zulmat*, 258

⁴⁸⁸ *Ibid.*, 261-262.

⁴⁸⁹ For another example of the direct correlation between nationalization and feminization, see “Golodomor v Kazakhstane: devochek otdavali”. The author interprets the famine as a great tragedy, because, in his words, the girls died before the age of fertility. Indeed, the emphasis is again on children, this time unborn children, that represent the future of the nation.

⁴⁹⁰ It is necessary to note that these are not the only images about the famine in the testimonies, but it can be confidently argued that a great majority of them present stories about children, whereas adult females do not occupy a main place.

city centers. Many witnesses remember the nightmarish moments when they had to pass through hundreds of dead bodies, sometimes even by walking on dead people. Although the oral testimonies also show how people got used to such horrific scenes, still it is an image that represents the scale of the catastrophe. According to Zhortūyl Rysaqov's testimony, the whole country was full of dead bodies: the city centers, streets, bazaars, train stations, and so on. He saw, white-haired old women, adolescent bodies "that lost their lights", twelve-years old "beautiful rosebuds", young children, and infants, all lying on the road. Some mothers died with their babies in their arms whereas some toddlers were walking around their mothers' dead bodies.⁴⁹¹ Zeytin Aqyshev recalls that when they got to Karaganda, they realized that the situation in the city was even worse than it was on the steppe. Due to the dead bodies, it was almost impossible to walk on the streets. Some people were jumping over the dead, some could not stand the smell and turned back, and some others, probably in shock, started to cry and stood still.⁴⁹² In Almaty, Āmir Alipbayuly remembers that especially the area which today hosts the Sayakhat bus station was full of dead people. He was one of the children who carried food from a dining hall (*ashkhana*) to their detdom. The children saw dead bodies and howling people on the road. Both sides of the road were full of dead bodies, and Alipbayuly says that one could get out of his mind easily when he saw 150-160 men licking the leftovers found in the garbage.⁴⁹³ Such descriptions of throngs of dead bodies are included in many other testimonies.

⁴⁹¹ Zhortūyl Rysaqov, "Ultyq Tragediya Zhanghyryghy," in Qystaūbaev and Khabdīna eds., *Qyzyldar Qyrghyny*, 181.

⁴⁹² Zeytin Aqyshev, "Bilsin Muny Urpaqtar," *ibid.*, 15.

⁴⁹³ He also notes how other people did not care about all the dead people and went on walking on their ways. Āmir Alipbayuly Sheripay urpaghy, "Men Dozaqty Kōrdim," *ibid.*, 249.

a-) Suckling the Dead Mother's Breast

A hunger-stricken mother, holding a child at her breast is one of the most frequent images in famine texts. Kelleher focuses on the woman's inability to feed her child in these famine images. According to her, a woman's dry breast represents one of the deepest horrors in a famine.⁴⁹⁴ It is possible that the image of a dead woman with a still living infant at her breast is a universal image of famines.⁴⁹⁵ Kelleher claims that the waning female body in this image represents the source of life. Yet, it is not clear why we cannot read these images primarily in reference to infants. It can be argued that the image of the infant represents a deeper despair: the extinction of the future of a people.

These images are also included in many Kazakh famine testimonies. Mäglīma Orazbaeva recalls how she saw bones of dead people and bodies of little children on the way to Semey. Then she describes an instance on a bridge over the Irtysh river. A young woman was dying there, and her infant child was crying and trying to suck her breast. As Orazbaeva says "what is there to suck from a dead body, that child would have probably died too. It was a time when nobody cared about anyone".⁴⁹⁶ Hence, one of the few instances that Orazbaeva recalls in some details includes such an image. Äsem Toqtabekova too remembers a similar scene. Seven year-old Äsem saw a woman lying on the road with a little infant (about one-year-old) near her. The infant was trying to suck her mother's breast as in many other stories. Little Äsem wondered why her father did

⁴⁹⁴ Kelleher, *The Feminization of Famine*, 22-23; 29.

⁴⁹⁵ The Ukrainian famine testimonies include a lot of such images. See, Robert Conquest, *The Harvest of Sorrow: Soviet Collectivization and the Terror-Famine* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1986), 287.

⁴⁹⁶ Mäglīma Orazbaeva's testimony in *Qazaq Khalqynyñ Qasireti*, 17-18.

not take the infant with them, but her father simply said, “my own children are enough”.⁴⁹⁷ Yet another Kazakh, Älzhappar Äbishev, remembers the screams of an infant of six-seven months that grated on their ears when they ran across a dead mother and the infant that was trying to suck her breast.⁴⁹⁸ What is interesting to note is that in each of these examples the emphasis is on the infant, not on the mother. Orazbaeva is primarily interested in the infant’s lack of survival chance, Toqtabekova wonders about the fate of the child, and Äbishev emphasizes the screams of the little baby.⁴⁹⁹ The scene of a dead mother and child lying together produced some of the most jarring reactions. Tursyn Zhurtbaev’s father Qudakeldi walked from Alatau to Altynemel with his two friends, and throughout the road they saw countless dead bodies. But it was only when they saw the bones of a woman with her infant on her chest that Qudakeldi’s friend started to cry: “what would I have done if these lying there were my wife and my kid, oh Qudakeldi!”⁵⁰⁰

⁴⁹⁷ Äsem Toqtabekova’s testimony, *ibid.*, 28.

⁴⁹⁸ Älzhappar Äbishev’s testimony in Zhüsip ed., *Asharshylyq Aqıqati*, 241.

⁴⁹⁹ Most of the testimonies make it explicit that nobody really helped suffering and dying little children although in literary depictions of the famine Kazakhs always help starving children even though they themselves do not have enough food. For example, we see that in Elübay’s novel, Pakhraddin sees children coming from all directions like “orphan lambs” and puts a little wheat into the hands of each children. When her wife gets angry about it, he answers “enough! If we are going to die, we will all together. My life is not more valuable than these children’s”. This depiction is indeed quite contrary to the majority of the testimonies. However, a few of the testimonies also refer to cases of generosity. For instance, Taūman Törekanov’s grandmother came across a similar case of a dead mother with her infant still trying to suck her breast. The grandmother says that she took this infant with her and looked after together with her own children. Taūman Törekanov, *Köz körgender edi... (Bolghandar men bolzhamdar) – derekti kitap: estelikter, ängimeler, ocherkter, etiudter, ässeler*, (Almaty, 1999), 78-79. Also see, Sasan Nurgalievich Nurgalymov’s testimony in Mikhailov, *Khronika Velikogo Dzhuta*.

Again, it seems that there is a correlation between how a person understands the famine and depictions of charity. For instance, Turganbek Kataev defines the famine as a “real ethnic genocide”, and the same person claims that people during the famine gave their last crumbs to children and tried to save their lives (over their own lives). Turganbek Kataev, *Pamiat’ o Voine i Mysli o Zhizni* (Almaty: Sanat, 1995), 8.

⁵⁰⁰ Tursyn Zhurtbaev, “Äkemniñ Ängimesi,” in Qystaūbaev and Khabdina eds., *Qyzylдар Qyrghyny*, 124-125.

b-) Sight of a Pile of Child Corpses on a Cart

Another very common image in famine testimonies is a pile of corpses taken out from a detdom. Sometimes these corpses were buried just near the orphanage but usually they were taken to a distant place by cart. During the famine, most of these detdoms were like death camps. Zhumazhan Aytzhanov entered a detdom in Aqtöbe (Aktiubinsk) oblast when he was eight-years old in 1932. He remembers that the situation was so terrible that it was not even possible to bury the dead, so they were just put in the cellar of the detdom.⁵⁰¹ Zheteū Nurmanov recalls that it was impossible to calculate the number of children who died in his detdom in Qonyrat. Little Zheteū even buried his sister himself. The dead bodies of little children were buried together near the detdom by shoveling the earth very lightly.⁵⁰²

However, in many testimonies, the high number of deaths in detdoms is associated with the image of a cart taking little corpses to a distant place. Zeytin Aqyshev states that in Karaganda he saw with his own eyes that countless dead children were put in an ox-cart and taken to an unknown place. His family wanted to give his little cousin to a detdom in Karaganda. Yet, when they saw the cart full of dead children, they hesitated and changed their mind.⁵⁰³ Silembek Shökimtayuly was one of the children who lived at Urzhar detdom in Eastern Kazakhstan during the famine. According to his testimony,

⁵⁰¹ Zhumazhan Aytzhanov, “Öli Riza Bolmas, Tiri Zharymas,” *ibid.*, 92.

⁵⁰² Zheteū Nurmanov’s testimony in Zhüsip ed., *Asharshylyq Aqıqaty*, 220.

Archival documents clearly show that not only during the famine, but also even in the aftermath of it, many detdoms were not too different from death camps. Detdoms are discussed in detail in the next chapter.

⁵⁰³ Unfortunately, the little child died after a short time. Zeytin Aqyshev, “Bilsin Muny Urpaqtar,” 14-15.

each day approximately ten children died, and they were taken by a cart to out of Urzhar.⁵⁰⁴

Although we have some testimonies from detdom children themselves, in many cases people who lived close to a detdom recall the horrors of the mass deaths of children. Ghalym Akhmedov was living on Buryl street in Äülĕ-Ata where a detdom was located. Lots of children died at the detdom during the famine. Akhmedov says, in his old age, the vision of dead children being taken from the detdom in a cart in the dawns still haunts him. He assumes that they were taken to the grave each morning, but he is not sure about the destination. He remembers that legs and arms of naked children were dangling from the cart.⁵⁰⁵ Tasbolat Inkärbäev too, who was 11-12 years old at the time, lived on the same street with a detdom in a village (*selo*) in the Qordai district. He remembers that every day dead bodies of children were taken by a horse cart to be buried in a large pit that was dug outside of the village.⁵⁰⁶ Mäglĕma Orazbaeva's husband worked for some time as a carter in Cherkaskii in Aqsu region. She remembers how terrible that work was. Each day her husband took piles of child corpses to the near mountain and dropped them off from the cliff. According to Orazbaeva's testimony, it was not possible to bury the children. She says that there were times that they dropped off 52 children from the edge of the cliff in only one day.⁵⁰⁷ Another person who worked transporting child corpses recalls throwing them on empty land. The sound of the cart's

⁵⁰⁴ Silembek Shökimtayuly, "General Qoighan Qulpytas," in Qystaübaev and Khabdĕna eds., *Qyzyldar Qyrghyny*, 222-223.

⁵⁰⁵ Ghalym Akhmedov, "Sol Bir Aüyr Zhyldarda," *ibid.*, 33.

⁵⁰⁶ Tasbolat Inkärbäev, "Közim Kōrgen Sumdyqtar," *ibid.*, 251.

⁵⁰⁷ Mäglĕma Orazbaeva's testimony, 18.

wheel in the early mornings was like a funeral ceremony of people who had starved to death.⁵⁰⁸

c-) Cannibalism: The Collapse of a Society

In times of famines, families face stark choices about who should die and who should survive. In most cases, the survival of the very young and the elderly are seen as less important.⁵⁰⁹ For the Ukrainian famine, Kis shows that in contrast to the popular images of a mother who always acts for the benefit of her children, it was not rare that a mother saved her life at the expense of her children. Some mothers exploited their children at the state institutions by taking the food their children were given, and some even let them die by keeping all the food for themselves.⁵¹⁰ Applebaum notes a similar instance when a mother decided to focus on saving herself, because she thought the children would die anyway.⁵¹¹ Another example displays parents' attitudes towards their children more strikingly: one Ukrainian woman said that she would always be able to give birth to other children, but she had only one husband and wanted him to survive. For this, she took all the bread her children were served at a kindergarten, and the children all died.⁵¹²

During a famine, infanticide increases greatly.⁵¹³ One Ukrainian survivor remembers that a neighbor became so angered by the sounds of his own children crying

⁵⁰⁸ Almasbek Äbsadyq, "Asharshylyq: qüäger kisiniñ esteligi," <https://adebiportal.kz/kz>, June 19, 2019, [accessed on April 27, 2019].

⁵⁰⁹ O'Grada, *Famine*, 46. However, it should be noted that this is not universal. How Confucian values prioritized the lives of old mothers in China was touched upon before.

⁵¹⁰ Kis reminds us that the traditional Ukrainian culture prioritized a mother's life over infants, so indeed this attitude was probably not that shocking. Kis, "Defying Death," 55.

⁵¹¹ Anne Applebaum, *Red Famine: Stalin's War on Ukraine* (New York: Doubleday, 2017), 244.

⁵¹² *Ibid.*, 245.

⁵¹³ O Grada, *Famine*, 55.

for food that he smothered his baby in its cradle, and killed two of his other children by slamming their heads against a wall. Only one of his sons managed to escape.⁵¹⁴ Another desperate farmer in Vinnytsia province, tried to kill his children by the smoke of the stove, and when the children cried for help he strangled them with his hands.⁵¹⁵ Varvara's story shows how people lost their minds during the famine. In early 1933, she took her remaining clothes and went to the nearby city to exchange them for bread. She got a loaf of bread, but when she returned home, she saw that it was stuffed with a paper sack. She then took the knife and stuck it into her son's back and started laughing hysterically. Her daughter ran away to save her life.⁵¹⁶

Infanticide was widespread in the Kazakh famine too. Turar Rysqulov's famous letter includes two examples of infanticide: the first one is a Kazakh woman from Ayagöz who threw her two children under a train, and the second one is a woman in Semey who threw her two children into a hole.⁵¹⁷ A number of testimonies refer to parents who killed their own children. Ghalym Akhmedov heard a story in which a mother threw one of her children over the edge of a cliff. The second child tried to run away, but she caught and threw him/her too. Finally, the mother threw herself from the cliff.⁵¹⁸ Orazbai qyzy Säken witnessed an instance when a young mother threw her son into Aqsūat river.⁵¹⁹ Qasym Toqtarbaev himself witnessed a woman killing her child by smashing his/her head on a

⁵¹⁴ Applebaum, *Red Famine*, 249.

⁵¹⁵ He then went to the village council and confessed the murders and said that he killed them because there was nothing to eat. *Ibid.*, 249.

⁵¹⁶ *Ibid.*, 250.

⁵¹⁷ "Pis'mo Predsedatelia Sovnarkoma RSFSR T. R. Rysqulova v TsK VKP (b) tov. Stalinu," 250.

⁵¹⁸ Ghalym Akhmedov, "Sol Bir Aūyr Zhyldarda," 35.

⁵¹⁹ Orazbay qyzy Säken's testimony in Tölebaev and Sabdenova eds., *32-niñ zulmaty*, 43.

stone.⁵²⁰ The author Smagül Elübay describes the tragic situation of Kazakhs in 1932 with the example of infanticide. Many Kazakhs took refuge in Karakalpakstan and a lot of Kazakh children were abandoned there. Local elderly did not want to marry women who had children; thus, many abandoned their children, many more killed their own children. According to Elübay, once these young women recognized what they did, they lost their minds.⁵²¹

However, much more than infanticide, it is cannibalism that represents dehumanization experienced in the famines. In Ukraine, Bertelsen suggests that the majority of cannibalism cases included hallucinations, delusions, and memory loss accompanied by cognitive and emotional upheaval. Tremendous suffering redefined identities, and the distance between the moral and immoral withered away. Consequently, fathers ate their children, wives and husbands killed each other, children murdered their siblings, and women buried or drowned their children.⁵²² She states that state documents frequently depict stories of cannibals who ate their own children. Parents put their deceased children into cellars and consumed their flesh piece by piece or sold it in the market.⁵²³ Conquest too notes that most of the cannibalism accounts include cases of children being eaten by parents.⁵²⁴ Some of the cannibalism stories from Ukraine are much more graphic than the ones in Kazakhstan. Possibly, the most mind-bending instance is a scene in which little children start to bite and eat one of their friends alive.⁵²⁵

⁵²⁰ Toqtarbaev wanted to shoot the woman with his rifle, but his father stopped him and said that the woman would die in any case. After some days, they also saw the woman's dead body. Toqtarbaev Qasym's testimony, *ibid.*, 31.

⁵²¹ Zhüsip ed., *Asharshylyq Aqıqaty*, 158.

⁵²² Bertelsen, "'Hyphenated' Identities during the Holodomor," 83.

⁵²³ *Ibid.*, 85-86.

⁵²⁴ Conquest, *The Harvest of Sorrow*, 285.

⁵²⁵ Timothy Snyder, *Bloodlands: Europe Between Hitler and Stalin* (Basic Books, 2012), 50-51.

It was not different in the Kazakh famine. Quite a high proportion of cannibalism stories are about children eaten by their parents. It was also common that children were kidnapped by neighbors or strangers to be eaten, and for that reason many parents did not let their children outside alone. So many famine testimonies from Kazakhstan talk about cannibalism very openly. Some of the testimonies repeat what they heard, but quite a lot of them depict what they themselves witnessed.⁵²⁶ Such an emphasis on cannibalism stories displays how cannibalism, and more specifically children eaten by their parents, is perceived as the utmost tragedy for a people. Kindler shows that whenever officials discovered cases of cannibalism, they carefully noted the condition of the corpses. They took a list of scalped heads, ripped out kidneys, hearts, livers and so on.⁵²⁷ Testimonies include references to cannibal gangs. For example, Balaqan Kūmisbaev recounts, in Aqköl, there was a road that was difficult to pass. A gang of cannibals used that place to catch people. The place (Shengel) started to be known as “*Oybay*”⁵²⁸ Shengel” because of the screams of victims.⁵²⁹

Parents warned and tried to keep their children at home, because cannibals were hunting people, and not surprisingly most of the victims were little children. We have a few testimonies of those who escaped from those “hunters”. The poet Ghafu Qayyrbekov

⁵²⁶ A number of testimonies that refer to cannibalism do not provide a detailed description. See for example Älimkhan Isabaeva’s, Kerimuly Esken’s and Abylkhanov Akhmetbek’s testimonies in *Qazaq Khalqynyñ Qasireti*, 40, 67, 43; Särgazy Saghyntay’s testimony in Tölebaev and Sabdenova eds., *32-niñ zulmaty*, 41; Mäke Moldabekov’s testimony in Zhüsip ed., *Asharshylyq Aqıqaty*, 224.

⁵²⁷ Kindler, *Stalin’s Nomads*, 168. For documented cases of cannibalism in Kazakhstan also see, Ayaghan, et. al., *Pravda o Golode*, 92-98; for documented cases of cannibalism among Kazakh refugees in Kyrgyzstan, see, “Dokladnaia zapiska rukovodiashikh militsii Kirgizii,” 241-242. Some of the testimonies describe official investigations of such cases. Ghalym Akhmedov recalls a few instances when officials investigated cannibalism cases. Ghalym Akhmedov, “Sol Bir Aūyr Zhyldarda,” 28-30.

⁵²⁸ An idiom used to express excitement, fear etc.

⁵²⁹ Kūmisbaev Balaqan’s testimony in Tölebaev and Sabdenova eds., *32-niñ zulmaty*, 60.

was playing on the street when an old man caught his hand. Although the man was not strong, Ghafu was only four years old and could not run away. His grandmother saw what was happening and called other people for help, and that was how little Ghafu was saved.⁵³⁰ Having survived a tragic trip from Kazakhstan to Kyrgyzstan, little Qamza Alimuly lost all his family members on the road back and was walking around alone when he saw a couple and approached them to ask for some food. As he describes, their faces were dark and terrible, and although the women said, “come to me my kid”, Qamza felt that there was something wrong, and started to run away. While running away he heard the woman’s call to her husband: “catch him!”.⁵³¹

However, not all children were lucky enough to escape from these horrific fates. Many were hunted and eventually fell victim to the cannibals. According to the testimony of Töken Bekmaghambetov, a five-year-old child was lost in their village in 1932, and then when a house that was located three kilometers outside of the village was investigated the child’s head and flesh were found there.⁵³² Qauāzhan Tynybaeva from Aqsuat village in the Semey oblast remembers that the Saghymbay brothers ate human flesh. Passing by their house, someone recognized the arm of a child in a pot and after he came to his senses, he reported the instance to the village soviet.⁵³³ Dana-bike Baykadamova’s testimony includes a tragic story. A mother, exhausted by famine, did whatever she could to save her three-year-old son, but nothing worked. One day she fell

⁵³⁰ Gafu Kayyrbekov’s testimony in Zhüsip ed., *Asharshylyq Aqıqaty*, 232.

⁵³¹ Qamza Älimuly’s testimony, 71.

For other testimonies about the danger of cannibalism for children see: Maqan Qurmanqulov’s testimony in Zhüsip ed. *Asharshylyq Aqıqaty*; Sergazy Sagyntai’s and Orazova Uzimbala’s testimonies in Tölebaev and Sabdenova eds., *32-niñ zulmaty*, 41, 65-66; Beti Akhmetbek’s testimony in *Qazaq Khalqynyñ Qasireti*, 43.

⁵³² Töken Bekmaghambetov, “Kolkhoz Ornaghannan Son,” in Qystaubaev and Khabdina eds., *Qyzylдар Qyrghyny*, 82.

⁵³³ Tynybaeva Qauazhan’s testimony in Tölebaev and Sabdenova eds., *32-niñ zulmaty*, 69.

asleep, and when she woke up in the morning she saw that her son was dying because parts of his body were cut off (according to the testimony, the child's heart was cut off, but it is not clear how he was still not dead but "dying"). She followed the drops of blood and the trail took her to one of her neighbor's house. There was a single guy living at this house; his wife and two children had recently gotten lost. When the mother entered, she faced a horrific scene: her neighbor was eating her little son's heart. The cannibal ignored the women's threat of shooting, and then the woman noticed the heads of the cannibal's lost wife and children. Before she could use her gun, the woman lost her mind.⁵³⁴

Another similar case ended with belated revenge. One day, leaving his mother and daughter at home, Alpysbay went hunting. When he returned from hunting, he could not find them at home. He followed their trails and came to a yurt. He understood that his mother and daughter fell victim to a cannibal. For some reason, he did not do anything then, but after two years suddenly he went and shot the cannibal. Senimqul Zhelderbaeva, who narrates the story, says that nobody really knows why he did not kill the cannibal immediately. When others asked, "why have you killed him", he only answered "it was necessary to kill, so I have done". Nobody, including the cannibal's family members, intervened in the case.⁵³⁵

Äsem Toqtabekova states that many parents ate their own children, because they thought if they could survive, they would have other children.⁵³⁶ One of the famine

⁵³⁴ Dana-bike Baykadamova's testimony, 231-232.

⁵³⁵ "Kek" in Zhüsip ed. *Asharshylyq Aqıqaty*, 98-100

⁵³⁶ Äsem Toqtabekova's testimony, 28

There were also cases when other members of the family practiced cannibalism Zhorabek Düysenbin remembers that an old man called Omar slaughtered and ate one of his grandchildren. His daughter-in-law saved her other child and escaped to the city to survive. Zhorabek Düysenbin, "Köz Körgen," in Qystaubaev and Khabdina eds., *Qyzylдар Qyrghyny*, 106.

survivors even claims that the mothers who ate their own children were not guilty. According to him, it was the famine that forced people because “life was sweet too”.⁵³⁷ This supports Kis’ point that Holodomor survivors express little moral judgement about the tragic decisions taken during the famine. Even cannibal mothers are not openly condemned because the survivors admit that they cannot imagine what they would do under a similar situation.⁵³⁸

Parents tried to resist the appeal of cannibalistic appetite. Some parents could not bear the thought of eating their own children. Hence, they exchanged children.⁵³⁹ According to one testimony, after the death of his mother and other children, one father was left with one of his children. He tried so hard to trap small animals, but once, he could not hunt anything for seven days. The father then swore that if he could not hunt anything for three more days, he would eat his own child, because if he dies, no one would take care of the child, but if he survives, he could have other children. The child’s life was saved on the last day.⁵⁴⁰ Shamshiya Zhüsipbekqyzy witnessed another tragic instance on the coast of Syr Darya river on the road from Uzbekistan. An exhausted man told his wife that God would give them other children if they themselves survived while looking at their little infant. The mother, behaving apathetically, said “let the fish eat the kid instead of you” and threw the infant into river.⁵⁴¹

⁵³⁷ Adilbek Nurmaghambetov, “Zulmat Zhyldyn Zulymdyqtary,” *ibid.*, 148.

⁵³⁸ Kis, “Defying Death,” 57.

⁵³⁹ Kamilla Raimqulova, “Zhizn’ Prostogo Cheloveka, Stavshaia Podvigom,” in *Chelovek v Istorii Kazakhstan – XX Vek: Sbornik rabot pobeditelei (Kazakhstanskii Konkurs Istoricheskikh Issledovatel’skikh Rabot Starsheklassnikov)*, ed. E. M. Gribanova (Almaty: 2003), 63.

⁵⁴⁰ Amandyq Amirkhamzin, “Torgaydaghy 1931-1932 zhyldardaghy asharshylyq,” in Zhüsip ed., *Asharshylyq Aqıqaty*, 311.

⁵⁴¹ Shamshiya Zhüsipbekqyzy’s testimony, *ibid.*, 258.

Cannibalism has been witnessed in almost all great famines in world history (not in all though) although it lacks sufficient documentation in many cases.⁵⁴² Russian émigré sociologist Pitirim Sorokin wrote that cannibalism inclines the suppression of not only religious, moral, legal, and aesthetic reflexes, but also of basic group preservation.⁵⁴³ That is exactly what happened in the Kazakh famine. Nevertheless, cannibalism is often a taboo topic for the collective memory of famines.⁵⁴⁴ That is related to an effort to preserve what is left from a group characteristic after such a destruction. In the Kazakh case, nonetheless, both famine testimonies and contemporary Kazakh media are quite open about cannibalism. Perhaps, this is because there is no nomadic society left to preserve or because the Kazakh famine is much less politicized than other cases. In this respect, the symbolic collapse of Kazakh society is even more desperate. Among all Kazakh cannibalism stories, the emphasis is usually on child victims. The phrase that “it was a period when father ate his own children” is repeated in numerous testimonies as a way to describe the calamity that Kazakh people experienced.⁵⁴⁵ There is more to

⁵⁴² For an overview of famine cannibalism in world history, see: Chapter 1: “Eating People is Wrong: Famine’s Darkest Secret?” in Cormac O Grada, *Eating People is Wrong, and Other Essays on Famine, Its Past, and Its Future* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2015). O Grada’s global coverage includes the Kazakh famine as one of the cases where cannibalism is documented (based on Kindler’s book) along with other Soviet famines. Yet, contrary to the appeal of the title of the chapter, it is mainly a descriptive review essay that lacks detailed discussion of the meanings and perceptions of famine cannibalism.

⁵⁴³ Pitirim A. Sorokin, *Hunger as a Factor in Human Affairs* (Gainesville: University of Florida Press, 1975), 136.

⁵⁴⁴ O Grada points out how sources are silent on cannibalism in the Irish case, not because it did not occur, but because it turned into as a powerful taboo. O Grada, *Eating People is Wrong*, 30-37. According to Snyder, cannibalism is a taboo of literature because communities try to protect their dignity by suppressing this kind of memories. Cannibalism has been a source of great shame for Ukrainians outside Soviet Ukraine. Snyder, *Bloodlands*, p. 51. Some Ukrainian famine testimonies include references to cannibalism though.

⁵⁴⁵ For other relatively detailed descriptions of cannibalism cases in testimonies, see, Zhumash Atay’s, Zhumazhan Zhetisbaev’s and Qayypbay Ata’s testimonies in *Qazaq Khalqynyñ Qasireti*, 23, 42, 63-64; Orazova Üzimbala Toqmyrzaqyzy’s and Qaūzhan Tynybaeva’s testimonies in Tölebaev and Sabdenova eds., *32-niñ zulmaty*, 65, 69; Töken Bekmaghambetov’s and Armiyal Tasymbek’s testimonies in Qystaūbaev and Khabdīna eds., *Qyzyldar Qyrghyny*, 82, 212.

suffering than meets the eye in this phrase. Nomadic society centered around lineage groups; having a son was so vital for the preservation of the lineage. When a father ate his son, he brought an end to his own lineage; metaphorically, he ate his own lineage's chance of survival.

Conclusion

The famine ended the way it had begun, slowly and gradually. Recovery started in the fall of 1933, and as 1934 progressed no more people died of starvation.⁵⁴⁶ However, the effects of the famine would be felt for years to come. The famine took not only hundreds of thousands of children's lives, but also surviving children felt the effect of malnutrition their whole life. Shayakhmetov was the size of a ten-year-old boy when he was thirteen due to years of malnutrition.⁵⁴⁷

The surviving children were not only physically affected by the famine. Growing up prematurely is one of the most common themes in famine testimonies. Kazakh children had to adapt to an adult world very early. Kazakh writer Ötebay Qanakhin, who was orphaned in 1932 at the age of nine, served various people. He fired up the stoves, cleaned up cowpat, reared calves, sheep, camel, and took care of little children.⁵⁴⁸ A whole generation lost their childhood. Bekenov, one of the survivors, writes that every period creates its own person, and in Kazakhstan, it was the famine that created this

⁵⁴⁶ Kindler, *Stalin's Nomads*, 216.

⁵⁴⁷ Shayakhmetov, *The Silent Steppe*, 235.

⁵⁴⁸ Ötebay Qanakhin, "Öz Közimmen Kördim" in Zakhardin Qystaubaev ed., *Naūbet: Publitsistikalyq oytolghaūlar* (Almaty: Zhalyn, 1990).

period's person.⁵⁴⁹ Yet, very little has been written about the person created by the famine in Kazakhstan. This chapter has tried to shed light on this person.

It is not easy to overestimate the importance of the famine in the history of Soviet Kazakhstan. In a rather speculative essay, Sergei Maksudov claims that the famine in Ukraine brought nothing less than dehumanization of peasants. They were passivized, reduced to submission; callousness, general apathy, loss of ethical standards, moral degradation and alcoholism became their characteristics in the long run. The peasant lost his love for his land, his love for work and his pride.⁵⁵⁰ Although, the causality Maksudov builds cannot be proved, it is clear that traditional social structures totally collapsed. In her old age, Aleksandra Vrakova, daughter of a Russian doctor, recalls how they saved several Kazakhs' lives during the famine. One of them was a three-year old girl. They tried so hard to keep the girl alive. The girl survived, but she did not remember anything. She did not know her parents, even her own name. Once, she looked blankly on her own face on a mirror. Aleksandra said it was a mirror and it became the little girl's new name.⁵⁵¹ This little girl's tragic story is in a sense a reflection of the Kazakh people's situation after the famine. Somehow, they survived, but they had lost all their ties to their previous life. Nor could parents overcome their trauma. During the famine, one mother who begged for some food in the bazaars decided to leave one of her daughters when nobody helped them. She abandoned her 3-year old daughter instead of her infant

⁵⁴⁹ Bekenov, *Qazaq Tutqyny*, 29.

⁵⁵⁰ Sergei Maksudov, "Dehumanization: The Change in the Moral and Ethical Consciousness of Soviet Citizens as a Result of Collectivization and Famine," *Harvard Ukrainian Studies* 30, no. 1 (2008).

⁵⁵¹ Aleksandra Vrakova, "Azaly Zhyldar Esteligi" in Qystaūbaev and Khabdīna eds., *Qyzyndar Qyrghyny*, 98. (Not clear if the girl's name became *Ayna* in Kazakh or *Zerkalo* in Russian, but possibly *Ayna* since it is more likely to be used as a human name).

because the 3-year old asked for bread. According to the story, the girl shouted behind her mother “Mom, mom! Take my scarf for the baby, otherwise she would freeze” as if she silently and consciously accepted her own fate. The mother would frequently cry because she would hear her daughter’s crying for her whole life.⁵⁵²

Kindler suggests that although the famine was not premediated, authorities accepted it as a welcome outcome, and it became a way to maintain power over the nomadic society. It was the famine that broke the resistance of the nomads to the Soviet regime.⁵⁵³ Pianciola too notes that the inclusion of Kazakhs in Soviet institutions was made possible by the famine’s destruction.⁵⁵⁴ Therefore, it can be argued that the famine created the necessary conditions for further Sovietization in the Kazakh steppe. Yet, this was not equal to Sovietization. Instead, the process can be defined as what Pianciola calls “etatization”.⁵⁵⁵

This chapter has discussed Kazakh children’s experiences during the famine and how survivors made sense of the catastrophe through images of children. In contrast to the illusion of continuity and linear progression of Kazakh history created by Kazakh intellectuals (as discussed in the previous chapter), Kazakhs’ lives were forever ruptured by the tide of the famine. The famine was primarily a demographic catastrophe. However, cultural and symbolic aspects of the famine are understudied. No social norm was left alive after selling, abandoning, killing and even eating children. Kindler accepts Shayakhmetov’s claim that the extreme solidarity among family members made survival

⁵⁵² The mother later told the story to Törebek Teūkelov’s mother, and the story is recalled by Teūkulov. Zhūsip ed., *Asharshylyq Aqıqaty*, 229.

⁵⁵³ Kindler, *Stalin’s Nomads*, 10.

⁵⁵⁴ Pianciola, “Famine in the Steppe,” 191.

⁵⁵⁵ *Ibid.*, 147-148; 190-191.

possible even under the most difficult conditions.⁵⁵⁶ However, dozens of other testimonies make it very explicit that it was indeed a time when nobody cared about anyone. In this sense, Shayakhmetov's experience is the exception, not the rule.

Why do children occupy such a central role in Kazakh testimonies? The simple fact is that children represent the future of any society. Therefore, images of starving and dying children, first of all, represent the lack of any hope for the future of Kazakh society. Secondly, all these testimonies about girls sold by their fathers, infants abandoned by their mothers, children killed and even eaten by their parents prove that the collapse brought by the famine was much deeper than a demographic crisis. In order to better understand the effects of this tragedy, we need to look beyond physical devastation and see the role of symbolic collapse of a whole society. Only then, we can really appreciate the extent of the catastrophe.

⁵⁵⁶ Kindler, *Stalin's Nomads*, 165.

CHAPTER 3

ORPHANS OF FAMINE: RETHINKING SOVIETIZATION IN CENTRAL ASIA, 1933-1941

On March 27, 1936, A. Orlov, one of the most active inspectors in Kazakhstan and a member of Almaty City Soviet, sent a report directly to Levon Mirzoyan and Nikolai Semashko, chairman of the Children's Commission in Moscow (and to the infamous Yezhov). He started his report by saying that in some detdoms in the city of Almaty, children were brutally bullied, beaten, left hungry, locked up in cold raw basements, kept in inhuman conditions that causes mass diseases. Instead of communist education, they were "intentionally vaccinated with the feeling of national animosity", isolated from modern life in a complete environment of neglect and ignorance. Consequently, they were on the path to hooliganism and crime. Not surprisingly, he directly accused certain detdom directors and educators and asked higher authorities whether they knew these "criminals" were among the cadres of GorONO and Narkompros. He added that these people got frequently drunk in front of children (including "bacchanalias"), stole government resources, used little girls for sexual relations and so on. There was no political or cultural education at all, and even though their crimes were known to lesser authorities, none of them were punished.⁵⁵⁷

⁵⁵⁷ TsGARK, f. 30, op. 4, d. 1144, ll. 128-131 (From Orlov to Mirzoyan, Sharangovich, Yezhov and Semashko)

On the one hand, Orlov's accusations against certain individuals and local authorities resonate with the denunciations of the era of Terror. Yet, on the other hand, he was one of the well-known inspectors in Kazakhstan and when this report was written purges did not gain a momentum yet. In addition, his courage to address the highest authorities reached almost the level of impudence since he was apparently not only accusing local authorities, but also higher authorities for doing nothing about these problems. For all these reasons, his report looks like a reliable source.

This example is definitely not a unique case. Almost without exception, all reports from the 1930s present a similar picture. Neither the goal of political education, nor internationalism were achieved in detdoms. A cultured way of life and hygiene, which were at the heart of cultural revolution particularly among “backward” populations, was only a dream. Children could not even be fed properly nor given medical treatment. In such an environment they could not adopt a Soviet identity or internalize the essentials of the cultural revolution. Their lives were transformed. The old life was destroyed, but a new Soviet person did not emerge.

It is probably not surprising that proponents of modern political and ideological projects see children broadly as the future of their nations or empires. However, among all children, orphans are usually singled out as the true bearers of various ideologies. Because orphans are free of parental influences and even to a considerable extent of societal influences, they have been usually seen as the best raw material. The importance of orphans for specific nationalist or imperialistic projects are noted in many different contexts. In the modern age, the perception of orphans as tabula rasa is common and using them to realize future visions is a frequent practice across the globe.⁵⁵⁸

The Bolshevik vision viewed orphans as the prime candidates for the creation of a new Soviet person. Orphans were idealized insomuch that, as Svetlana Boym suggests,

⁵⁵⁸ Owen White, *Children of the French Empire: Miscegenation and Colonial Society in French West Africa 1895-1960* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1999); Nazan Maksudyan, *Orphans and Destitute Children in the Late Ottoman Empire* (Syracuse, NY: Syracuse University Press, 2014); M. Colette Plum, “Inscribing War Orphans' Losses into the Language of the Nation in Wartime China, 1937-1945” in *Childhood, Youth, and Emotions in Modern History: National, Colonial, and Global Perspectives*, ed. Stephanie Olsen (London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2015); Aldis Purs, “Orphaned Testimonies: The Place of Displaced Children in Independent Latvia, 1918-26” in Nick Baron ed., *Displaeced Children in Russia and Eastern Europe*; Elizabeth White, “Relief, Reconstruction and the Rights of the Child: The Case of Russian Displaced Children in Constantinople, 1920-22,” in Nick Baron ed., *Displaeced Children in Russia and Eastern Europe*.

by the mid-1920s pedagogical conceptions secured their position as the dominant tool for the creation of a new Soviet person, and “[T]he pedagogical ideal is not a fantastic new Adam or Eve but a reformed orphan, the former homeless hooligan-*besprizornik*, a child of the Civil War turned into an exemplary builder of communism. The orphanage or camp of *besprizorniks*, a confined space with full-time instruction and paramilitary discipline”.⁵⁵⁹ Presumably having been saved from the negative impact of the old society, the image of orphan so deeply shaped the Soviet mind that theorists agreed that eventually all children would be cared for by the state in public nurseries, childcare centers, and schools by substituting science for love, and the "rationality" of educators for the "irrationality" of parents; the early Soviet vision also foresaw the withering of the institution of the family completely.⁵⁶⁰ Thus, ideally, children’s homes were not to be established only for orphans, but for all children.⁵⁶¹ Despite the abandonment of this utopic vision, these institutions continued to be shaped by the long-standing dream of forging the New Man.⁵⁶²

As already discussed in Chapter 1, the image of the orphan was central in the Kazakh context too. In Soviet Kazakh narrative, children who were “saved” by the Bolshevik Revolution from the exploitation of feudal bays were preferably orphans. Published in 1934, Beyimbet Maylin’s *Azamat Azamatyich* became a classic of Kazakh literature.⁵⁶³ Young Azamat, previously Kozhalak Kurkildekov before he had changed his

⁵⁵⁹ Boym, *Common Places*, 91.

⁵⁶⁰ Goldman, *Women, the State and Revolution*, 8-9; 12.

⁵⁶¹ However, this early Soviet utopia could not be realized. Indeed, it was mainly because of the problem of the abandoned children that the family was resurrected; the family was the only institution that could take care of a child at no cost to the state. *Ibid.*, 100.

⁵⁶² Stone, “Growing up Soviet?,” 22.

⁵⁶³ Beyimbet Maylin, *Azamat Azamatyich* (Almaty: Zhazūshy, 2009) [originally published in 1934].

name⁵⁶⁴, happily grows up in a detdom (although he is not an orphan) and then becomes a model Soviet citizen. Azamat represents the new Soviet person who was raised by the Soviet regime, and the novel depicts his somewhat heroic struggle against the enemies of the people who try to deceive the Soviet authorities and Azamat himself. In a children's story from 1941, the main hero declares that detdom is both his mother and father; pioneer and Komsomol groups are his home. At first, he missed his family, but now his mother, sister, and brother all can be found in detdom. Since there is detdom, how can he be an orphan?⁵⁶⁵ The happy life of the Kazakh orphan and his heroic struggle for Soviet power is reproduced time and again in Soviet Kazakh literature.

The influence of orphans was not limited to images. Adrienne Edgar argues that members of the new Communist elite were often marginalized people within local societies. Among others, orphans too belonged to this category. In fact, two of the three most important Turkmen officials in the new Turkmen Republic were men who had been orphaned in their early childhood.⁵⁶⁶ In the Bukharan People's Republic, some observers claimed that orphanages were "student factories". Quite a few members of the new elite were orphans who had grown up outside the traditional family structure.⁵⁶⁷ Coming from an aristocratic family, Mustafa Shoqay, an influential member of the nationalist Alash party with a privileged pre-Soviet education, described the early Kazakh Bolsheviks as "a rare collection of the most unpopular and most compromised elements in the steppe".⁵⁶⁸

⁵⁶⁴ Adopting new names to reflect the new age is a popular trend for the children in the novel. Most of them adopt Russian names, while Kozhalak chooses the Kazakh name Azamat Azamatych (Azamat means citizen in Kazakh).

⁵⁶⁵ Gabdol Slanov, "Pioner Kündeligi," *Pioner* 1, (1941): 8.

⁵⁶⁶ Edgar, *Tribal Nation*, 104-105.

⁵⁶⁷ Khalid, *Making Uzbekistan*, 157.

⁵⁶⁸ M. Shoqay, *Shygharmalarynyň tolyq zhīnaghy (ekinshi Tom)* (Almaty: Daik-Press, 2012), 161.

Sabit Mukanov, future president of Kazakhstan's Writers' Union, is a good example of a Kazakh orphan who joined the Bolsheviks during the Civil War and eventually made a career as one of the most influential Soviet Kazakh writers. His famous autobiographical novel starts with a description of how he suffered as an orphan in his childhood.⁵⁶⁹

Before the Revolution Kazakhs had no orphanage experience.⁵⁷⁰ In the nomadic Kazakh society, as elsewhere in pre-Soviet Central Asia, orphaned children were usually adopted by their relatives. Hence, detdom life itself was a new experience for Kazakh children. In fact, extended families remained the main caretaker for orphans in rural Uzbekistan up until World War 2.⁵⁷¹ In Kazakhstan, it already started to change with the famine of 1921-22, but the real blow came in 1930-33. Orphans were a large-scale social problem for the Bolsheviks from the beginning, and due to the great famine, Kazakhstan became a hotbed of the orphans' crisis.

In her study of the Kazakh famine, Sarah Cameron noted how Soviet regime's plans for socialist education and upbringing of youth intersected with the orphan crisis of the famine.⁵⁷² In fact, there is a widespread, almost universal, perception of detdoms (also of schools, but particularly detdoms) as institutions of not only Sovietization, but also Russification. This perception is widespread both among Kazakhs and non-Kazakhs. Whomever I talked to about my project had preconceived opinions about detdoms as the model Soviet institutions where Kazakh children were brainwashed to believe

⁵⁶⁹ Sabit Mukanov, *Ömir Mektebi (birinshi tom)* (Almaty: Zhazūshy, 2002) [Originally published in 1949], 8-10.

⁵⁷⁰ For an amateur attempt to write the history of detdoms in Kazakhstan that mostly skips the 1930s, see, Gulzhan Imandosova and Daniyar Nurlanov, "Istoriia Detskikh Domov na Territorii Semirech'ia," in *Chelovek v Istorii Kazakhstan*, 258-267.

⁵⁷¹ Among 44 respondents of Kamp, only 3 were raised in detdoms in the 1920s and 1930s. Remaining orphans were all adopted by relatives. Kamp, "Kinship and Orphans".

⁵⁷² Cameron, "The Hungry Steppe," 279.

wholeheartedly in the ideals of Marxism.⁵⁷³ The majority also believe the Soviet regime used these institutions to consciously Russify Kazakh children.

Analyzing the experiences of orphans and detdoms provides new insight into Soviet policies in Central Asia. On the one hand, orphans⁵⁷⁴ were at the margins of society which allows us to move beyond a focus on the elite and the activists. On the other hand, orphans were at the center of the Soviet project which provides an opportunity to analyze Sovietization in Central Asia. Having been separated not only from their families, but also from their traditional society, it can be assumed that orphans of the Kazakh famine were ideal targets for the policies of the so-called Sovietization and cultural revolution.

However, I argue that, in contrast to widespread assumptions, Sovietization in the sense of creating the new Soviet person or in the sense of a Soviet civilizing mission, to a considerable extent, failed in the detdoms of Kazakhstan in the 1930s.⁵⁷⁵ It might be

⁵⁷³ There is also a widespread perception of Marxism being an omnipotent, omnipresent and unchanging ideology which allegedly dominated all aspects of life from the beginning to the end. Even though Soviet historiography went beyond the totalitarian school decades ago, this perception of Marxism and the Soviet rule still dominates discussions about Kazakh identity let alone popular perceptions. In this understanding, being Soviet means embracing socialist ideals wholeheartedly while Marxism leaves no room for any other discourse. Insebayeva, "Imagining the Nation"; Dadabayeva and Sharipova, "The Imagined Nation-State in Soviet Literature".

⁵⁷⁴ Not all the children in detdoms were orphans. It is better to say that this is primarily a study of detdoms.

⁵⁷⁵ Stone notes that the majority of reports about detdoms were written by people who were concerned for children. Therefore, they tended to focus on shortcomings and problems in detdoms; many archival documents tend to give a negative picture of detdoms. However, inspectors also reported on better functioning institutions. Stone, "Growing up Soviet?", 90.

I admit that my sources shape my perception of detdoms. However, Stone also notes how there was a widespread tendency to estimate the number of besprizorniks on minimal data (pp. 44-45). Moreover, a comparison of the detdoms in the European parts that Stone studied with my examples clearly show that the situation was much more horrific in Kazakhstan (pp. 94-95). The destruction brought by the Kazakh famine was not comparable to those regions of the Soviet Union that were not hit similarly. Within Russia, not surprisingly, the Lower Volga Territory hosted the worst detdoms (p. 96). Hence, it is not accurate to claim that official documents present an exclusively negative picture.

In contrast, there is a perception among some Kazakh historians that official Soviet documents always lie and present a very positive picture. While I was working in the archive, a prominent Kazakh historian

correct that cultural revolution in Central Asia established a framework for a new identity, but this chapter argues that at best the influence of that framework was quite limited before the war. Hence, I suggest that we need to question the central role of cultural revolution in the formation of Soviet identities and general stability in Central Asia.

This chapter primarily looks at the material conditions, internationalism and inter-ethnic relations, political and cultural education, and hygiene in the children's homes which are commonly associated with cultural revolution and the Soviet identity.⁵⁷⁶A discussion of children's homes necessarily requires a descriptive methodology in which I need to reconstruct life in the orphanages including conditions, the health and education of the children, and the numbers of children who were under the authority of these houses. However, I also discuss the success or failure of Sovietization, and identity formation based on limited sources.⁵⁷⁷ Internal correspondence of state institutions and a number of letters and petitions written by former *detdom* children also allow us to discuss whether *detdom* children were successfully integrated into society or not.

dismissed the documents I was working on by claiming that those documents all lie and only praise the Soviet regime.

⁵⁷⁶ Cultural revolution here is understood as the Soviet version of a civilizing process. See, Vadim Volkov, "The concept of *kul'turnost'*: notes on the Stalinist civilizing process," in *Stalinism: New Directions* ed. Sheila Fitzpatrick, (London and New York: Routledge, 2000).

⁵⁷⁷ Lack of scholarly attention on orphans of the Kazakh or Ukrainian famines of the 1930s is not only a consequence of Russo-centric history writing. The most important reason for the coverage of the 1920s is abundance of sources including detailed reports, academic analysis, memoirs, interviews, and the public debate over the orphan crisis. Since most of the 1920s' orphans owed their destiny to processes that could not be blamed primarily on the Soviet government such as war, famine, and associated epidemics, the regime allowed public debate and presented abandoned children as a legacy of capitalism. However, the orphan crisis of 1930s was a consequence of the collectivization famines. The party did not acknowledge the famines and the relevant orphan crises. Hence, studying orphans in Kazakhstan is a challenging attempt because of the lack of sources; one must almost entirely rely on archival documents that prioritize financial issues, material conditions in the orphanages, and the numbers and statistics with only rare insight into opinions, emotions, and psychologies of children. Stone too attracts attention to the difficulties of studying *bezprizornost'* in the 1930s. The ideological climate of the 1930s which was much less sympathetic to homeless children was a main reason for the lack of sources. Stone, "Growing up Soviet?," 44-45.

Detdom as a “Death Camp”

In 1934, at a meeting of the Children’s Commission, K. Savchenko, deputy chairman of the Central Children’s Commission who was sent from Moscow to Kazakhstan during the famine years, took the floor after Kazakh bureaucrats spoke about the improvements in detdoms. Having admitted that the situation was, of course, not as bad as the year before, he said: “Last year, there were barbaric relations with children. I have seen so much grief in my life, but the horror that I had to go through here, I have not seen anywhere”.⁵⁷⁸

Savchenko’s statement is one of the most honest descriptions of the enormous tragedies lived in Kazakhstan’s detdoms through the famine years. It is also a reminder that what is called “improvement” by some bureaucrats is very questionable since it means nothing more than the end of the terrible famine. In fact, throughout the famine years, detdoms resembled death camps. The adjective most common in the documents to describe the situation is “catastrophic”. A report by Savchenko claimed that half of the children perished in one month in many detdoms. He expressed how horrified he was: “With regards to children’s upbringing, I am speechless – I am fighting to save their

⁵⁷⁸ TsGARK, f. 509, op. 1, d. 213, l. 12 (Stenogramma Zasedaniia Prezidiuma Tsentral’noi Detskoi Komissii – 17 Maia 1934 g.).

Children’s Commission included representatives from various state organs. Uzaqbay Qulymbetov, chairman of the Central Executive Committee of the Kazakh SSR, served as the head of the commission from 1933 to 1936 which is a proof of how serious a problem child homelessness was. As of September 1, 1933, Zhürgenov and Rozhdestvenskii were the deputy chairmen. Other members of the commission included Abdrakhmanov (NK RKI), Baymukhanov (NKP), Kozlov (NKZdrav), Yusupbekov – replaced by Morozov- (KSPS), Tubanov – replaced by Taldykova (Kraikomol), Bessonov – replaced by Zadorozhna – (NKF), Olikov (NKYust), Sanalieva (Kraikom VKP/b), Diuzheva (Sekretar TsDTK). TsGARK, f. 509, op. 1, d. 227, l. 3.

lives”.⁵⁷⁹

At least in some cases, children had a better chance of survival on the street than in the detdoms. This was captured by a Narkomzdrav official: the situation was so catastrophic that the children would either perish or escape from the institution.⁵⁸⁰ In the summer of 1932, one detgorod located 30 kms from Semey was completely unable to feed children. On the day the authorities investigated, children had not had any bread for four days. Each day 5-6 children were dying, and the number reached to 35 in some days.⁵⁸¹ In two detdoms and one children’s nursery in the Belagach raion in Eastern Kazakhstan, 311 of 766 children died in 1932 and 113 of them escaped.⁵⁸² Tobol detdom of Northern Kazakhstan Province was founded in September 1933. 230 of 500 children could not survive the winter.⁵⁸³ Children at the detdoms buried their loved ones with their own hands. Zheteū Nurmanov’s mother took refuge in Turkmenistan, while her three children stayed at a detdom in Qonyrat. 11-years old Zheteū buried his sister Arūzhan (8-9-years old) and his brother Bazarbay (6-7-years old) himself.⁵⁸⁴ One report from Pavlodar in February 1932 declared that “‘detdom’ – it should rather be called a morgue”.⁵⁸⁵

⁵⁷⁹ Quoted in Cameron, “The Hungry Steppe,” 281.

⁵⁸⁰ TsGARK, f. 509, op. 1, d. 209, ll. 17-19.

It was so terrible in some detdoms in Kharkiv during the Ukrainian famine, children asked the police to be allowed to die in the open air: “Let me die in peace, I don’t want to die in the death barracks”. Quoted in Snyder, *Bloodlands*, 22-23.

⁵⁸¹ When the detgorod was first established shortly earlier there had been 1200 children, but the number already decreased to 490. Around 100 of them escaped and the half had died.

TsGARK, f. 509, op. 1, d. 178, ll. 26-27 (Report by OGPU representative Rachinokii, July 6, 1932).

⁵⁸² TsGARK, f. 509, op. 1, d. 178, ll. 126-128. (Tezisnaia Zapiska: O Sostoianii bor’by s detskoi besprizornost’iu v V. K. Oblasti).

⁵⁸³ APRK, f. 141, op. 1, d. 7692, ll. 61-63 (Letter from Biisen uly, head of the political section of Tobol detdom, to Mirzoyan).

⁵⁸⁴ Nurmanov Zheteū’s testimony in Zhüsip ed., *32-niñ zulmaty*, 131.

⁵⁸⁵ “Zaiavlenie politicheskikh ssyl’nykh,” 98-99.

Famine itself was never acknowledged; however, it was not rare that during the famine years newspapers wrote about the street children or problems at the detdoms. Some of them were surprisingly honest about the terrible conditions, but always blamed local authorities and cadres for the problems.⁵⁸⁶ In 1933, one newspaper reported that there was no work at detdoms and workers just guarded children in order to prevent their escape. Nevertheless, children kept running away in groups. Children only came to detdoms to have meals, when they were available, and at other times no one knew where they were. Detdoms turned into nutrition stations.⁵⁸⁷ In some regions, there were not even buildings for children, so some children lived in yurts or barns under terrible conditions; in some places 15-20 children lived in tiny barns, in others 300 of them struggled to survive in one corridor and others slept on the streets.⁵⁸⁸

Kazakh authorities attempted to underestimate the size of the tragedy. In October 1933, the Almaty regional children's commission claimed that child homelessness in the oblast was liquidated; even though there were still children on the streets, their number was not more than 200-250.⁵⁸⁹ Authorities also claimed that a significant number of abandoned children actually had parents or relatives who either had left their children in

⁵⁸⁶ Volgina, "Detskomu domu maksimum vnimaniia," *Pravda Iuzhnogo-Kazakhstana*, April 18, 1933; "Detskim domam-vnimanie vsei obshchestvennosti," *Pravda Iuzhnogo-Kazakhstana*, August 12, 1933, 2; "Detdomy Chimkenta Ne Gotovy k Zime," *Pravda Iuzhnogo-Kazakhstana*, October 20, 1933, 4; "Dat besprizornikam – Putevku v Zhizn'," *Rabochaia Pravda*, June 28, 1933, 2; K. Abilkhair, "Razvalivaiiut Detskii Dom," *Karagandinskaia Kommuna*, December 17, 1935, 3; "Detdom zhumysy kamsamol baqylaūynda bolsyn," *Leninshil Zhas*, May 21, 1933.

⁵⁸⁷ Volgina, "Vyshe kachestvo bor'by s detskoii besprizornost'iu," *Pravda Iuzhnogo-Kazakhstana*, June 27, 1933, 2.

⁵⁸⁸ Document No 65: "Dokladnaia zapiska v SNK KazASSR ob ustroistve vozvrativshikhsia bezhentsev," 176.

⁵⁸⁹ Document No 62: "Iz Doklada Predsedatelia Alma-Atinskoi Oblastnoi Detskoi Komissii" in *Qazaq Khalqynyñ Qasireti*, 306-307.

search of bread, or children had lagged behind otkochevniks.⁵⁹⁰ Members of Kazakh Children's Commission such as Seyitqali Mendeshiev and Abdrakhmanov tried to understate the numbers by claiming that many of the abandoned children had parents, therefore they were not besprizorniks. They argued that authorities did not have reliable data and debates over besprizornost' were only speculations.⁵⁹¹ In response, Savchenko said that he could not understand Mendeshiev's logic. A child, he argued, was already a besprizornik if he was on the street and if his parents did not feed him.⁵⁹²

One of the most striking features of the debates (indeed of all the documents about detdoms in these years) on besprizornost' is the dry language and the complete lack of sentimentalism on Kazakh authorities' part. With hundreds of children dying each day and thousands more suffering unbearable pain, I was shocked to see that bureaucrats never ever used emotional language to describe the suffering of children. An exception is Khasen Nurmukhamedov who could not bear the silence over famine and took the floor at the sixth plenum: "Everyone is talking about the livestock reduction. ... Yet, we often forget the essential element of productive force – human beings. Population in some regions is under very harsh conditions. ... We have up to 80.000 abandoned children in Kazakhstan".⁵⁹³ For this comment, Nurmukhamedov was accused of bourgeois philanthropic tendencies and he had to admit that he had made a mistake.⁵⁹⁴ Other than this example, Savchenko was the only one who frequently got emotional and opposed

⁵⁹⁰ TsGARK, f. 509, op. 1, d. 163, ll. 108-110 (Letter from Diuzhev, secretary of Kazakhstan Central Ispolkom to Children's Commission in Leningrad, August 1933).

⁵⁹¹ TsGARK, f. 509, op. 1, d. 167, ll. 46-57 (Stenogramma: Zasedaniia Sekretariata Kazakskogo Tsentralnogo Iсполnitelnogo Komiteta, g. Alma-Ata, May 8, 1932).

⁵⁹² Ibid., 77 (Stenogramma: Vneochednogo zasedaniia Prizidiuma Tsentral'noi Detkomissii pri Prizidiuma Kaz. TsIK'a, May 13, 1932).

⁵⁹³ Quoted in Mikhailov, *Khronika Velikogo Dzhuta*, 297.

⁵⁹⁴ Kindler, *Stalin's Nomads*, 173-174.

this numb approach. Once, having listened to the representative of Narkomsnab on the question of besprizornost', he commented by saying "he thinks that children are not humans. He only talked about plans, outfits; and he did not say anything about what was actually done".⁵⁹⁵ Interestingly, Savchenko, a Russian official from Moscow, frequently defended Kazakh orphans against Kazakh officials.

When Savchenko left Kazakhstan, he asked Kazakh authorities to inform him once every ten days about child besprizornost' in Kazakhstan. He also asked authorities to send him Kazakh newspapers which published articles about besprizornost'.⁵⁹⁶ However, no one kept him informed. In May 1934, he criticized Kazakh authorities harshly. He was quite angry that Kazakh authorities were all complaining about funds. According to him, the problem was not funding, he claimed that the party paid special attention to Kazakhstan and sent more money in comparison to other regions, but everyone was stealing from the budget openly. In fact, corruption was admitted in many documents. As one official stated in 1934, there was usually no fund for detdoms at all, and even when there was, it was stolen before funds reached detdoms. Children's bread was stolen by officials.⁵⁹⁷ According to Savchenko, Kazakh authorities could not satisfactorily succeed in anything. In 1934, When a Kazakh official said they did not know how to transfer children to other regions, Savchenko replied: "Take the Northern Caucasus for example, the situation there was not better than yours, but they very quickly

⁵⁹⁵ TsGARK, f. 509, op. 1, d. 213, l. 17 (Stenogramma Zasedaniya Prezidiuma Tsentral'noi Detskoi Komissii – 17 Maia 1934 g.).

⁵⁹⁶ TsGARK, f. 509, op. 1, d. 212, ll. 37-38 (From Savchenko to Mironov, April 25, 1933).

⁵⁹⁷ APRK, f. 141, op. 1, d. 7701, l. 2 (K voprosu 'o sostoianii i prodelannoii raboty po detbesprizornosti za 1933 goda i 1-y kvartal 1934 goda"', April 10, 1934).

managed this job. ... After all, you insufficiently managed this job; it is better to transfer children than starve them and silently watch how they die”.⁵⁹⁸

In the summer of 1934, Savchenko directly wrote to Mirzoyan. In the letter, he accused Narkomrpos and Narkomzdrav of Kazakhstan, saying homeless children were dying, getting sick at the detdoms, but nobody was paying attention to this. We learn that he sent 250 thousand rubles to start construction of a sanatorium for children sick with tuberculosis, but Narkomzdrav did nothing. He could not get a response from Sovnarkom and the Children’s Commission and that was why he wrote to Mirzoyan directly.⁵⁹⁹ On August 26, 1934, Savchenko sent another telegraph and complained that even though he had asked Kazakh authorities to keep him updated about child besprizornost’, he had received no information at all.⁶⁰⁰

On the opposite side, Kazakh authorities were quite disturbed by Savchenko’s continuous complaints. In a letter to Semashko, Uzaqbay Qulymbetov wrote that Savchenko repeatedly emphasized problems in Kazakh detdoms based on newspaper articles. However, what Savchenko claimed either had already lost its freshness or was published on Kazakh authorities’ own demand. In a region that was badly in need of pedagogical cadres, Qulymbetov continued, of course, there might be individual

⁵⁹⁸ TsGARK, f. 509, op. 1, d. 213, ll. 17-18 (Stenogramma Zasedaniya Prezidiuma Tsentral’noi Detskoi Komissii – 17 Maia 1934 g.).

It is necessary to note that various Soviet organs that were supposed to collaborate in the struggle against besprizornost’ frequently came into outright conflict. Children’s Commission continued to criticize local Narkompros officials across the Soviet Union for a wide range of deficiencies in detdoms. In turn, local Narkompros officials usually resented Children’s Commission. Stone, “Growing up Soviet?,” 53-56.

⁵⁹⁹ TsGARK, f. 509, op. 1, d. 272, ll. 51-52 (From Savchenko to Mirzoyan, July 10, 1934).

⁶⁰⁰ TsGARK, f. 509, op. 1, d. 272, l. 40 (From Savchenko to Children’s Commission in Kazakhstan).

problems, yet they believed that the conditions in detdoms were incomparably better now.⁶⁰¹

The tensions between Almaty and Moscow did not come to an end. In 1935, Semashko singled out Kazakhstan (together with Omsk oblast) as an example of poor work at detdoms (positive examples included Leningrad, Saratov and Michurinsk). Not surprisingly, local Children's Commissions were to blame.⁶⁰² After the publication of an article about the problems in Kazakhstan's detdoms in March 1936, Semashko sent another warning message to Qulymbetov and once more harshly criticized the Kazakh Children's Commission.⁶⁰³

Material Conditions and Hygiene in the Detdoms

A regional newspaper article in 1936 provided description of a model detdom. "15 years to October", a children's commune in Eastern Kazakhstan, is a self-sufficient, model institution. Even though there are only 217 children, the commune has 436 sheep, 17 horses, 200 cattle of which 42 are dairy cattle, 31 pigs and various domestic birds. The commune did not ask for milk or meat from the authorities. That was not all. They harvested 250 hectares of crops and grew their own potatoes, cabbage and carrots. This was all thanks to the efforts of the director. He was appointed in 1933 when "agriculture was weakened" and assumed responsibility of 247 homeless children. Each child was reported to have said that their "stomachs were full, clothes were new, and lessons were good". Educators were chosen among the children themselves: 15-year-old Amantai and

⁶⁰¹ TsGARK, f. 509, op. 1., d. 335 (Undated letter from Qulymbetov to Semashko).

⁶⁰² TsGARK, f. 509, op. 1, d. 335, ll. 106-113 (Materialy po tekhnimumu dlia rabotnikov Detkomissii).

⁶⁰³ TsGARK, f. 509, op. 1, d. 335 (From Semashko to Qulymbetov, March 6, 1936).

Gulzhamal. There was no ethnic strife and children all together sang Russian and Kazakh songs. However, the newspaper reported that even such a model *detdom* lacked children's clubs, red corners and libraries.⁶⁰⁴ As can be seen in this description, the ideal *detdom* was a financially self-sufficient one. Priorities were clear: a children's institution that did not bring a financial burden to the authorities was preferred. Other issues including education, internationalism and political and cultural education were afterthoughts.



Image 10: Growing flowers in Qaskeleñ *detdom*, Almaty oblast (1951).⁶⁰⁵

However, those priorities were barely achieved. Although the horror of the famine years had passed, material conditions in children's homes would not be improved sufficiently for years to come.⁶⁰⁶ Child mortality rates would significantly decrease

⁶⁰⁴ Shaimerden, "Önegeli Det Kamuvna," *Ekpindi*, March 10, 1936, 3.

⁶⁰⁵ TsGAKFDZRK, 4-1269.

Unfortunately, there are only a few photos of *detdoms* in the 1930s.

⁶⁰⁶ One might dismiss the influence of material conditions on self-identification of children by pointing out that material conditions were not satisfactory for the great majority of Soviet people throughout the 1930s. However, as Stone notes, Soviet orphans' experiences were shaped as much by the concrete material conditions of *detdoms* as by the ideological efforts to form Soviet subjects. Stone, "Growing up Soviet?," 77-78.

toward the end of the decade; but because of undesirable conditions in children's institutions, high mortality rates continued for a few years after the end of the famine. Even in 1935, infant mortality rates at the infant houses were alarming: 60% in Qostanay, 50% in Qyzylorda, and 75% in Eastern Kazakhstan oblasts.⁶⁰⁷ The children's diet remained a significant problem even when children were no longer starving. Most of the detdoms provided only one sort of food twice a day. At one of the detdoms in Qyzylorda in 1937, for a period of 10-12 days, children ate only noodles (*lapsha*) twice a day, and they did not taste fats in their meals.⁶⁰⁸ Nor did detdoms have enough clothes, shoes, coats, underwear, bedding or fuel for children. Sick children were not treated properly, and insanitary conditions prevailed.⁶⁰⁹

Funding was the greatest reason for the poor material conditions regardless of whether central authorities failed to provide enough funds or corrupt detdom workers stole the money. In 1936, an official confessed that financial support for detdoms had not improved, it had even worsened.⁶¹⁰ Not surprisingly, many newspaper articles presented an ideal picture of detdoms. It was claimed that even disabled children, who were simply abandoned to their own fate in the Tsarist era, were given all the opportunities they needed to enjoy a happy life.⁶¹¹ However, it was also not rare that inadequacies in detdoms were publicized. Party authorities declared in newspapers that children at

⁶⁰⁷ TsGARK, f. 509, op. 1, d. 370, ll. 143-145.

⁶⁰⁸ TsGARK, f. 509, op. 1, d. 422, ll. 57-59.

⁶⁰⁹ APRK, f. 141, op. 1, d. 10585, l. 170 (O Proverke Material'no- Bytivogo Polozheniia i Vospitatel'noi Raboty Detdomov).

⁶¹⁰ TsGARK, f. 30, op. 5, d. 836, l. 109 (Stenograficheskii Otchet: Vystuplenii po voprosu 'O sostoianii detdomov, Zasedanie Sovnarkoma ot 7-go maya 1936 g.).

⁶¹¹ S. Kozhevnikova, "V Detskom Dome Fizicheski-Defektivnykh Detei," *Prikaspiiskaia Pravda*, October 10, 1936, 2.

detdoms were starving and naked although detdoms were provided with adequate clothing and other necessary items.⁶¹²

The geographical distribution of detdoms in Kazakhstan was another significant challenge. The vast geography of the republic made logistics of supplies highly difficult. For example, reports frequently presented a very negative picture of Spasskii detdom. This detdom was built 40 km from Karaganda; there was no available transportation there and consequently supply of food or fuel was highly difficult.⁶¹³ In a letter to the Sovnarkom of Russian SSR, Aliev, the deputy head of Kazakh Sovnarkom, explained that detdoms in Kazakhstan differed from others in the Union with respect to their geographical locations. Many detdoms with large number of children were located more than 50-100 kms from raion centers and railways.⁶¹⁴ For example, Dzhangalinsk detdom in Western Kazakhstan province was located 200 kms from the railway; hence, even in 1940, there were never vegetables at the detdom and water was brought from 10 km away. Consequently, there was a mass scurvy disease, tuberculosis and trachoma; in January 1940 alone 15 children died of diseases.⁶¹⁵

Throughout the decade, officials continuously complained about the lack of any central authority over regions. Usually there was no reliable information on even how many children died. In a speech (probably by one of the head officials of the Children's

⁶¹² "Zaidemte v Detskim Dom: Produkty est', odezhda est', bel'e est', a deti golodnye i oborvannye (Iz besedy s brigadoi kraikoma VKP(b): upolnomochennym VTsIK'a t. Tregubovym i upolnomochennym Kaznarkomprosa tov. Polianskim," *Priirtyshskaia Pravda*, May 24, 1934, 3.

⁶¹³ TsGARK, f. 509, op. 1, d. 322, ll. 100-103 (Dokladnaia Zapiska: Sostoianii Detskoi besprizornosti v Karagandinskoi oblasti po sostoianiiu na 1/IY-34 goda).

⁶¹⁴ He was asking a large amount from the budget for transportation for this reason. TsGARK, f. 30, op. 3, d. 1077, l. 69 (From Aliev to Sulimov, May 10, 1935).

⁶¹⁵ TsGARK, f. 1692, op. 1, d. 386, l. 10 (Dokladnaia zapiska o sostoianii detdomov v Zapadno-Kazakhstanskoi oblasti).

Commission), the speaker declared that nobody knew who died, and who survived. He gave the example of the Petropavlovsk *detpriemnik* (child receiving center) where workers *absolutely* did not know how many of their children died, let alone who among them died.⁶¹⁶



Image 11: Detdom No. 4, Zhañia Semey (1934)⁶¹⁷

For the Bolsheviks, hygiene, health and purity involved more than the care of the body; they defined the very essence of Soviet institutions and identities. The rationalized and the cleansed Soviet body was essential to the socialist utopia.⁶¹⁸ Hygiene was a central element of cultural revolution, and it had particular connotations for the “backward” Asiatic peoples.⁶¹⁹ The role of hygiene practices in the imagination of

⁶¹⁶ TsGARK, g. 509, op. 1, d. 319, l. 105 ob. (Otchetnyi Doklad o Sostoianii Detskikh Domov i Prakticheskikh Zadachakh Na 1935 god).

⁶¹⁷ TsGARK, f. 509, op. 1, d. 296, l. 183.

⁶¹⁸ Tricia Starks, *The Body Soviet: Propaganda, Hygiene, and the Revolutionary State* (Madison: The University of Wisconsin Press, 2008).

⁶¹⁹ See, Yuri Slezkine, *Arctic Mirrors: Russia and the Small Peoples of the North* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1996).

Kazakhs' backwardness is well documented by Paula Michaels.⁶²⁰ It was indeed one of the most recurrent themes about Kazakh culture in the early Soviet era which was also informed by the prerevolutionary descriptions of nomadic life. In the discourse on orphans too, hygiene occupied a main place. Official documents frequently equated being clean with being cultured.

However, the goal of hygiene was definitely not achieved throughout the decade in the detdoms, rendering Sovietization and the Soviet regime's definition of cultural revolution impossible. The catastrophic famine years with numerous epidemics taking the lives of children had passed, yet, neither diseases related to sanitary conditions came to an end, nor did children satisfactorily learn the "cultured" way.⁶²¹ In 1934, Moscow Institute of Sanitation and Hygiene sent an expedition team to Eastern Kazakhstan to report on the fight against child bezprizornost'. According to their report, almost in all raions, sanitary conditions of detdoms were unsatisfactory and measures were not taken against diseases.⁶²² Two years later, Narkomzdrav of Russian SSR sent medical specialists to Kazakhstan for an expedition to help detdoms in Kazakhstan. The final report stated that "The People's Commissariat of Health has received alarming signals about sanitary conditions of detdoms and mass diseases among children of Kaz. ASSR's detdoms." Many detdoms had no bathroom. These conditions, inevitably, created mass contagious diseases and a scurvy epidemic. According to the report, in many detdoms

⁶²⁰ See relevant parts such as "Russian Orientalism and Kazakh Medicine" and "The Construction of Kazakh Culture in Biomedical Propaganda" in Michaels, *Curative Powers*.

⁶²¹ Even Sügiralimova, who claims that Soviet authorities eventually solved the problem of besprizornost' in Kazakhstan, notes how by 1940 hygiene rules were not internalized by children yet. Their clothes were dirty, their hairs were infested with lice. They changed their underwear or bedding very rarely. Sügiralimova, "Qazaqstandaghy Panasyz Balalar," 107.

⁶²² TsGARK, f. 509, op. 1, d. 227, ll. 44-45 (Otchet: O rabote po bor'be s besprizornostiu Voctochno-Kazakhskoi oblasti, brigade Moskovskogo Instituta Sanitarii i Gigieny).

such as Qyzylorda detdoms, there was not even one healthy child. This picture was true for all Kazakhtan, and in Almaty oblast the situation was only slightly better.⁶²³

According to official statistics, in 1936, 47% of detdom children in Kazakhstan were sick with flu, trachoma, tuberculosis and venereal diseases, and there was no real children's hospital in the entire Kazakh republic.⁶²⁴ A Sovnarkom report from May 1936 admits that the majority of detdoms were under unsanitary conditions, and sick children continued to stay in Narkompros detdoms without any medical help. Indeed, the report makes it clear that it is not possible to talk about an improvement, because the number of sick children was increasing, not decreasing, from month to month. There were cases when all children of a detdom without exception fell sick. Detdoms were heavily overcrowded; two, sometimes three-four children slept on the same bed, even the sick ones.⁶²⁵

Nomads had been made fun of by their Russian comrades for not knowing personal hygiene rules. However, habits such as having a bath or changing clothes regularly were not realized in many detdoms, primarily because of the material inadequacies. In December 1937, in the Kazalinsk detdom with 320 children, there was a bath, but it was unsanitary. There was no washbasin for children, and especially boys almost never washed up.⁶²⁶ Kazalinsk was indeed representative of the detdoms in Kazakhstan. Even a detgorod that hosted 609 children and was located in the capital did

⁶²³ TsGARK, f. 30, op. 4, d. 1003, ll. 93-94 (From zam. Narkomzdrav RSFSR Mugurevich to Predsedatelyu Sovnarkom RSFSR Sulimov, April 7, 1936).

⁶²⁴ TsGARK, f. 30, op. 5, d. 882, ll. 60-62 (Spravka: K voprosu 'Ob ozdorovlenii detskogo naseleniia Kazakhstane).

⁶²⁵ APRK, f. 141, op. 1, d. 10586, ll. 247-251 (O Sostoianii Detdomov Kazakskoi ASSR).

⁶²⁶ At least pediculosis was finally liquidated though. TsGARK, f. 509, op. 1, d. 423, ll. 8-10 (Protokol: Oblastnoy Soveshchaniia Direktorov i Starshikh Vospitatelei Detdomov).

not have a functioning bath. Children were supposed to use the public bath, but during the summer, children had not been to the bath for three months.⁶²⁷

As a result of all these inadequacies, children escaped from detdoms in large numbers. We know that homeless children were fond of their freedom and mobility in the 1920s.⁶²⁸ Some officials claimed the same for Kazakhstan in the 1930s too. According to a list of 81 children who escaped from NKVD detpriemniks, 46 of them escaped because they missed the life on streets.⁶²⁹ Nevertheless, this claim is in contrast with most of the cases where runaway children's own explanations for their flight was recorded. Children who had escaped and were then caught frequently complained that they were fed poorly, dressed poorly and beaten by educators or older children.⁶³⁰ In addition, exploitation of children's labor was a major reason for mass flight of children from the labor communes.⁶³¹ According to one estimate, in 1937 alone, 1498 children escaped from Narkompros detdoms⁶³² when the number of children in detdoms was decreased to below twenty-five thousand.⁶³³ It was reported that besprizorniks were being collected at

⁶²⁷ APRK, f. 141, op. 1, d. 11794, l. 3 (Inspector report by the team appointed by Almaty Gorsovet, December 31, 1935).

⁶²⁸ Ball, *And Now My Soul is Hardened*.

⁶²⁹ TsGARK, f. 509, op. 1, d. 442, ll. 4-7 (Spisok: Bezhavshikh detei iz detdomov sistemy NKZdrava, NKProsa i postupivshikh v detpriemniki raspredeliteli NKVD KSSR).

⁶³⁰ Various reasons for escape are recorded in APRK, f. 141, op. 1, d. 11804, ll. 107-112.

Another report from Qaskileñ regional party committee provide cases of escapes from detdoms and includes bad food, material conditions, beating, lack of books and notebooks and diseases such as scurvy among the reasons for escapes. APRK, f. 141, op. 1, d. 11804, 132 (Qaskileñ Avdandyq Partiya Kamiytetiniñ Qavylsy, April 15, 1936) As late as 1936, the report described the conditions in the detdoms as "catastrophic".

⁶³¹ TsGARK, f. 81, op. 1, d. 1612, ll. 96-98 (Ob obshestvennogo soveshaniia po voprosam bor'by s detskoi bezprizornost'iu).

⁶³² TsGARK, f. 509, op. 1, d. 442, l. 9.

⁶³³ One inspector report from Almaty oblast in 1935 confesses that in only September, 23 children escaped from one detgorod, however, only one of them was recorded. APRK, f. 141, op. 1, d. 11794, ll. 1-10 (Inspector report by the team appointed by Almaty Gorsovet, December 31, 1935).

Hence, we can confidently assume that the number of children that escaped from children's institutions was generally higher than the documents suggested.

detpriemniks, and then were escaping the next day to the streets. Homeless children were mostly said to be found at train stations, streets and in the criminal world. Children who escaped from a detpriemnik in Almaty were found by teachers who rode horses and driven them back to the center “like cattle”.⁶³⁴

Some detdom directors claimed that children who escaped from their detdoms were indocile (*trudnovospituemyi*).⁶³⁵ However, children’s own accounts usually challenge these claims. In their letter to the authorities, four girls who had escaped from a detdom explained how conditions in the detdom were terrible. Having described how they were fed, what materials they did not have, and how they could not be cleaned, the girls stated that they had been living “like dogs”. They told the story of how they escaped, and how they were caught, how they had gone to district authorities, but nobody had helped them. According to the letter, they were crying every day, walking as dirty as “homeless dogs”, and if the authorities would not help, they were planning to escape again.⁶³⁶

Political and Cultural Education⁶³⁷

⁶³⁴ TsGARK, f. 509, op. 1, d. 318, l. 73.

The report makes it clear that children stayed in cold, dark, small, and dirty rooms which had an iron stove that made it impossible to close the doors in winter because of the smell it produced [it possibly refers to the potential of smoke poisoning]. There was nothing in the canteen to sit on, and everything in the kitchen was dirty. Children who violated the rules were continuously beaten.

⁶³⁵ TsGARK, f. 509, op. 1, d. 418, l. 9 (From Orlov, Nachalnik detpriemnika u NKVD po Kaz. SSR to Narkompros Kaz. SSR, January 8, 1937).

⁶³⁶ The letter is signed by Bigalneva A., Kutubaeva K., Ianina N., and Merzliakova Sh. TsGARK, f. 509, op. 1, 4. 422, l. 8.

⁶³⁷ *Vospitatel'naia rabota* means educational work. Yet, the Soviet authorities usually used this term to refer to extra-curricular education that aimed political and cultural education of a child. Hence, I translate it broadly as political and cultural education.

In December 1935, one of the most detailed local inspector reports of the decade declared that in a detgorod in the capital with more than 600 pupils “educational work, as a system, does not exist”. Most of the children did not know the rulers of the party. A Pioneer group was not organized. There was no wall newspaper or children’s literature. According to the report, the detgorod’s school did not deserve its name. Workers were repeatedly beaten by teenagers who even threatened to kill them. Some children had weapons. Older ones frequently beat younger children; they particularly disturbed girls and forced them to have sexual relations. In fact, educators allowed older children to beat the younger ones; one educator even formed a “police squad” made up of teenagers. Detdom educators were reported to be indifferent, callous and ruthless. Two educators raped girls and they were not punished. Inspectors described the detgorod as a shameful place that prepared wrong kind of people for life. Children lived barefoot and undressed under rain and freezing weather.⁶³⁸ This was the picture of a large children’s institution in Almaty and it was definitely not exceptional. The Soviet civilizing mission had achieved none of its goals in these institutions.

Because material conditions were so lacking, Sovietization of children could not even be attempted. There was usually no red corner, no children's books, no sport equipment or musical instruments in detdoms.⁶³⁹ In 1935, children of Qarasū detdom wrote a letter to Nadezhda Krupskaya. In their letter, they listed their demands: there was no literature at the library, they had no physical education equipment, they had no radio

⁶³⁸ APRK, f. 141, op. 1, d. 11794, ll. 1-10 (Inspector report by the team appointed by Almaty Gorsovet, December 31, 1935).

⁶³⁹ APRK, f. 141, op. 1, d. 10585, l. 170 (O Proverke Material’no- Bytivogo Polozheniia i Vospitatel’noi Raboty Detdomov).

or other tools of cultural entertainment, they had no washbasins, they had no paints and brushes for the wall paper, they had extremely few notebooks and pencils, supply of clothes was very poor.⁶⁴⁰

In theory, placing children in schools was the most successful aspect of Soviet education. A few years after the famine, more than 90% of orphans were already attending school. However, the level of education was usually very low, and the catastrophic material conditions were directly reflected in detdom schools. Besides, orphans usually started the school too late; for example, children starting primary school at the age of 12-13 was not an exceptional case. Zhürgenov himself made it clear that in 1935 47% of children in detdoms were beginning first grade.⁶⁴¹

In 1928, one Kazakh inspector defined the goal of detdoms as “preparing future citizens from homeless children”.⁶⁴² A booklet for the educators of the detdoms define four major goals for orphans’ upbringing: 1- internationalism; 2- battle against religion; 3- battle against old customs and instruction of tidiness, hygiene, and health; 4- patriotic education.⁶⁴³ However, the author also notes how these goals could not be achieved yet. For example, children still ate with their hands, because there were no spoons. Although children did not even have spoons, the author also says that a detdom for 300 children must have a hall for 450 people, a library, a reading room, three rooms for technical training (each for 40 people), one work room for Pioneers, and another one for other

⁶⁴⁰ TsGARK, f. 509, op. 1, d. 318, l. 84 (From Daniushevskii -Nachalnik Upravleniia Detskikh Domov NKP- to RSFSR Narodnyi Komissariat po Prosveshcheniiu, November 4, 1935).

⁶⁴¹ 27.2% at the second, 14.4% at the third, 2.7% at the fourth, 2.5% at the fifth, 1.4% at the sixth, 0.4% at the seventh and 0.1% at the eight year. Zhürgenov, *Qazaqstanda Mädeniät Revolyutsiyasy*, 6.

⁶⁴² TsGARK, f. 509, op. 1, d. 122, l. 42 (O Sostoianii Detuchrezhdenii SSTs-Pravovoi Okhrany i o Bor’be s Detskoi Besprizornosti).

⁶⁴³ G. Qudayqululy, *Tärbëshige Kömekshi: Material Zhñnaghy* (Almaty: Qazaqstan Baspasy, 1934), 24.

societies, and two rooms for children's clubs. He also defines the goal of children's clubs as communist upbringing of children through extracurricular activities.⁶⁴⁴

The ideal was to educate children in the detdoms according to communist principles. The most important themes of a communist education included teaching them about the struggle against the Tsar, the proletariat's fight, fascist terror, capitalist class exploitation, the miserable lives of workers and children in capitalist countries, the happy lives of Soviet children, internationalism, and anti-religious propaganda. However, the practice could not be more different than the ideals. Detdom directors were not able to answer questions about the number of books in the libraries, what books educators made children read, which themes educators chose to teach children and so on. In many cases, directors could not even name one book read at the detdom.⁶⁴⁵ Anti-religious education was also not satisfactory. According to one Narkompros report from 1939, anti-religious propaganda was practiced only when there was a religious holiday.⁶⁴⁶

At the regional meeting of detdom workers in the Kazakh republic in 1934, participants were reminded that the essential task of detdoms was to provide a communist upbringing and transform children into qualified workers and builders of socialist society. The text read at the meeting includes many references to class war and class enemies.⁶⁴⁷ However, this text was an exception, rather than the rule. It is almost impossible to find

⁶⁴⁴ Ibid, 40-42

⁶⁴⁵ TsGARK, f. 1473, op. 1, d. 65, ll. 210-211 (Stenogramma: Vechernogo soveshchaniia direktorov detdomov Kaz. SSR – 14.3.1938).

⁶⁴⁶ TsGARK, f. 1692, op. 1, d. 250, l. 36 (O Sostoianii Detdomov v Kazakhskoi SSR", September 1, 1939).

⁶⁴⁷ TsGARK, f. 509, op. 1, d. 294, ll. 14-22 (Rezoliutsiia: Kraevogo Soveshchaniia rabotnikov detdmov po dokladu Zam. Narkoma t. Dzhantleuova 'Ob Organizatsionno-Khozaistvennom Ukreplenii Detskikh Domov", August 16, 1934).

the language of class conflict in the internal correspondence of Kazakh authorities. Yet, when they wrote to Moscow, they emphasized the struggle against class enemies.⁶⁴⁸

A booklet for *detdoms* from 1939 describes required political education as consisting of instruction about Soviet leaders' lives, the achievements of the Soviet homeland, the struggle against religion, and the international situation in the world. Sample topics to be instructed included the "conquest" of the Northern Pole and the successful flight of Soviet pilots from Moscow to the US. The activities suggested for *detdom* children included meetings for young naturalists and for rallying against religious festivals such as Christmas and *Qurban Ayt*.⁶⁴⁹ It was also necessary to have training courses for various musical instruments, painting, sculpture, and even model aircrafts, as well as organizing excursions and basic military training.⁶⁵⁰ In fact, the necessity for organizing various cultural activities and establishing clubs and corners were repeated again and again by *Narkompros* and Children's Commission authorities. It would not be correct to say that all these plans failed. Towards the end of the decade, some *detdoms* had more than a few cultural clubs or red corners. There was a particular emphasis on musical instruments. When we come to the end of the decade, even the *detdoms* that could not properly feed, warm up, or accommodate their pupils had at least a few *dombras* or *balalaikas*. Not surprisingly, very few of these clubs functioned properly; the majority existed only on paper.

⁶⁴⁸ For example, see, TsGARK, f. 509, op. 1, d. 319, ll. 126-141 (*Dokladnaia Zapiska: Ob Itogakh Raboty detdomov KASSR za 1934 god*).

⁶⁴⁹ *Detdomdaghly Oqū-Tārbīe Zhumystaryn Plandaū* (Almaty: Qazaq Memleket Baspasy, 1939), 12-13.

⁶⁵⁰ *Ibid.*, 7-9.

During the years of famine, political and cultural education literally stopped at almost all detdoms. An undated circular (probably from 1934 after the end of the famine), which was sent to all raion commissions, captures the situation well. Having presented the lack of any educational work at the detdoms of Almaty oblast, the circular admits that until then all work in the detdoms was directed to feeding and caring for the children. Consequently, there was no Marxist-Leninist education.⁶⁵¹ A Komsomol report from Karaganda in 1933, clearly showed how political and cultural education totally collapsed in all detdoms. In one detdom, it was rumored that Stalin lost power and fled the country.⁶⁵² Anti-Stalinist rumors continued in the coming years. In 1936, two children at Byrianovkii [unidentified] detdom who were transferred from Semey asked inspector Novichkov whether it was true that Stalin wanted to sell all detdom children for payment in gold by sending them abroad and Voroshilov stood against it. When asked where they heard it, the children said they heard this from other children.⁶⁵³ It shows that anti-Stalin rumors were not absent among children who were supposed to be “children of the state”.

As one detgorod manager reported, the children perceived labor, the essence of socialist education, as punishment and there was a general anti-labor mood.⁶⁵⁴ Consequently, many inspectors noted how pupils in detdoms were busy doing nothing.

⁶⁵¹ TsGARK, f. 509, op. 1, d. 225, ll. 32-33.

⁶⁵² APRK, f. 143, op. 1, d. 1932, 44-48 (Dokladnaia Zapiska: O provedenii dvukh dekadnia bor'by s detskoi besprizornost'iu i uchastie komsopioner organizatsii).

⁶⁵³ APRK, f. 141, op. 1, d. 11849, l. 34 (Dokladnaia Zapiska).

Stone found a similar rumor from the Rybinskii receiving center. According to the rumor circulating among children, Stalin was “an Armenian (armashka) who gave the order to execute underage criminals and wanted to sell besprizornye abroad for two train cars full of gold, but Voroshilov stopped him”. Stone, “Growing up Soviet?,” 67. As Stone notes it was not clear why it was Voroshilov who appeared in the role of the saviour. Nonetheless, as I briefly discuss in Chapter 4, there was a smaller cult around Voroshilov that accompanied the omnipresent Stalin cult. That might be the reason why Voroshilov, and not someone else, was perceived as a saviour by children.

⁶⁵⁴ APRK, f. 141, op. 1, d. 7701, l. 29 (Zasedanie Prezidiuma Tsentral'noi Detkomissii KTsiK, June 19, 1934).

For example, in Semey, no kind of educational or cultural work was conducted, thus children did not do anything. They went wherever they wanted to, such as the bazaar, or the river.⁶⁵⁵ In fact, it was not rare that detdom children were organized to go to bazaars in groups. They begged, stole and collected garbage to use for food.⁶⁵⁶ An interesting example was the Shaklar detdom in Aqtöbe oblast. According to an official, children of this detdom were waiting for a train accident for a whole day. There had been two accidents before, children got the butter that the trains were carrying and sold it at the bazaar. Since there was no red corner, children's games, musical instruments, clubs or physical education at the detdom; children were walking around the railway the whole day.⁶⁵⁷

Throughout the decade, educators, or cadres in general, were a significant problem. Authorities either in Moscow or in Almaty almost always blamed the personnel for the inadequacies in the detdoms.⁶⁵⁸ Indeed, the quality and educational background of the detdom personnel was quite unsatisfactory throughout the decade. Since there were not enough pedagogical cadres, anyone could become an educator in detdoms, sometimes even the illiterate. This was acknowledged in the main Kazakh pedagogical journal.⁶⁵⁹ In 1934, there were 62 thousand children in Kazakhstan's detdoms. 2090 educators were working in these detdoms and 82% of them had lower education (finished either only

⁶⁵⁵ TsGARK, f. 509, op. 1, d. 227, ll. 44-45 (Otchet: O rabote po bor'be s besprizornostiu Vostochnoi-Kazakstanskoi oblasti).

⁶⁵⁶ APRK, f. 141, op. 1, d. 5777, l. 101 (Report by Plenipotentiary Representative of OGPU in Kazakhstan / Secret Political Department, November 21, 1933).

⁶⁵⁷ APRK, f. 141, op. 1, d. 7701, l. 6 (K voprosu 'o sostoianii i prodelannoi raboty po detbesprizornosti za 1933 goda i 1-y kvartal 1934 goda, April 10, 1934).

⁶⁵⁸ Kelly notes that the late 1920s and early 1930s witnessed the rise of a "culture of blame" according to which detdom supervisors were held responsible for difficulties in detdoms. Kelly, *Children's World*, 210.

⁶⁵⁹ Aspandiyaruly, "Oquv-tärbie zhöninde balalar üyiniñ mindetteri," *Aūyl Mughalimi* 6 (1934): 8.

primary school or even lower). In Almaty oblast, 142 of 153 educators had lower education (92%). Many who had barely any education got jobs in detdoms.⁶⁶⁰

Those who were held responsible for the lack of political education were deemed anti-Soviet, of committing a political crime. Problems in detdoms were sometimes publicized; particularly, the quality of educators was problematized frequently.⁶⁶¹ However, always either the forenamed detdom personnel or local cadres were blamed for inadequacies and were declared anti-Soviet elements. For example, a journal article announced that people who beat children, or who used cruel punishments such as locking a child into a cold room were not Soviet educators, they were mullahs.⁶⁶² In 1934, a group of five inspectors reported that in one detdom in Ayagöz raion of Almaty oblast, educators themselves had no idea about Marxism-Leninism and Stalinism, therefore students were not learning anything. Classes were conducted according to pre-revolutionary methods of the Muslims madrasas. Students were totally unaware of the political life of the country; there was no available literature.⁶⁶³

The lack of Kazakh cadres was a significant reason for the absence of educational work. At the Kazakh detdom in Qarqaraly, all the teachers were Russian, and none spoke Kazakh, thus it was not possible to conduct any educational work.⁶⁶⁴ We do not have

⁶⁶⁰ Qudayqululy, *Tärbēshige Kömekshi*, 17.

⁶⁶¹ Aspandiyaruly, “Oquv-tärbē zhōninde balalar üyiniñ mindetteri,” 8.

⁶⁶² Q. Qudaykulov, “Detdom balalaryn tärbēleü zhōnindegi burmalaüşhylyqtargha zhol berilmesin,” *Aūyl Mughalimi* 3, (1937): 61.

⁶⁶³ TsGARK, f. 509, op. 1, d. 295, ll. 121-123.

The behavior toward and relations with children of educators were frequently perceived as a significant problem as well. There were attempts by detdom personnel to present themselves as dedicated educators. A newspaper piece written by a detdom educator from Semey presents an account in which educators devote their lives to children’s upbringing. She explains how children perceived detdom educators as their family. Qadisha Qozhaqmetova, “Bala tärbēesine äyelder zhavapty”, *Ekpindi*, March 10, 1936, 4.

⁶⁶⁴ Teachers even did not feel the need of reading decrees, and there was no discipline in the detdom. TsGARK, f. 509, op. 1, d. 227, ll. 335-336.

comprehensive data about the proportions of Kazakh and Russian educators, however, the lack of Kazakh cadres was continuously brought up by authorities as one of the most important problems. To give an example, there were 135 educators in Karaganda in 1935 and only 30 of them were Kazakhs (79 were Russians and 26 were of other nationalities).⁶⁶⁵

Being a detdom educator was not a promising career. Both because of the low amount of payment and of the negative image of orphans, authorities struggled to find educators.⁶⁶⁶ Even though we do not have any evidence to suggest that being a detdom educator was exclusively a female job, by 1936 it came to be associated more and more with women. According to Qulymbetov, Kazakh girls who themselves were orphans and former homeless children would make better teachers for detdoms; they also naturally loved children because they were females.⁶⁶⁷

Although not too many, there are cases when former detdom children remember their educators or directors with gratitude. After discussing how horrible it was for children in the detdom during the famine, Kempirbaev states that the director and educators of his detdom (Trotskii detdom in Almaty oblast) were good people. Children sometimes read in newspapers how teachers at detdoms or boarding schools abused children and sold children's food for their own benefit, but it was not like that in their

⁶⁶⁵ TsGARK, f. 509, op. 1, d. 397, l. 35 (Dokladnaia Zapiska: O rabote po bor'be detskoi besprizornost'iu i beznadzornost'iu po Karagandinskoi Oblasti za 1935 god).

⁶⁶⁶ In 1941, a correspondent of Moscow-Based newspaper Uchitel'skaia Gazeta reported that 60-70% of detdom personnel in the Kazakh SSR were people who were administratively resettled or exiled. RGASPI, f. 17, op. 126, d. 3, ll. 62-64 (Pis'mo redaktora "Uchitel'skoi Gazety v TsK VKP o pis'me iz Kazakhstana o sostoianii obrazovaniia). Available on <https://islamperspectives.org/rpi/items/show/11553>.

⁶⁶⁷ TsGARK, f. 509, op. 1, d. 274, ll. 85-86 (Comrade Qulymbetov's speech at the meeting of detdom workers, October 23, 1936).

The same year, an 18-year-old female educator from a detdom in Semey wrote in an oblast newspaper that child upbringing was women's responsibility. Qozhaqmetova, "Bala tarbiiesine äyelder zhavapty", 4.

detdom. Educators did everything they could to save children.⁶⁶⁸ In one exceptional case, Eletay Sadūaqasova expresses her gratitude to the Soviet government. She lost her parents in 1931 and was sent to Sergiopol detdom. In the 2000s, she recalled those days by saying “after some months, I forgot being an orphan. The Soviet government became both my mother and my father. It took care of and educated me”.⁶⁶⁹

Pioneer and Komsomol groups in detdoms were not properly organized throughout the decade too. For example, an inspector’s report from 1934 about a detgorod of 1821 children states that no Pioneer group was organized, and the Komsomol existed only on paper. Not all children were going to school, and in general they were not interested in school.⁶⁷⁰ An inspector reported from Southern Kazakhstan that educational work was not satisfactory in majority of detdoms. Pioneer work, international education, theft, fights, national hatred and escapes from detdoms were among the main problems.⁶⁷¹

Internationalism and Interethnic Relations

In 1929, the main Russian-language newspaper of Kazakhstan published a piece about Lenin detdom in Qyzylorda. It was reported that in this detdom Kazakh children were beating Russian girls (possibly all Russian children were female) and educators only watched. 20 of 170 children were Russians, but there was not even one Russian educator,

⁶⁶⁸ K. Kempirbaev, “Georgievka selosy,” 156-157.

⁶⁶⁹ APRK, f. 148, op. 1, d. 83, 4 (Oral history done by F. Zhañabaeva, “Adam taghdyry (o zhizni i deiatel’nosti pedagoga Saduaqasovoi E.)”).

⁶⁷⁰ TsGARK, f. 509, op. 1, d. 322, ll. 190-192.

⁶⁷¹ TsGARK, f. 509, op. 1, d. 422, ll. 60-62 (Postanovlenie: Prezidiuma Iuzhno-Kazakhstanskogo Oblispolkoma, g. Chimkent, 09.06.1937).

consequently no one was paying attention to Russian children. Their only difference from homeless children was having a roof over their heads. Kazakh children ate Russian girls' portions and the girls frequently had to go hungry for an entire day. In one instance, after Kazakh children had their portions and breads, there were only breadcrumbs left on the table. One educator suggested that the Russian girls should eat those crumbs as their lunch. When the girls refused it, Kazakh children started throwing crumbs on girls' faces and the educator, Yunusov, just smiled. In another instance, in the presence of Yunusov, Komsomol member Kairbekov brutally beat a Russian girl, Vera Ikonnikova. Yunusov laughed at this too and did nothing to save the girl.⁶⁷²

This piece, first of all, shows how interethnic relations were far from the Soviet ideal even among children and even at the very institutions that were expected to establish the ideal of internationalism. As briefly discussed in the previous chapter, the 1920s in Kazakhstan was a decade of frequent eruptions of ethnic hostility between Kazakhs and Russians. In a sense, the famine even deepened already existing hostilities. Nevertheless, the famine significantly turned the power balance at the expense of Kazakhs. Cases of ethnic conflict in Kazakhstan's detdoms after the famine usually present a very different picture than the above article. From then on, it was usually Kazakhs who were suppressed.

This piece is also striking when read in the light of general perceptions about detdoms as institutions of not only Sovietization, but also Russification for non-Russian children. For example, Cameron emphasizes important societal implications of the upbringing of the famine's orphans "in the largely Russian-speaking environment of city

⁶⁷² "V Detdome Im. Lenina," *Sovetskaia Step*, January 3, 1929.

orphanages”.⁶⁷³ It was indeed a hugely transformative process for Kazakh children. However, as discussed in another chapter, throughout the 1930s, there was never an official policy of Russification and detdoms were no exception to this rule. Hence, the perception of detdoms as institutions of Russification is not valid. It does not mean that Kazakh children were never educated in Russian or linguistically Russified in detdoms. Yet, it was a result of the changing population balance between Russians and Kazakhs in the country due to the famine, rather than the product of an official policy.

Internationalist education was an obvious major goal of the Soviet regime. The theme of interethnic harmony dominated Kazakh children’s literature. However, daily life was far from the ideal. Throughout the decade, there was considerable antagonism between Kazakh and Russian children both at the schools and detdoms. It is not possible to generalize about such hostility, but we have enough cases to question a rosy picture. Such interethnic hostility was striking at the detdoms where all children were supposed to be raised by the Soviet state without the influence of their parents or social and cultural prejudices. Olga Kucherenko argues that, with several exceptions, detdom children were generally less aware of their and their friends’ nationalities in the 1930s. The case that she uses as an example of exceptions is a letter written by Russian children of a Kazakh detdom. The children wrote that they would run away from the detdom if Kazakhs and Uzbeks continue to torment them.⁶⁷⁴ Hence, in comparison to the general Soviet picture, interethnic hostilities in Kazakh detdoms is even more striking.

⁶⁷³ Cameron, “The Hungry Steppe,” 279.

⁶⁷⁴ Kucherenko, *Little Soldiers*, 52.

In fact, throughout the decade, it was always problematized by authorities when Kazakh children did not speak Kazakh.⁶⁷⁵ According to a Sovnarkom decree that was issued on May 17, 1933, each detdom was required to have a children's library in the Kazakh language and a sufficient number of Kazakh personnel.⁶⁷⁶ However, in reality, this was not possible due to the significantly insufficient number of Kazakh cadres. In 1931, officials complained that Äülïe-Ata was a Kazakh raion, but the governing apparatus of the Children's Commission consisted only of Europeans who did not know the local language.⁶⁷⁷ Consequently, despite the official promise of korenizatsiia, state institutions largely operated in Russian. Yet, that did not solve the problem of a language barrier. In 1935, some local officials complained that nobody was reading the instructions because they were only available in Russian.⁶⁷⁸ The language barrier made political or cultural education impossible. For example, at the Narkomzdrav detdom in Shymkent, children did not understand the educators, hence no kind of education was possible.⁶⁷⁹

Some newspaper pieces strongly criticized chauvinism against Kazakh children in the detdoms.⁶⁸⁰ At one detdom in Alaköl county, all 80 children were Kazakhs, but the director was Russian. A newspaper article harshly criticized the fact that the Russian director was unsatisfied when Kazakh children spoke in their native language. Also, no

⁶⁷⁵ APRK, f. 143, op. 1, d. 2126, l. 82 (Protokol No 1: Soveshchaniia pompolitov detdomov i pioner organizatorov Karagandinskogo ON VLKSM ot 25-go iyulia 34. g.).

⁶⁷⁶ TsGARK, f. 509, op. 1, d. 207, ll. 98-101 (Qazaqstan Ortalyq Keñes Komitetiniñ Pyrzyidum Qavylsyy).

⁶⁷⁷ TsGARK, f. 509, op. 1, d. 154, l. 117 (Vyvody po Obsledovaniiu: Aulie-Atinskoi Detkomissii 7-8/I-31 g.).

⁶⁷⁸ APRK, f. 143, op. 1, d. 2126, ll. 121-125 (From the director of Karsakpaisk pioneer organization Buskov to the Secretary of Kraikom, Tashitov, March 10, 1935).

⁶⁷⁹ TsGARK, f. 1473, op. 1, d. 3, l. 93 (Stenogramma: Vechernogo zasedaniia soveshchaniia zav. detdomami i detbol'nitsami – 7 dekabrya 1936 goda).

⁶⁸⁰ Sharov, Il'iasov and Kulzhakhmetov, "Karmakchinskim detdomam rukovodili shliapyn chuzhdye elementy," *Pravda Iuzhnogo-Kazakhstana*, July 16, 1933.

educational work was possible, since the director did not understand the children: “if the children say ‘head’, the director understands ‘ear’”.⁶⁸¹ Yet, despite official condemnations, chauvinism was widespread. A commission that visited Qyzylorda detdoms in 1935 quoted one director who said “Kazakhs are too lazy, they don’t want to work, hence they steal. ... My hair has already turned gray, no matter how much you talk, they won’t understand”. It was noted that these kinds of statements were very common, and it was an expression of “great power chauvinism”.⁶⁸²

Chauvinism easily turned into hatred and hatred created separate lives. There were separate Kazakh and Russian detdoms (although they usually contained small numbers of children from other nationalities), however, in mixed detdoms too, Russian and Kazakh children often did not interact with each other in contrast to internationalist ideals. While reporting fights between Russian and Kazakh children in Esilskii raion in April 1933, one OGPU inspector said that internationalist education was not conducted at all among these children.⁶⁸³ In some detdoms, such as the one in Qostanay, Kazakh and Russian children slept separately, ate separately, and did not interact with each other.⁶⁸⁴ One such case from Aqtöbe was reported not only to Qulymbetov and Zhürgenov, but also to the head of the Children’s Commission in Moscow.⁶⁸⁵

The efforts to overcome this problem, at least in some cases, provoked the utmost hostility from children. In detgorod no 2 in Almaty, Russian and Kazakh children had

⁶⁸¹ B. S., “Balalar ‘bas’ dese, basshylary ‘qulak’ deidi,” *Leninshil Zhas*, May 27, 1933.

⁶⁸² The commission was also astonished to see many instances of drunkenness among children. During the celebration of Kazakhstan’s 15th anniversary, a fight resulting from drunkenness was only suppressed with the intervention of police. TsGARK, f. 30, op. 4, d. 1003, ll. 79-80 (March 19, 1936).

⁶⁸³ TsGARK, f. 509, op. 1, d. 251, ll. 206-215.

⁶⁸⁴ TsGARK, f. 509, op. 1, d. 278, ll. 59-62.

⁶⁸⁵ TsGARK, f. 509, op. 1, d. 315, ll. 137-147 (Dokladnaia Zapiska: O sostoianii Detskikh domov v Aktiubinskoi oblasti Kaz. ASSR na 1 iyulia 1934 goda).

been living separately. When authorities started to place Russians together with Kazakhs according to a new plan in 1935, both Kazakh and Russian children rioted. In protest, children broke windows, locked themselves in the rooms, ran away from the detgorod and even threatened arson. It was reported that children acted under the guidance of the educator Yusupov.⁶⁸⁶ However, when we consider the fact that the detgorod hosted more than six hundred pupils, agitation by a single educator is probably insufficient to explain the level of hatred between Kazakh and Russian children. Throughout the 1930s, in contrast to widespread assumptions of children's institutions as tools of internationalism and even of Russification, neither was really occurring.

There were many cases when Kazakh children were treated unfairly by their Russian educators. In 1933, head officials admitted that a disdainful attitude towards Kazakh children was a major problem in the detdoms.⁶⁸⁷ In many cases, inspectors reported that the educators did not care about national hostilities in the detdoms. It was reported that there was chauvinism and ethnic strife at the Lepsinsk detdom in Almaty region. There were 44 Kazakh and 109 Russian children and Russian children had bedding whereas Kazakhs were sleeping on floor.⁶⁸⁸ It is clear that after the famine power balance changed at the expense of Kazakhs, hence usually they were the targets of "great power chauvinism". In August 1932 Russian children were heard to shout "kill them!" at

⁶⁸⁶ APRK, f. 141, op. 1, d. 11794, l. 9 (Inspector report by the team appointed by Almaty Gorsovet, December 31, 1935).

⁶⁸⁷ TsGARK, f. 509, op. 1, d. 216, l. 405 (Stenogramma – Kraevogo Sovashchania po Bor'be s Detskoi Besprizornostiu).

⁶⁸⁸ Undated, but probably from 1933. APRK, f. 9, op. 1, d. 42, ll. 68-70 (Dokladnaia Zapiska: O khode mesiachnika bor'by s detskoi bezprizornost'yu" from Alma-Ata Gorodskogo Komiteta VLKSM to Alma-Atinskomu Obkomu i Kraikomu Komsomola).

Kazakhs in one detdom.⁶⁸⁹ In Semey, an inspector reported to Qulymbetov in 1934 that Kazakh children were crying because Russian children beat them and grabbed their bread. Kazakh children all desired to be sent to a Kazakh detdom.⁶⁹⁰

However, one can still find counter examples in which Russian children were mistreated by their Kazakh educators or friends. For example, 15 Russian children escaped from a detdom in Qaskeleñ in 1936 due to incitements of Kazakh educators.⁶⁹¹ Ethnic conflict between Kazakhs and Russians was not limited to detdoms in Kazakhstan. In the Kyrgyz Republic, there was a detdom near the city Tokmok which was under the supervision of Kazakh Narkompros. Most of the educators were Kazakhs who allegedly forced Kazakh children to beat Europeans, and consequently European children escaped from the detdom.⁶⁹²

Authorities in Almaty condemned these cases, but it is not clear whether they took serious action against them. In fact, it was only when such a claim about detdoms in Kazakhstan appeared in a Moscow newspaper that they reacted firmly. On November 1, 1932, Moscow-based *Pionerskaia Pravda* published a letter by a child from Tamdy Detkommun in Aqtöbe oblast. According to the claims of the boy, Kazakh children were

⁶⁸⁹ Before the famine, Western Kazakhstan had the highest number of orphans, and Russians were a majority. In this priemnik too, Russian children formed a huge majority (60 Russians, 12 Kazakhs), and that might explain the aggression of Russian children. TsGARK, f. 509, op. 1, d. 161, ll. 27-30 (Akt: Obsledovaniia Detdomov Gorod Ural'ska Komissiei).

⁶⁹⁰ TsGARK, f. 509, op. 1, d. 295, ll. 140-142 (Polozhenie i podgotovlennost k zime detdomov goroda Semipalatinska).

⁶⁹¹ APRK, f. 141, op. 1, d. 11804, l. 132 (Kaskileñ Avdandyq Partiya Kamiytetiniñ Qavylysy, April 15, 1936).

⁶⁹² TsGARK, f. 509, op. 1, d. 393, l. 114 (From the director of Tokmok detgorod Abdralimov to Almaty Kraikom, May 16, 1936).

Children of other ethnic groups were also involved in conflicts. In Chunzhinsk detdom of Almaty province, ethnic animosity prevailed among many other problems: Russian children were beating Kazakhs and Uyghurs and Uyghur children were beating Russians. Educators did not know Russian; hence, Russian children did not study at all (70 out of 165 children were Russians). TsGARK, f. 509, op. 1, d. 318, ll. 71-72 (O sostoianii Chunzhinskogo Detdoma Alma-Atinskogo OblONO).

not allowed to attend physical education class by Russian teachers, and they were sent to the stable near pigs and horses when it was minus 30 degrees outside. This was not a unique case, the letter writer continued, Russian teachers always cursed and beat Kazakh children. There was musical training in the detkommun but only Russian children were trained, and when Kazakh children asked for it, they were told “Kazakhs are not capable of studying”.⁶⁹³ A telegraph was directly sent to Goloshchekin himself from Moscow by the Bureau of Investigation and Correspondence Actions.⁶⁹⁴ Kazakh Children’s Commission appointed more than one commission for the investigation of the case, and these commissions’ reports denied any of the claims, and argued that the child who wrote the letter was “mentally retarded” and “abnormal”. These reports depicted the very opposite of what was occurring: in every aspect, the detkommun was depicted as an ideal model institution in which Russian and Kazakh children lived together; Kazakhs sang Russian songs and Russians sang Kazakh songs.⁶⁹⁵ Yet, the reliability of these reports are very questionable considering that they took no action against other cases of interethnic conflict.⁶⁹⁶

⁶⁹³ TsGARK, f. 509, op. 1, d. 252, l. 37.

⁶⁹⁴ APRK, f. 141, op. 1, d. 6516, l. 21.

⁶⁹⁵ TsGARK, f. 509, op. 1, d. 216, ll. 39-44.

Another Narkompros inspector report also refuted the article in Pionerskaia Pravda. The report claimed that children of nine nationalities lived together and internationalism was paid special attention. TsGARK, f. 509, op. 1, d. 229, ll. 1-4 (Ot inspektora Narkomprosa Baitugaeva Balkaia: Fakty o velikoderzhavnom shovinizme, kak v moem obsludovanii, tak i po materialam – Moskovskoi Pionerskoi Pravdy ne podtverdilis, April 23, 1933).

⁶⁹⁶ In addition, it was almost impossible to have such a perfect children’s institution during the famine years and Tamdy detkommun would come to the fore for various inadequacies in the coming years. See for example, TsGARK, f. 509, op. 1, d. 365, ll. 19-23 (Protokol No 2: Zasedaniia Prezidiuma Aktiubinskoi Oblastnoi Detskoi Komissii”, February 9, 1936).

All these factors weaken the reliability of those reports, and rather indicates Kazakh authorities’ fear of Moscow and their efforts to defend themselves.

“Reunion” with Family

Even during the famine, the authorities frequently emphasized that many besprizorniks indeed had parents and needed to be returned to their parents. Although, the initial Soviet dream was to host all children in detdoms to overcome their parents’ negative influence, this dream was not even once uttered by Kazakh authorities. Returning children to parents or immediate relatives was the main goal in the post-famine years.

Officials’ claims that a portion of children had parents were not totally baseless. An inspector’s report from Aqtöbe described detailed cases of how some parents took advantage of detdoms by hiding themselves. According to the report, when they were in need of material help, these parents sent their children to detdoms and had instructed them to claim that they were orphans. When their material conditions improved, they looked for ways (usually tricking the authorities) to take their children back.⁶⁹⁷ Changing surnames to hide their parents was still a problem at the end of the decade.⁶⁹⁸

Desperate parents often left their children behind during the famine. Many parents or siblings looked for family members for years to come. In his memoirs, Baghdad Zhandosay writes that, in the aftermath of the famine, it was difficult to walk through the contemporary Zhibek Zholy street in Almaty due to the density of Kazakhs who were looking for their lost children or other relatives.⁶⁹⁹ During the famine, Kamīla Turghanbaev gave her three-year younger brother to a detdom. Subsequently, she lost

⁶⁹⁷ TsGARK, f. 30, op. 2, d. 1476, ll. 53-56 (Dokladnaia Zapiska: Upolnomochennogo Detkomissii pri VTsIK’e t. Zazykina).

⁶⁹⁸ TsGARK, f. 1692, op. 1, d. 388, ll. 117-118 (Otchet: O sostoianii raboty detdomov za 1940 god po Semipalatinskoi oblasti, sektor detdomov).

⁶⁹⁹ Zhandosay, *Shoshqanyñ Qumy*, 115.

track of her brother and it took some years before she finally found him.⁷⁰⁰ One of Qamza Alimuly's sisters had lost all her children during the famine. Then she looked for Qamza for a long time, wrote many petitions, and finally found him.⁷⁰¹ Maqsut Rayqululy was reunited with his brothers in 1935.⁷⁰²

The reunion was very difficult for some families. Salīkha Dayarshy's (born in 1925) mother gave her to a detdom after Salīkha's father and sister died during the famine. At first, she frequently visited her daughter at the detdom, but then she disappeared. In 1935, she once more found Salīkha, however, Salīkha did not recognize her mother. Her mother succeeded in convincing Salīkha to go with her to Karaganda after three days of continuous efforts of persuasion. Salīkha also notes that at the time she was a Russian-speaker and had difficulty communicating with Kazakhs.⁷⁰³ Qadan Bekenov was separated from his family in 1933. In 1937, an unknown man came to take Qadan. Then Qadan learned that the man was his father.⁷⁰⁴

In some cases, it was the children who desperately looked for their families. Zhortūyl Rysaqov was admitted to Sergiopol detdom in 1931. He spent the winter in the detdom and escaped in the spring of 1932 to find his family. He was caught by the police in Äülīe-Ata and sent to a detdom again. However, he did not give up escaping and

⁷⁰⁰Kamīla Turghanbaev's testimony in *Qazaq Khalqynyñ Qasireti*, 64-65.

⁷⁰¹ Qamza Älimuly's testimony, 71.

⁷⁰² Maqsut Rayqululy, "Esten Ketpes Qasiret," in Qystaūbaev and Khabdīna eds., *Qyzylar Qyrghyny*, 165.

⁷⁰³ Salīkha Dayarshy, "Qaraly Zhyldar" (written by Ömir Kāripuly), *ibid.*, 133.

⁷⁰⁴ Qadan Bekenov, "Täüelsiz elimniñ 'Soghys ardageri goi!' dep kurmettegen bir aūyz sözine eshteñe zhetpeydi", December 30, 2016, http://old.baq.kz/kk/news/ashikāngime/kadan_bekenov_täüelsiz_elimnin_sogis_ardageri_goi_dep_kurmett_egen_bir_aūiz_sözine_eshteñe_zhetpeydi20161230_092000.

finally found his family several years after. When his mother and brother both died, he finally decided to stay at the detdom.⁷⁰⁵

Reports about detdoms continued to mention thousands of children being returned to parents or other immediate relatives for many years after the famine.⁷⁰⁶ However, it is not clear whether so many parents really survived the famine. I think that usually whomever children were given to were recorded simply as “parents”. The example of Asqar Qonyravbekov from Southern Kazakhstan shows how the process was handled on ground. Asqar was taken to a detdom in 1933 and in 1936 he was told that he had a brother and had to leave the detdom. Yet, this “brother” was just a distant relative, not Asqar’s real brother. Consequently, the relative did not really take care of him and Asqar lived in misery. In his letter to Mirzoyan, Asqar asked either to be taken back to a detdom or to be provided with material help.⁷⁰⁷ It was not only Kazakh children who were supposedly returned to parents. Twelve years old Vasily Ivanovich was among 12 children at the Zharkent detdom who were forced to go to their parents even though they did not know where their parents were. Three of them could not find their parents and little Vasily was abandoned at the Logova station and was told “well, to hell with you”. Vasily returned to Zharkent alone.⁷⁰⁸

⁷⁰⁵ Zhortūyl Rysaqov, “Ultyq Tragediya zhanghyryghy,” 185.

⁷⁰⁶ We have testimonial evidence that reunion was much more difficult for families torn apart during the Great Terror. Qaysar Tashtitov’s daughter Ghaysha was taken to a detdom after her mother was arrested in 1938. According to the testifier, Ghaysha could only been found 50 years later thanks to a newspaper article. In another example, a Kazakh boy escaped from the detdom and was adopted by an old man. The boy adopted the old man’s surname and settled in the Kyrgyz republic later in his life. His mother looked for him for long years and when she finally found him, the little boy already had seven children (dates and names are not clear in the story). Armiyal Tasymbekov, *Zhan Daūysy* (Almaty: Zhalyn, 1994), 38-41.

⁷⁰⁷ APRK, f. 141, op. 1, d. 13627, l. 55.

⁷⁰⁸ TsGARK, f. 509, op. 1, d. 424, l. 228.

Improvements: How Far?

According to Sügiralimova, Soviet authorities in Kazakhstan eventually solved the problem of besprizornost': homeless children were saved by the state institutions. Many of them became successful workers, experts, academics and so on.⁷⁰⁹ Based on the famous 1935 official decree on the liquidation of child homelessness, she claims that the problem of homeless children was solved in the mid-1930s.⁷¹⁰ According to the official declaration, "as a result of the successful socio-political construction in Kazakhstan, ... and thanks to the enormous help from the government, child homelessness in the republic is substantially liquidated".⁷¹¹

Yet, even though there were inescapably some improvements towards the end of the decade, Sügiralimova reproduces the official discourse without providing much evidence. As already noted, the early 1930s were a period of catastrophe in Kazakhstan, hence it is not striking that conditions in detdoms improved in the second half of the decade. However, we must be cautious about the official declarations. A closer look into some of the detdoms reveal that improvements in detdoms were usually quite limited and even though the children were not starving anymore, most of the problems could not be solved by the end of the decade.

It is true that towards the end of the decade, inspectors started reporting both successful and unsuccessful examples. For example, in Eastern Kazakhstan in 1938, political education was satisfactory in some detdoms, while it was unsatisfactory in others. Nevertheless, sanitary conditions were still unsatisfactory without exception: in

⁷⁰⁹ Sügiralimova, "Qazaqstandaghy Panasyz Balalar," 6.

⁷¹⁰ Ibid., 30.

⁷¹¹ APRK, f. 141., op. 1, d. 10207, ll. 15-20 (O Likvidatsii Detskoi Besprizornosti", May 31, 1935).

some detdoms children did not take a bath for the whole summer.⁷¹² A Narkompros order from 1941 admitted that there were some improvements, however, educational work was far from being satisfactory at a considerable number of detdoms. Once again, the order only blamed cadres for the inefficiency of education. Accordingly, where the director, educators and other workers worked honestly, conditions in the detdom were good; and in the opposite case, the conditions in the detdom were poor.⁷¹³ In her study on detdoms in early Soviet Russia, Tatiana Smirnova argues that the conditions and success of detdoms depended not so much on the orders and instructions from Soviet authorities, but on the personnel (or on “the human factor”) who implemented these regulations.⁷¹⁴ However, such an approach prevents us from seeing the systematic problems in the functioning of Soviet rule and we end up reproducing official Soviet perceptions. Stone, on the other hand, suggest that even though qualifications of the staff seem to have played an important role, it was only one of a number of factors that influenced the overall conditions in a detdom.⁷¹⁵

Some officials were aware of the contradictions between ideals and reality. At a meeting of children’s institutions’ directors in 1938, one official stated that so many were talking about the importance of giving a communist education at detdoms, yet, although it was definitely the ideal, in reality, it was not possible. In reality, the essential task of detdoms was teaching working skills. It was revealed that the majority of detdom

⁷¹² APRK, f. 708, op. 1, d. 776, ll. (Dokladnaia Zapiska: O sostoianii detskikh domov po Voctochno-Kazakhstanskoi oblasti na 1/10-1938 goda).

⁷¹³ TsGARK, f. 1692, op. 1, d. 388, ll. 60-61 (Narkompros zakaz no: 28-170).

⁷¹⁴ Tatiana Smirnova, “The Soviet Regime and the Human Factor in the Functioning of the Children’s Homes System, 1917 to the 1930s,” *The Soviet and Post-Soviet Review* 43, no. 1 (2016).

⁷¹⁵ Stone, “Growing up Soviet?,” 104-107.

children were being sent to work in agriculture.⁷¹⁶ Therefore, the reality was starkly different from the ideals of educating detdom children in a communist way. Ideological considerations were much less important than the necessity of teaching practical skills. In addition, this was also a confession that detdom children who continued their education were only a minority, while the majority were taking blue-collar jobs.

In general, toward the end of the decade, Aqtöbe detdoms were usually described as better than other regions.⁷¹⁷ However, even many detdoms in Aqtöbe were in “intolerable” conditions as late as 1937. They were dirty, unsanitary, and unhealthy; educational work and labor training did not exist.⁷¹⁸ A closer look into one of the detdoms in Aqtöbe oblast might give us a better assessment. Kamyshlybashskii detdom was not among the best in Aqtöbe, however, it was also not an exception. In 1937, there was no kind of educational work in the detdom, and no collective was working because of lack of discipline. There was no cultural corner, but even this detdom had a few dombras although they did not work properly. Boys were engaged in theft both from the detdom and from surrounding places. For many months, children had had no meat, and very little fats, milk, and sugar. The director regularly got drunk, he rarely came to the detdom and did not care about children.⁷¹⁹

An unsatisfactory level of ideological work was also noted and discussed in many platforms towards the end of the decade. For instance, the resolution of the meeting of the

⁷¹⁶ TsGARK, f. 1473, op. 1, d. 65, ll. 74-75 (Protokol: Respublikanskogo Soveshchaniia Direktora Detskikh b-ts Kaz. S.S.R. – 15 Marta 1938 goda).

⁷¹⁷ For example, see, TsGARK, f. 509, op. 1, d. 419, ll. 52-83 (Dokladnaia Zapiska: O polozhenii detskikh domov po Aktiubinskoi oblasti po sostoianiiu na 10 marta 1937 goda).

⁷¹⁸ TsGARK, f. 509, op. 1, d. 405, ll. 27-29 (Protokol No 2: Zasedaniia Prezidiuma Tsentral'noi Detkomissii pri TsIK KSSR).

⁷¹⁹ TsGARK, f. 509, op. 1, d. 419, l. 67 (Dokladnaia Zapiska, “O polozhenii detskikh domoi po Aktiubinskoi oblasti po sostoianiiu na 10 Marta 1937 goda).

detdom workers in April 1938 emphasized the importance of increasing the quality of ideological work, international education, anti-religious propaganda, and hygiene standards.⁷²⁰ Yet, this emphasis was more about the failure of ideological indoctrination. Even a report that states that all children in South Kazakhstan were schooled, and that they were studying in their native language confesses that the quality of education was not high, national hatred among children was strong and children were not aware of personal hygiene.⁷²¹

⁷²⁰ TsGARK, f. 509, op. 1, d. 435, ll. 26-29 (Rezoliutsia: Respublikanskogo Sovesheniia Rabotnikov Detdomov i Detlechebnits).

⁷²¹ TsGARK, f. 509, op. 1, d. 423, ll. 66-74 (Doklad: Yuzhno-Kazakhstanskoi Oblastnoi Detskoi Komissii o Rabote po bor'by s detskoi besprizornost'iu i okhrane detstva za 1937 god).

The reliability of the documents from the years of Terror is limited as we have sometimes highly optimistic, but usually very pessimistic descriptions of the situation in the detdoms. Accusations against directors or other detdom personnel enormously intensified and inspector reports were flooded with anti-Soviet elements, Trotskyist conspirators, and enemies of people; a very ideological language which had been, to a great extent, absent up to that point.

Portraits of directors and other workers are the least reliable. It is necessary to remember that Narkompros was one of the heavily hit institutions in Kazakhstan during the Terror, therefore quite a number of detdom educators or workers were also purged. Indeed, blaming Narkompros officials was not unique to the years of Terror. Throughout the decade Narkompros was frequently blamed for the inadequacies. For example, see, TsGARK, f. 509, op. 1, d. 213, l. 151 (K zasedaniu Tsentral'noi Detkomissii pri KTsIK'e KASSR – Ot 10 aprelya 1934). Hence, usual accusations against Narkompros became an issue of life and death during the Terror.

In essence, reports from the Terror years are not that different from the rest. We read the same problems again and again. However, during the Terror, all these problems such as unsanitary conditions, lack of underwear, theft, hooliganism or drunkenness became crimes for detdom directors who were accused of being enemies of people due to these. TsGARK, f. 509, op. 1, d. 407, l. 33 (Postanovlenie – Prezidiuma Pavlodarskogo Raiispolkoma ot 33 noyabr 1937). When we look at a protocol about the dismissed detdom officials from June 1937, it is seen that although being a class enemy or being son of a kulak were frequently used in accusations against dismissed officials in the general discourse, the most common concrete accusations were regularly getting drunk and theft. Lack of discipline and low level of educational work at detdoms were among other accusations. TsGARK, f. 509, op. 1, d. 407, ll. 17-18 (Vypiska iz Protokola No 28: Vyeznogo Zasedaniia Prezidiuma Shemonaikhinskogo Raionnogo Iсполnitel'nogo Komiteta Sovetov", June 9, 1937). According to another report, accusations against detdom directors and educators included being uneducated, beating and even raping children, nationalism, mismanagement and widespread mass hooliganism among children, not having anti-religious propaganda and religious influences on children. APRK, f. 708, op. 1, d. 572, ll. 74-82 (Dokladnaia Zapiska: O sostoianii detdomov v respublike na 20/USH-37 g.", pp).

Not all reports from the Terror years were negative which make it complicated how to treat these reports. In contrast, some of them provided a very positive picture. For example, see an inspector report about Qarabulaq detdom in Almaty oblast, TsGARK, f. 509, op. 1, d. 418, ll. 43-48 (Dokladnaia Zapiska: O Sostoianii detdomov po Alma-Atinskoi oblasti na 1-2 yanvar 1937 goda).

The 1935 decree that declared that child besprizornost' was liquidated focused too much on hooliganism. The police were supposed to wage a war against child and teenage hooligans on the street.⁷²² In this respect, the decree was an early announcement of the panic of the subsequent years of the decade. In relation with the increasing obsession with discipline and a sense of moral panic, Soviet authorities more and more emphasized lack of discipline in detdoms.⁷²³ In the official discourse of the 1930s, the insistence that "victory of socialism" had solved such social problems contributed to a more hostile attitude to besprizorniks. Increasingly, homeless children came to be seen as "socially harmful elements". An article about regulating leisure time for children in Kazakh reveals that as of 1937 street children's image was terribly worsened. According to the author, children should not be allowed to interact with the children on the street in order to prevent them from being impudent, from learning habits such as smoking or playing *ashyk*⁷²⁴ and so on.⁷²⁵

In 1941, a Narkompros decree counted poor discipline, hooliganism, an unsocial attitude towards education and labor, plunder of socialist property, rudeness, uncomradely relations between children, and improper relations between boys and girls as the main problems in detdoms.⁷²⁶ Although the authorities perceived any unruly behavior as hooliganism, inspector reports show that in some detdoms, child/teenager gangs ruled; they were even beating educators and authorities had only minimal control

⁷²² APRK, f. 141., op. 1, d. 10207, ll. 15-20 (O Likvidatsii Detskoi Besprizornosti, May 31, 1935).

⁷²³ Stone, "Growing up Soviet?," 30-31; 60-61.

⁷²⁴ A traditional child game played with animal bones. Curiously, the author criticizes this game very harshly.

⁷²⁵ M. Begalın, "Balalardyn bos ūaqytyn durys uyymdastyrayyq," *Aūyl Mughalimi* 4 (1937), 66.

⁷²⁶ TsGARK, f. 1692, op. 1, d. 388, ll. 60-61 (Narkompros zakaz no: 28-170).

over the institutions.⁷²⁷ For example, it was reported that there was no discipline in Qaskeleñ detgorod and hooliganism prevailed. Hooligan children broke windows; girls could not leave their rooms due to fear. Theft was common and children were selling what they stole in the bazaar. They also often got drunk. Some of the girls were running away to go to the Issyk detgorod that was 60 kms away from Qaskeleñ.⁷²⁸

One common theme in highly critical reports about specific detdoms was rape. Although probably some of these accusations were used for the purge of certain individuals, and hence were not totally reliable, some reports include detailed descriptions of cases of rape. For example, according to one inspector report, a storekeeper raped a girl in Ayagöz detdom and then the girl herself took the issue to the police; yet the man was not punished.⁷²⁹ My interpretation is that at least a portion of rape cases were real since child abuse is universally not uncommon in children's institutions. Yet, in connection with the moral panic, rape was more and more problematized by the authorities in the late 1930s. Sexual exploitation of children was indeed a common problem throughout the decade. For example, in 1935, it was reported that girls in the age group of 11-13 were massively abused in Zharkent, Taldyqorghhan and Chu detdoms.⁷³⁰

The Road to Life?

⁷²⁷ APRK, f. 143, op. 1, d. 1928, l. 55 (Report by inspector Kostina).

⁷²⁸ APRK, f. 143, op. 2, d. 79, ll. 28-35 (Dokladnaia Zapiska: O sostoianii Kaskelenskogo Detskogo Goroda).

⁷²⁹ APRK, f. 708, op. 1, d. 572, l. 44 (Dokladnaia Zapiska, June 13, 1937).

⁷³⁰ APRK, f. 141, op. 1., d. 10207, ll. 2-3 (O khode realizatsii reshenii TsK VKP/b/ i SNK SSSR ot 31 maya 1935g. i Kraikoma VKP/b/ i SNK KASSR ot 15 iyunia s. g. o likvidatsii detskoi besprizornosti i beznadzornosti, November 21, 1935).

Although I have more material on this topic, I am not going to discuss it more in this dissertation. I am planning to further investigate sexual abuse of children both in detdoms and schools in another study.

The fate of orphans was used to legitimize Soviet rule. In 1935, Zhürgenov introduced cultural revolution in Kazakhstan with the example of the life of an orphan. According to Zhürgenov's narrative, Tañghyuly Beken from Aqtöbe oblast had participated in the all-union collective farmers congress in Moscow. Allegedly, Beken said "In the past I used to be a shepherd. I grew up poor, I was an orphan. Today I drive a tractor. The government gave me a tractor of the brand International. When I drive the tractor, I tell myself: 'See Beken! Drive the steel pegasus [*bolat tulpar*], cultivate the socialist land!'"⁷³¹ Zhürgenov's narrative continues with statistics about the achievements of orphans who had grown up in the detdoms. For instance, among the former orphans of the Tamdy detkommun in Aqtöbe oblast, there were 18 film technicians, 13 teachers, 5 photographers, and 16 tractorists. There were musicians, artists, and doctors who used to be detdom orphans. 70 children who were gathered from detdoms across Kazakhstan were studying at the Almaty ballet school.⁷³²

Confirming Zhügenov's claims, the Kazakh historian Sügiralimova argues that detdoms played a vital role in the successful professional careers of children after the detdom.⁷³³ Contemporary newspapers provided the same narrative that former detdom children were successfully integrated into society. One 1935 article from a Karaganda newspaper gave examples of former detdom children who worked at different facilities, and they claimed to be satisfactorily taken care of.⁷³⁴ However, the same piece also confessed that it was not universal and brought a few examples of how some former

⁷³¹ Zhurgenev, *Qazaqstanda Mädeniät Revolyutsiyasy*, 5-6.

⁷³² Ibid, 6-7.

⁷³³ Sügiralimova, "Qazaqstandgy Panasyz Balalar," 107.

⁷³⁴ Sukhova, "Usilit' vniianie i zabotu o detiakh besprizornikakh," *Karagandinskaia Kommuna*, November 15, 1935, 3.

detsdom children lived terribly in the places that they were sent to (such as the ones who could not attend school since they did not have shoes).

We do not know how reliable the data Zhürgenov provided about former orphans was; however, the majority of the available documents from various state departments contradict Zhurgenev's claims. In general, orphans were not welcomed by the society and their tough life continued after the detsdom experience. Particularly, in the collective farms they were taken advantage of by other farmers. Society perceived them as morally corrupt. Consequently, for most of them, orphanhood and the detsdom experience did not produce opportunities to become members of the socialist society. In contrast, they were further marginalized. As noted in the Introduction, some Kazakh children, such as Kemel Tokayev, had successful careers. However, it is easier to write about success stories and ignore thousands of others who did not share the same fate.

Before the famine, one could easily find 20-21 year-old pupils in the detsdoms. During the famine, officially detsdoms admitted boys and girls who were younger than 16. Those who were 16 and older were to be sent to technical schools, other high schools and production units.⁷³⁵ According to the 1935 decree on the liquidation of besprizornost', children older than 14 years were to be sent to FZU schools, sovkhozes, kolkhozes and MTSs.⁷³⁶ However, this was easier to decree than do. Sügiralimova states that the most important problem in children's institutions throughout the 1930s was that the number of children was higher than capacity and teenagers constituted a significant portion.⁷³⁷ The problem kept authorities busy and despite all their efforts to get rid of teenagers older

⁷³⁵ Qudaydululy, *Tärbīeshige Kömekshi*, 4-5.

⁷³⁶ APRK, f. 141., op. 1, d. 10207, ll. 15-20 (O Likvidatsii Detskoi Besprizornosti, May 31, 1935).

⁷³⁷ Sügiralimova, "Qazaqstandaghy Panasyz Balalar," 29.

than 14 years old, in 1936, 50 of 600 children in a detgorod in Almaty city were teenagers from 15 to 19 years old.⁷³⁸

The number of children in the detdoms decreased significantly towards the end of the decade. In fact, it can be argued that in the second half of the decade the priority was to decrease the number of detdom children by sending them wherever possible. In some cases, so many children were circulated so quickly that teachers had no time to become familiar with them.⁷³⁹ Consequently, for the majority of children, detdoms turned into a kind of transitory institution. Detdom's role in the creation of the new Soviet person was thus further undermined.

Detdoms preserved their status as a tutelary for pupils who were sent to schools or production units such as kolkhozes and factories. That is why we have some descriptions of the early years of their post-detdom lives. Children who were released from detdoms were to be provided clothes and other basic needs by Narkompros. Detdoms were responsible to keep in touch with these children for one year and to help in case they needed material assistance.⁷⁴⁰

In a relatively early description from 1935, it was stated that the goal of labor education in the detdoms was to prepare orphans for their life after the detdoms; however, it was not the case because the children who were sent to kolkhozes and sovkhoses lived

⁷³⁸ APRK, f. 141, op. 1, d. 11794 (Akt: 1936 goda Dekabria 31 dnia gorod Almaata).

⁷³⁹ The director of a detdom in Shymkent emphasized the intensity of movement of children in the second half of the decade. His detdom only hosted 88 children, but in the first nine months of 1937, 1205 children passed through the institution. According to another director, his detdom hosted 166 children, but in the first nine months 1440 children passed through and another detdom hosted 135 children with 1775 passing through in nine months. TsGARK, f. 509, op. 1, d. 423, l. 12, 17, 19, 26 (Protokol: Oblastnogo Soveshchaniia Direktorov i Starshikh Vospitatelei Detdomov, 23-27 dekabria 1937). The number of children passing through a detdom sounds too exaggerated, but these high numbers can be found in many documents.

⁷⁴⁰ Qudaydululy, *Tärbēshige Kömekshi*, 4-5.

in terrible conditions. For example, 15 former detdom children who had been sent to Tarangul sovkhhoz in Lenin raion were living in “inhuman” conditions. They worked for the whole summer, but in the winter, they found themselves hungry and barefoot. They were not allowed to go to school either.⁷⁴¹ In 1936, Qulymbetov explained that the children that they had sent to kolkhozes and sovkhazes in the previous year were not treated properly. Usually they were seen as laborers akin to slaves. They never studied, but only worked for the farms.⁷⁴²



Image 12: Life after the famine – Children of a mountain village (1934)⁷⁴³

Officials sometimes referred to detdom children as a “child army”. Nevertheless, it was obvious that this army could not be commanded properly. One official gave the example of Eastern Kazakhstan region where mass escape from kolkhozes was witnessed. Children who escaped from kolkhozes were caught and taken back to

⁷⁴¹ TsGARK, f. 509, op. 1, d. 319, ll. 105-106 (Otchetnyi Doklad o Sostoianii Detskikh Domov i Prakticheskikh Zadachakh Na 1935 god).

Teenagers who were sent to work at factories were no different. In December 1937, ten former detdom children who were then working at a sugar factory wrote a petition to authorities and explained how terribly they lived. TsGARK, f. 509, op. 1, d. 423, l. 79.

⁷⁴² TsGARK, f. 509, op. 1, d. 274, ll. 85-86 (Comrade Qulymbetov’s speech at the meeting of detdom workers, October 23, 1936).

⁷⁴³ TsGAKFDZRK, 7-124 (The archive of F. L. Savin – Tau Chilik raion, Almaty oblast).

kolkhozes, but they kept escaping.⁷⁴⁴ The fate of children who were released from detdoms after the age of 14 continued to keep authorities busy. In a Sovnarkom decree in 1937, officials admitted that there were serious problems concerning children after they left detdoms. It was noted that some of these teenagers escaped from their new institutions to live either on the streets or return to their detdoms.⁷⁴⁵

Former detdom children wrote letters to newspapers. For example, teenagers who were sent to work at the Lenin mechanical factory in Western Kazakhstan complained that they were living in a cold building, they were not provided winter clothes, and for that reason they were not going to school for more than a month.⁷⁴⁶ On the issue of former detdom children, newspapers usually blamed the managers of sovkhoses or kolkhozes. In a regional newspaper, it was claimed that ten former detdom children who were sent to a sovkhos in Aktuibinsk oblast were provided everything they needed before they had left the detdom. Yet, managers of the sovkhos treated them “soullessly”. Children were reported to say that managers seized all their clothes and shoes, and no one was taking care of them.⁷⁴⁷ Former detdom children’s petitions to higher authorities show that detdoms frequently ignored their responsibilities as well. 21 former detdom children from Qaskeleñ detgorod were sent to kolkhozes in Kugalinsk raion. In their petition to Mirzoyan, the children wrote that they were not provided necessary belongings by the

⁷⁴⁴ TsGARK, f. 1473, op. 1, d. 66, ll. 47-48 (Stenogramma: Soveshchaniia zaveduiushikh i direktorov detdomov, detbol'nits Kaz. SSR – 11 marta 1938 g. vechernee zasedanie).

⁷⁴⁵ APRK, f. 141, op. 1, d. 13627, ll. 158-163 (Qazaq SSR-nyñ Qalyq Komiissarlary Sovetiniñ Qavylsyz: 1936-Zhyly Detdomdardan Shygharylghan 14 Zhastan Zhogharghy Eresek Balalardyn Zhayy Zhäne Aldaghy Úaqytta Detdomdardy Eresek Balalardan Zheniltüv Tūraly, April 21, 1937).

⁷⁴⁶ “O nas ne zabotiatsia,” *Prikaspiiskaia Pravda*, February 5, 1937.

⁷⁴⁷ “Vospitateli iz Alimbetovskogo Sovkhoza”, *Aktiubinskaia Pravda*, January 22, 1937.

detdom before they were sent to kolkhozes in 1938.⁷⁴⁸ In another example, at a meeting of children's institutions' directors in 1938, one official explained how children at the age of 14 could not really be employed even though they were supposed to. Six teenagers from Qaskeleñ detdom were sent to kolkhozes in 1937, but they were not accepted and roamed across the district for six months. In another example, teenagers escaped from a sovkhos and no one knew where they were.⁷⁴⁹ Some of the teenagers that were sent from detdoms to production units were not even literate. According to an inspector report from 1935, 115 of teenagers sent to production units in 1935 were illiterate.⁷⁵⁰

Some of them wrote petitions to Children's Commission for help. According to Kōrshinbay Qorqymbaev's letter, in 1937, children older than 14 in his detdom in Mirzoyan raion had been sent to kolkhozes by the order of Narkompros. They worked for the whole summer, and in September, Kōrshinbay went to a secondary school with his two friends. Conditions in the school were so poor that the other boys had escaped, and Kōrshinbay was trying to survive in the dormitory. Neither the school, nor the kolkhoz helped him. Kōrshinbay claims that he had written a letter to Mirzoyan and the head of the detdom. The regional Narkompros was ordered to help, yet, they told Kosrhinbai that they were not going to help.⁷⁵¹ This was more or less what happened to at least most of the children who asked for help from Children's Commission. Central authorities usually

⁷⁴⁸ TsGARK, f. 509, op. 1, d. 432, l. 16. Then we learn that 16 of them returned to Qaskeleñ detgorod and one child was provided material help. TsGARK, f. 509, op. 1, d. 432, l. 18.

⁷⁴⁹ TsGARK, f. 1473, op. 1, d. 65, l. 45 (Protokol: Respublikanskogo Soveshchaniia Direktora Detskikh b-ts Kaz. S.S.R. – 15 Marta 1938 goda).

⁷⁵⁰ APRK, f. 141, op. 1, d. 10207, ll. 2-3 (O khode realizatsii reshenii TsK VKP/b/ i SNK SSSR ot 31 maya 1935g. i Kraikoma VKP/b/ i SNK KASSR ot 15 iyunia s. g. o likvidatsii detskoï besprizornosti i beznadzornosti, November 21, 1935).

It was also noted that children continued what was perceived as hooliganism and theft at the new institutions to which they were sent to work. TsGARK, f. 509, op. 1, d. 441, l. 45.

⁷⁵¹ TsGARK, f. 509, op. 1, d. 423, l. 154.

answered these petitions, and charged local authorities to help, but the process was rarely finalized; it was usually apparent that there were not enough financial sources, nor did the Commission have real authority over detdoms across Kazakhstan.⁷⁵²

An exceptional petition was written by 21 former detdom children in Petropavlovsk in 1938. The petition shows that there was not only solidarity among orphans, but that a detdom identity was emerging among them. Yet, the petition also demonstrates how they could not become members of the Soviet society, and how their previous petitions were not taken into account.⁷⁵³ For the former detdom orphans, life was sometimes so difficult that they even thought about suicide. Eremin and Romanovskii studied to be chauffeurs in Talghar, but they lived in the most terrible conditions [*sobachikh usloviakh*], and they had survived up to the point that it was “not possible to live anymore”. Although they had left the detkommun like “skirmishers of work”, now they were thinking of returning to homelessness.⁷⁵⁴ In fact, Eremin and Romanovskii were not the only former detdom pupils who thought about escaping from the collective farms. Tens of orphans indeed had left kolkhozes and sovkhoses and started to live on the streets and bazaars in almost all regions across Kazakhstan.⁷⁵⁵

Beyond question, children who were sent to high schools for further education were the luckiest ones. However, it was not easy for an average detdom child to continue his/her education. In one example, Daülbaev finished the fifth grade at Karamsk detdom

⁷⁵² Two other orphans, Shomanov and Kasenev, lived like homeless children in the Latys sovkhos. The two orphans got tired of trying to explain their situation to local authorities, for nothing was ever done. TsGARK, f. 509, op. 1, d. 424, l. 173.

⁷⁵³ TsGARK, f. 509, op. 1, d. 441, l. 67.

⁷⁵⁴ TsGARK, f. 509, op. 1, d. 442, l. 34 (Letter from the children of Karaganda det-trudkoloni).

⁷⁵⁵ TsGARK, f. 509, op. 1, d. 385, ll. 88-89 (Ob Ustroistve Pererostkov).

in Almaty oblast in 1935. Together with his friends, he asked the director of the detdom to allow them to continue their education. The director, sick of their demands, sent each of them to 15 different kolkhozes.⁷⁵⁶ In addition, even teenagers who had the opportunity to pursue further education frequently had similar problems. On one occasion, 40 former detdom children studying at Lepsinsk pedtekhnikum wrote a letter to Zhürgenov. They complained about their material conditions: they had neither clothes, nor shoes. Neither the director of the tekhnikum, nor other institutions helped them; they were feeling no one cared about them.⁷⁵⁷ In another example, a group of teenage girls who were sent to Semey FZU complained that they were not provided sufficient food and clothes and were taught in Russian, even though they had been educated in Kazakh previously at the detdom.⁷⁵⁸

In one letter written to Mirzoyan by a former detdom child, we see how children embraced Soviet discourse, but also the limits of it. 19-year-old Alimbay Esenzholov asked for 283 som from Mirzoyan. He writes that he entered a boarding school at the age of 14 and stayed there until October 1936. In line with the Soviet discourse about Kazakh children, he also notes that he served for the wealthy after he was orphaned. He finished his letter by saying “I am the government’s child; I was in a boarding school, in a detdom”. One may claim that this is a proof of how Kazakh children were Sovietized by embracing the expected discourse. However, in the same letter 19-year-old Alimbay uses the word dying frequently (“if you do not want me to die”; “if you do not send this

⁷⁵⁶ APRK, f. 141, op. 1, d. 10171, l. 122 (Petition from Daulbaev E. to Kraikom VKP/b/ Almaatinskaia oblast Chilinskii raion, October 28, 1935).

⁷⁵⁷ APRK, f. 141, op. 1., d. 11797, ll. 11-14.

⁷⁵⁸ APRK, f. 141, op. 1, d. 10171, l. 98 (From Zhürgenov to Mirzoyan, October 2, 1935).

money, I will die” and so on) and describes in detail in what ways Mirzoyan could send the money to him. Obviously, this letter presents the author as a desperate person and uses agitational language; and the Soviet discourse used in the letter is more likely to be just a tactic when we also consider that it is used only in passing and not strongly emphasized.⁷⁵⁹

Conclusion

In a 1935 Kazakh language children’s story, a group of vigorous, confident, and strong children march in a parade. One of the spectators is amazed by the discipline and charisma of the children. He asks another spectator who these children are. Looking proud and wise the other man replies that these are the Pioneers and Oktobrists of the Qaskeleñ detgorod; “they are the young sprouts of the new life”.⁷⁶⁰ According to the story, thousands of children now study, train in arts and sciences, and are educated as communists in the place where once [before the Soviet regime] only one *bay* had lived. Such was the image of orphans and detdoms in Kazakhstan.

However, Qaskeleñ detgorod was one of the institutions that appeared in government documents again and again for its inadequacies. Official documents’ description of the detgorod was very different from the image presented by the story above. Stoves did not work properly, windows were broken in many rooms, the number and the condition of the washbasins were insufficient. Two children slept on one bed, rooms were dark, latrines were dirty and devastated. Educational work collapsed,

⁷⁵⁹ APRK, f. 141, op. 1, d. 13627, ll. 152-153 (From Ālimbay Esenzholov to Mirzoyan, “Süiikti Qadyrly Agamyz Mirzoyanga!”).

⁷⁶⁰ “Eñbek Süyerler” in Ālibayuly, *Sarı bala*.

children drank and smoke. There was no communist education at all.⁷⁶¹ Qaskeleñ detgorod was still singled out as a terrible example in 1940 as an institution where children could not eat anything other than bread.⁷⁶² Lisa Kirschenbaum argues that the Bolshevik regime in fact separated myths of childhood from children themselves, and the metaphorical children stood as icons of the revolutionary vision while debates on childhood were only partially about real children.⁷⁶³ What Kirschenbaum argues is explicit in the case of Kazakhstan too and Qaskeleñ detgorod's representation in children's literature is a perfect example.

This chapter has argued that the case of orphans of the famine demonstrates how the attempts to create a new Soviet person were not successful in the detdoms of Kazakhstan in the 1930s. In contrast to general assumptions, detdoms were not institutions of Sovietization for the formerly nomadic Kazakh orphans. In fact, I have suggested that we need to rethink the impact and importance of cultural revolution in the formation of Soviet identities in Central Asia. A focus on self-claimed communists or cultural activists is not sufficient to explain the experiences of broader segments of the society.

In the Russian SSR, Alan Ball argues that even though various shortcomings were characteristic of many detdoms, there were considerable improvements towards the end of the 1920s and the chaos of the early years gradually came to an end.⁷⁶⁴ In his unpublished dissertation, Andrew Stone directs our attention to the emotional aspects of

⁷⁶¹ TsGARK, f. 509, op. 1, d. 418., l. 88 (Prezidiumu TSP Soiuzu Doshk. Uchr. i D/D).

⁷⁶² TsGARK, f. 1692, op. 1, d. 386, l. 128 (Narkomtorg KazSSR Prodovol'stv. Otd., 17.4.1940)

⁷⁶³ Kirschenbaum, *Small Comrades*, 2-3.

⁷⁶⁴ Ball, *And Now My Soul is Hardened*, 173-174.

Soviet orphanhood, arguing that how orphans thought about themselves and spoke about their lives were sought to be transformed in state institutions.⁷⁶⁵ However, the project of building the new Soviet person was most successful in famous institutions such as the Bolshevo and Dzerzhinskii labor communes for children that were presented as models to follow for other children's institutions. These institutions were the "factories of the New Soviet People".⁷⁶⁶ Although Stone has the advantage of using a wide range of ego documents to reach such a conclusion, his argument, which, to some extent, can be generalized to many children's institutions in the Soviet center, does not fit the Kazakh case at all. According to Stone, although not all Soviet policies were successful, orphans still developed a common identity, and particularly felt attachment to their loving and caring educators. In contrast, *detdom* personnel were usually seen as a problem by both authorities and children in Kazakhstan. In addition, in the letters they wrote to officials, former *detdom* children in Stone's study present themselves as self-improving and dedicated future Soviet citizens. In this respect, these *detdoms* did achieve some qualified success to provide a communist upbringing.⁷⁶⁷ That is not the case in Kazakhstan; at least in the few letters and petitions of children that we have. An "emotional regime" emerged in the children's institutions that Stone studied, and this regime played a huge role in the formation of children's subjectivities.⁷⁶⁸ An obvious characteristic of *detdoms* in

⁷⁶⁵ Stone, "Growing Up Soviet?", 15.

⁷⁶⁶ *Ibid.*, 128-188.

Yet, Stone notes that many children even in these celebrated institutions did not construct elaborately "Soviet narratives" for themselves (pp. 169-174).

⁷⁶⁷ *Ibid.*, 247-253.

⁷⁶⁸ *Ibid.*, 222-226.

Kazakhstan was the lack of attention to children's emotions and the complete lack of sentimentalism on the part of Kazakh authorities in a tragic decade.⁷⁶⁹

There were enormous numbers of child deaths in the immediate post-famine years even by Soviet standards, and throughout the 1930s, children almost never had enough food, clothes, or any other basic need. Political or cultural education was barely conducted. The campaign for hygiene was a total fiasco. The very institutions, which were supposed to consolidate interethnic harmony and raise internationalist future citizens, frequently contributed to the consolidation of ethnic hostilities. Ethnic conflict between Russians and Kazakhs was a permanent part of life in Kazakhstan from the early 1920s onwards. In the case of detdoms, we can see how this conflict continued throughout the 1930s, but also importantly, how the balance of power significantly changed at the expense of Kazakhs. The problem of teenagers sent to kolkhozes was another proof of how detdoms were unable to prepare children for life and to integrate them into Soviet society. In their post-detdom lives, the majority of detdom children were further marginalized in Soviet society

Robert Kindler argues that if Sovietization means subjecting entire collectives to the will of the state, then the famine was responsible for the birth of Soviet Kazakhstan. Whoever survived the famine stabilized the Soviet system; individual survival was almost totally dependent on Soviet mechanisms.⁷⁷⁰ This chapter has demonstrated that

⁷⁶⁹ On the other hand, in her comparative study of Moscow and Kalmykia, Loraine de la Fe suggests that the common experiences of children including education, material belongings, communal dining etc. created a new Soviet person in the detdoms. de la Fe, "Empire's Children". It is difficult to assess de la Fe's claim, because it is more a way of reasoning than a well-supported argument.

de la Fe also suggests that Soviet policy in Kalmykia was actually imperialistic.

⁷⁷⁰ Kindler, *Stalin's Nomads*, 237-238.

stability was not easy to consolidate in the aftermath of the famine. More importantly, subjecting entire collectives to the will of the state was only a first step towards Sovietization. As Kindler himself notes, it was the Great Patriotic War that had the most impact on identification with the Soviet regime which, according to Kindler, blocked the tragedy of famine out of the collective memory of Kazakhs.⁷⁷¹

An analogous example can be found among the children of kulaks across the USSR who were deported from their homelands. In their study of memories of these displaced children, Baron and Kaznelson argue that Soviet authorities never succeeded in instilling in them a full or secure sense of belonging. The regime also failed to create any sense of overarching spatial identity of the Soviet homeland.⁷⁷² Recently, historians of Soviet Central Asia have also started to emphasize that the goals and implementation of Soviet policies in the periphery significantly differed from the political and ideological processes in the center. In her discussion of Fatima Gabitova, an ethnic Tatar writer and pedagogue who played a significant role in cultural life of Soviet Kazakhstan, Maria Blackwood invites us to question the applicability of the arguments on Soviet subjectivity based on studies of Russian subjects to non-Russian areas.⁷⁷³ In her study of early Soviet rule in Tajikistan, Botakoz Kassymbekova argues that the absence of institutions and cadres significantly limited the capacity of Soviet state in the periphery. Consequently,

⁷⁷¹ Ibid., 239. If the famine marked the birth of Soviet Kazakhstan, why the war was the most significant factor to shape people's identification remains unanswered.

⁷⁷² Michael Kaznelson and Nick Baron, "Memories of Displacement: Loss and Reclamation of Home/land in the Narratives of Soviet Child Deportees of the 1930s," in Nick Baron ed., *Displaced Children in Russia and Eastern Europe*, 116.

⁷⁷³ Maria A. Blackwood, "Fatima Gabitova: repression, subjectivity and historical memory in Soviet Kazakhstan," *Central Asian Survey* 36, no. 1 (2017).

Kazakh historian Zhanat Kundakbayeva too studied Gabitova's personality and reached a similar conclusion. Kundakbayeva contrasted Gabitova's case with the women activists of the 1920s. Kundakbayeva, *Modernizatsiia Rannei Epokhi*, 170-193.

the state came to depend on a network of individuals who were not motivated by revolutionary enthusiasm. The remoteness from the center determined the shape of Soviet policies in Tajikistan.⁷⁷⁴ A recent study on the role of red teahouses for the Soviet Enlightenment project in Tajikistan is even more relevant for this study. These red teahouses (or red *yurts* in Kazakhstan) are usually seen as the instruments of cultural revolution in Central Asia. However, analyzing drug use in the 1930s, Alisher Latypov argues that, in contrast to dominant assumptions in historiography, red teahouses failed to end the use of drugs and transform Tajik society according to the promises of cultural revolution. The fundamental problems on the “cultural front” remained mostly unresolved throughout the 1930s.⁷⁷⁵ In this way, Latypov highlights the limitations of Soviet cultural projects, largely caused by the inefficiency of Soviet policies in the periphery. In this chapter, I have emphasized the limitations of another Soviet institution in the formation of Soviet identities and the success of cultural revolution. The origins of the curious stability of Soviet Central Asia should be looked for not in cultural policies of the 1930s, but in the structural transformations of the subsequent decades.

⁷⁷⁴ Kassymbekova, *Despite Cultures*.

⁷⁷⁵ Alisher Latypov, “*Choikhonai Surkh*: The Replacement of ‘Opium Dens’ with Red Teahouses and the Limits of the Soviet Enlightenment Project in Tajikistan,” *Central Asian Affairs* 7, no. 3 (2020).

CHAPTER 4

MOBILIZATION AND HEROISM: KAZAKH CHILDREN DURING WORLD WAR II, 1941-1945

Julie deGraffenried argues that the war marks a great rupture in the Soviet narrative of a progressively sentimentalized childhood. The war transformed the definition of childhood: the grateful but relatively passive myth of happy childhood lost its usefulness once the war began, and instead a new paradigm, what deGraffenried calls “sacrificing” childhood, supplanted pre-war conceptions.⁷⁷⁶ In fact, even though the image of an assertive and active child gave way to a more passive conception of happy childhood throughout the 1930s, military values had been instilled in children’s literature from the early days of the Bolshevik regime and the child as hero and martyr reached its peak with the rise of the cult of Pavlik Morozov. Therefore, it can be argued that for the general Soviet picture, the war marks not a great rupture, but rather a return of the image of child as hero.⁷⁷⁷

In the Kazakh case though, the war was certainly a rupture. The Soviet Kazakh discourse of childhood lacked the image of a child martyr until the late 1930s. Military training in children’s publications came late in comparison to the general Soviet picture. The war inevitably brought the image of child as hero, and military values ultimately defined who a Soviet Kazakh child was. In the absence of a long tradition of writing on military training, Kazakh authors almost totally depended on translations of Russian texts. During the war, no Kazakh-language periodical for children or about children was

⁷⁷⁶ deGraffenried, *Sacrificing Childhood*, 3.

⁷⁷⁷ deGraffenried herself notes how the Pioneer leadership depended on previous experiences of child heroes such as the cult of Pavlik Morozov and Arcadii Gaidar’s literary hero Timur. *Ibid.*, 85.

published. The decrease in publishing in the Kazakh language itself was a cause for the rupture in imagination of childhood in Kazakhstan. On the one hand, due to the significant decrease in the publication of Kazakh-language sources during the war, coupled with the attempts that took Russian language education for non-Russian children much more seriously than ever starting from 1937-38, Kazakh children came to depend heavily on Russian-language texts. On the other hand, even the ones who consumed only Kazakh-language literature mostly read translations from Russian. The war, for the first time, brought homogenization of images of childhood across the Soviet Union. Before the war, Kazakh language sources were usually late to catch up with the general trends in the Soviet Union. The theme of war in children's literature and military training are good examples of these late-coming images in the 1930s. Although Kazakhstan adopted the Stalinist myth of happy childhood and a discipline and school-oriented conception of education by the end of the 1930s, there was still more diversity as discussed in the first chapter. Once the war started, relative diversity of images was replaced by a more homogenous Soviet patriotism and heroism.

Mobilization of the whole society, including children, for a single cause for the first time made it possible for large segments of Kazakh society to participate in the Soviet project. Discussion of images of children (or lack of them) for adults show how Kazakh soldiers and authors claimed equal citizenship within Soviet society. As will be discussed in the last section of this chapter, the war created an alternative discourse of suffering and sentimentalism for the general Soviet public; however, Kazakhs were, to a great extent, indifferent to this alternative discourse. Instead, they consolidated a primordialist Kazakh national discourse by fully embracing the heroic vision of Soviet patriotism. The war made

Kazakhs Soviet, but being Soviet no longer required a revolutionary zeal or socialist set of values. Amir Weiner argues that World War II transformed the Soviet polity physically and symbolically. Contribution to the war effort and purity along ethnic lines replaced social origin as the dominant criterion of sociopolitical status.⁷⁷⁸ Just like the war provided Ukrainians a powerful myth that simultaneously integrated them into the larger Soviet narrative and allowed for particularistic aspirations⁷⁷⁹, Kazakhs were integrated into the Soviet project largely thanks to the myth of War that allowed them simultaneously to ignore the original assumptions of the Bolshevik revolutionary zeal.

During the war, approximately 1.2 million Kazakhstani soldiers were conscripted by the Red Army (the fifth largest number after the Russian, Ukrainian, Belorussian and Uzbek republics). Civilians were mobilized for the war effort on the home front. For the Soviet Union, Kazakhstan was a source of livestock, cereals, and potatoes. It was not only agricultural products that Kazakhstan supplied though. Karaganda coal mines became vital for the war effort particularly after the invasion of the Donbass by the Nazi army. The war period witnessed the evacuation of numerous factories, mainly of textile and food industries, from Ukraine and Russia to Kazakhstan.⁷⁸⁰ It was reported that out of 16 million som donation from all around the Soviet Union, 1 million som was provided by Kazakhstani citizens.⁷⁸¹ In addition to the extreme intensification of the wartime production, gathering winter clothes for the Red Army became another central theme in the

⁷⁷⁸ Weiner, *Making Sense of War*, 9.

⁷⁷⁹ *Ibid.*, 331-337.

⁷⁸⁰ For details, see, G. Balaqev and Q. Aldazhumanov, *Qazaqstan Eñbekshileri Maydan Qyzmetinde, 1941-1945* (Almaty: Ghylym Baspasy, 1985), 36-38.

⁷⁸¹ *Ibid.*, 200.

lives of Kazakhstanis, particularly in the first winter of the war.⁷⁸²

Agitation and propaganda were widespread. Large numbers of workers were trained for the war effort. Kazakh women joined the labor force for the first time in great numbers. Combat training was a natural part of everyday life. As the consequence of the evacuation of hundreds of thousands of people from the combat zones, Central Asia was now home to enormous numbers of refugees of various nationalities. The punished peoples⁷⁸³ were included into this picture towards the end of the war. Despite the war effort, cultural life did not stop, and Kazakh artists participated in the concerts, theater plays, and exhibitions, not only in Kazakhstan, but also at the front. A group of Kazakh musicians gave 64 concerts at the northeastern front, and 16 concerts in Moscow in 1942.⁷⁸⁴ Not only industries, but also film studios were evacuated to Kazakhstan such as Mosfilm and Lenfilm. Numerous Soviet films including “Chapaev”, “Lenin: The Year 1918”, “Yakov Sverdlov”, and “Lenin in October” were shown with Kazakh subtitles.⁷⁸⁵ During the war, the Soviet regime legitimized its rule with references to the cultural and scientific developments it provided for Kazakhstan. Among many, famous Kazakh author Sabit Mukanov praised Soviet cultural developments frequently, whereas geologist Qanysh Sätbaev propagated the scientific developments of the Soviet regime.⁷⁸⁶ Soviet agitation tried to incorporate women into the war effort, and legitimized itself by trumpeting how

⁷⁸²For the detailed numbers of winter clothes provided by Kazakhstanis, see, *ibid.*, 225.

⁷⁸³Aleksandr Nekrich, *The Punished Peoples: The Deportation and Fate of Soviet Minorities at the End of the Second World War* (New York: Norton, 1978).

⁷⁸⁴“Qazaqstannyñ Iskusstvo Qyzmetkerleriniñ Maydangha Barghan Brigadasy,” *Sotsialistik Qazaqstan*, August 28, 1942.

⁷⁸⁵T. Täzhibaev, “Qazaq Kinoiskusstvosynyñ Mindetteri,” *Sotsialistik Qazaqstan*, September 1, 1943.

⁷⁸⁶Sabit Mukanov, “Küş bizde, Zheñis de bizde bolady!,” *Sotsialistik Qazaqstan*, July 11, 1941; Qanysh Sätbaev, “Qazaqstanda Ghylymnyñ Damüvy,” *Sotsialistik Qazaqstan*, July 11, 1942.

the new status of Kazakh women was made possible by the Soviet policies.⁷⁸⁷

On the Eve of the War: International Politics and Military Training in Children's Literature

A new discourse started to dominate children's publications towards the end of the 1930s. Happy Kazakh children mourned for the suffering of children in other countries. It was sometimes the poor revolutionary Chinese children who suffered under the tutelage of British, French, and Japanese imperialism, where parents sold their children to the rich and to brothels due to poverty. The little girl Lid-Zhu Kim, who was exploited by the collaboration between the British imperialists and the Chinese police, dreamt about Lenin and Moscow.⁷⁸⁸ Kazakh children read poems about Jewish girls under the rule of Nazis. They heard the suffering and crying Jewish girls' voice from Berlin, whereas in the happy land of the Soviet Union, the Jewish girl served the people as an engineer, teacher, pilot, or doctor.⁷⁸⁹ Colonial peoples' suffering under the French or British empires was another theme that Soviet Kazakh children had encountered.⁷⁹⁰

However, this was not the ultimate fate of the children abroad. One day, they might all share the happiness of the Soviet children. That was the case with little Belarussian girl Nilla, because the Red Army "liberated" them in 1939. Nilla tells her parents that "today our teacher has talked about the Soviet Union. Children there do not

⁷⁸⁷ "Qyz Äkeniñ, apa-qaryndas tüysynyñ, äyeli eriniñ ornyñ basady," *Sotsialistik Qazaqstan*, July 4, 1941.

⁷⁸⁸ Sh. Süleymanuly, *Lid-Zhu: Qytaydaghy Tönkerisshil Balalar* (Tashkent-Samarqand: Özbekstan memleket baspasy, 1935).

⁷⁸⁹ Baūbek Bulkishev, "Evrey Qyzy," *Pioner* 2 (1939): 23.

⁷⁹⁰ N. A. Konstantinov, "Imperializmniñ Kolonyialyq Mektep Sayasaty," *Aūyl Mughalimi* 11-12 (1938): 84-86.

know what poverty or suffering mean. All of them study at the school. Now, we are going to live like the Soviet people, like the Soviet children, too. We will see Stalin himself too [the greatest joy ever on earth].”⁷⁹¹ The text continues with a poem dedicated to the children of Western Ukraine, allegedly written by Kazakh children:

I hear how you are living,
I know, I read from the newspaper.
Your time to live in happiness has come,
The old life has gone, [and] will never come back.⁷⁹²

Constructing happiness through a comparison with the life in other countries is put even more explicitly in another story. The hero of the story starts by describing the beauties of the city of Almaty in a sentimentalist tone and asks, “don’t our lives resemble spring gardens?”. He then says that “in order to understand how happy our country is, let’s look at other countries” and tells the tragic story of two young Spanish soldiers: Tripón and Anderson. When other children ask if he himself has seen all of what he has told, the answer reflects the power of Soviet newspapers’ truth claims: “It doesn’t matter if I fly over there and see all, or if I read in newspaper, this is the truth”.⁷⁹³

The unhappiness of workers’ children in capitalist countries is further emphasized in pedagogical works. Pedagogue Mukhamedzhanov claims that children in capitalist countries could not experience their childhood with games and joy because their lives are very difficult. Most of these children work at the factories for the capitalists for 10 hours per day, and sometimes even more than that.⁷⁹⁴ Another, Begalín, appeals to the authority

⁷⁹¹ H. Saqabaev, “Qyzyl Armia Olardy Azat Etti,” *Pioner* 11 (1939): 7.

⁷⁹² *Ibid.*, 8.

⁷⁹³ Säken Dairbekov, “Serüen,” *Pioner* 5 (1939): 7.

⁷⁹⁴ K. Mukhamedzhanov, *Pedagogiqalyq Maqalalar Zhyinaghy* (Almaty: Qazaqtyn Memleketik Birikken Baspasy, 1941), 19.

of statistics to make his case more convincing. According to the data that he provides, the number of students in higher education in Germany was decreasing year by year, because students have to pay tuition. He adds that higher education was closed to workers' children, and he even claims that the number of students at the higher education institutes in only Ukraine is far more than the number of German students.⁷⁹⁵ The narrative that these authors provide is the familiar and very common Soviet discourse about capitalist countries.

Through the end of the decade, the importance of international politics intensified, and children read particularly about fascism in Europe and the developments in China. It seems that almost all of these publications in Kazakh were translations of Russian texts, even though the reference to the original source was rarely included. The Spanish Civil War was a popular theme⁷⁹⁶, but the course of fascism in Germany was even more important.⁷⁹⁷ As we have seen in the story of little Lid-Zhu Kim, Kazakh children also read about political developments in Asia.⁷⁹⁸ International politics was taken so seriously that in order to understand the contemporary developments it was considered necessary to learn the histories of these countries. The Kazakh pedagogical journal published lectures about Spain from the eleventh to fifteenth centuries or about ancient China.⁷⁹⁹

⁷⁹⁵ M. Begalın, "Lenin-Stalinniń Ult Sayasaty Zháne Oqyp Bilim Aluv Pravasy," *Aūyl Mughalimi* 3-4 (1938): 51.

⁷⁹⁶ "Shet elderde: Ispanyanyń űshitelderi fashizmge qarsy kűreste," *Aūyl Mughalimi* 6 (1938): 70-72.

⁷⁹⁷ "Fashizm mektep pen mädeniettiń zhavy," *Aūyl Mughalimi* 6 (1938): 73-74; V. Sanev, "Fashistik Germanianyń Ishki Khali," *Khalyq Mughalimi* 11 (1939): 64-69.

⁷⁹⁸ A. Shimonaev, "Qytay qalqynyń ulttyq t  uelsizdigi zh  ne azattyghy zholynda kűresi," *Khalyq Mughalimi* 11 (1939): 61-63.

⁷⁹⁹ "Ispania, XI-XV ghasyrda," *Khalyq Mughalimi* 12 (1939): 46-51; "Ezhelgi Qytay," *Khalyq Mughalimi* 12 (1939): 63-67.

Another topic of interest was the lives of revolutionaries across the world. The best example of this literature was a book translated into Kazakh in 1939.⁸⁰⁰ The book introduced the lives of German communists Ernst Thälman, Edgar Andre and Fritz Schulte, Romanian revolutionary Ana Pauker, American revolutionary Thomas Mooney, Finnish proletarian leader Toivo Antikainen and Bulgarian communist Yordan Liutibrodski. Kazakh children learnt that Andre and Schulte were killed by the fascists, Liutibrodski was killed in a prison; Thälman, Pauker, Mooney and Antikainen were imprisoned (the last two were life sentences). The message for children was clear: innocent revolutionaries were suppressed all over the world.

In 1931, Kazakh children were told that English capitalists, American millionaires, Chinese generals, Italian fascists, the wealthy French and the Roman Pope all aim to start a war with the Soviet Union. However, the Soviet Union did not desire to fight and shed blood.⁸⁰¹ Throughout the 1930s, Soviet society was constantly warned of an upcoming war. Patriotism and a sense of “civic duty” was fostered through education.⁸⁰² The main theme behind Soviet children’s upbringing was the idea that they had a great deal to fight for.⁸⁰³

Early Soviet children’s literature produced an “iconography of the virtuous child fighter” that imagined children as active fighters rather than passive victims. They were supposed to understand that the construction of the new life would inevitably be

⁸⁰⁰ *Revolutsiyashyl Küresshilderin Ömir Tarikhtary*, trans. Zh Bekturov (Almaty: Qazaq Memleket Baspasy, 1939).

⁸⁰¹ Zhalpy Qazaqstandyq, 14-15.

⁸⁰² Kucherenko, *Little Soldiers*, 67.

⁸⁰³ *Ibid.*, 73.

accompanied by violence.⁸⁰⁴ However, the militaristic genre and military education for Kazakh children started quite late. In the Kazakh-language children's literature, we see mention of target practices for the first time in a book for pioneers in 1936. In the stories, children practiced shooting the wolves that attacked sheep.⁸⁰⁵ Thus, children were still imagined as shepherds, not yet as prospective soldiers. It was only in 1939 that military training and war became a significant part of Kazakh children's lives. One of the earliest examples of the theme of war in children's literature appeared in a collection of children's art works; a poem with the title "If there is a war tomorrow!"⁸⁰⁶ Publications about military training and war included training for use of firearms and protection from air attacks and chemical attacks.⁸⁰⁷ These works also introduced details about combat vehicles such as airplanes, and various war items including bombs and chemical weapons. Specific articles were devoted to the history of various weapons.⁸⁰⁸ Children were also introduced to war games. On the eve of the Soviet Union's entrance into war in 1941, hundreds of children participated in a war game in Almaty.⁸⁰⁹

The theme of war was most prevalent in the pages of the Kazakh language journal *Pioner*. With the start of its publication in 1939, Kazakh children came into contact with

⁸⁰⁴ Maria-Starkova Vindman, "Fighting for a Utopian Childhood: Militarism in Children's Periodicals of the Early Soviet Union," in *Utopian Reality: Reconstructing Culture in Revolutionary Russia and Beyond* eds. Christina Lodder, Maria Kokkori and Maria Mileeva (Leiden: Brill, 2013).

⁸⁰⁵ Qurmanbaev, *Pionerler*.

⁸⁰⁶ Saïn and Särsenov eds., *Altın дәуірен*, 87.

⁸⁰⁷ Z. Turarbekov ed., "*Voroshilovshyl Zhas Mergen*" *znachoghynyñ normalary* (Almaty: Qazaq Memleket Baspasy, 1939); A. Nurpeisov ed., *Pionerler men mektep balalaryna ava men khimiya shabuldaryna qarsy qhorganuv turaly: Balalardyn "PVKhO'ga dayyn" normalaryn tapsyruvgha zhardem äsebinde* (Almaty: Qazaq Memleket Baspasy, 1939).

Although there is not information about the original sources, these books were most probably composed of translations of various Russian-language works.

⁸⁰⁸ For example, see, V. Fedorov, "Vintovqanyñ Tarıkhy," *Pioner 2* (1941): 19-21.

⁸⁰⁹ B. Beyisov, "Attanys (Pionerler men mektep oqushylarynyñ bükilsoyyzdyq äskerī-taktıkalyq oyyny)," *Pioner 2* (1941): 9-10.

military education and the theme of war more intensely than ever. Yet, probably because Kazakh authors were late to take up the theme, the content of the journal was heavily composed of translations from Russian. Articles and stories about the Red Army, developments in fascist countries, and military training were common. The most significant myth for this pre-war period was the Soviet-Japanese war of 1939. Testimonies of soldiers and stories about this war were published regularly. Children also wrote letters to, or poems for, their brothers serving in the military. Children asserted that they were going to become heroes like their older brothers.⁸¹⁰ In one of the stories, the brother of a young student returns from the Japanese front. Little Kamīla tells about his brother's heroism to her classmates: "he defeated thirteen samurais on his own. In the past, he talked to Stalin".⁸¹¹ All became very excited to learn about the hero's stories. They decide to ask permission from their teacher to invite Sagī to their school. When the children go to invite Sagī, his reaction was unanticipated: "Who told you that I am a hero?".⁸¹² The Red Army soldier Sagī is too modest to call himself a hero. Subsequently, he tells a story about the heroism of one of his comrades. When Sagī first arrives home, Kamīla shows him the school. Sagī replies by saying "wonderful", but Kamīla is not satisfied with this answer, and says that nothing is wonderful about the school because there is no hero like Sagī there. Sagī explains that he who loves his own job is a good person, and if students love the school, respect the teacher and study *otlichno*, they are heroes too.⁸¹³

⁸¹⁰ See for example, "Agham Meniñ Zhaūynger (Aghagha Khat)" and "Armiadaghy Aghagha," *Pioner* 2 (1940): 1.

⁸¹¹ Khasen Seilkhanov, "Erlik Tūraly Ängime" (Part II), *Pioner* 7-8 (1940): 10.

⁸¹² *Ibid.*, 11.

⁸¹³ Khasen Seilkhanov, "Erlik Tūraly Ängime" (Part I), *Pioner* 5-6 (1940): 17.



Image 13: “Learn Warfare!” (1941)⁸¹⁴

Instilling courage was important for military training. Still not satisfied with Sagı’s explanation, Kamıla says, “No. There is a kid in our class whose name is Zhaqyp; he is *otlichnik* (a top student), but such a coward”.⁸¹⁵ The Soviet child must be a good and obedient student, but these qualities are not sufficient anymore. He or she must be courageous too. Yet, interpretation of courage sometimes also conflicts with the image of an ideal Soviet child. Time and again, Soviet children were imagined as active, but obedient subjects. However, stories for children sometimes appealed as nonnormative examples in order to encourage bravery. In one of these stories, a mother scolds her son by saying “if you are a coward, you can’t defend the border, you can’t drive your tank, you can’t use your rifle too. ... You are a coward, you are grouchy, you are weakhearted”.⁸¹⁶ When later other children tease him on the street, this time he is not

⁸¹⁴ TsGAKFDZRK, 9-27 (Kazfotoizdata, l. 9, Almaty).

⁸¹⁵ Ibid., 17

⁸¹⁶ Kh. Seilkhanov, “Beket,” *Pioner* 10 (1939): 10.

afraid, but still he is beaten. After that his mother tells him courage without intellect (and without the necessary tool/weapon) does not work. At the end of the story he learns how to be courageous, but for this, he understands he needs to read a lot and use his intellect. In this story, street fights that are usually seriously condemned are used as examples to learn courage.

As seen in the example above, courage itself was not seen to be enough. Children also had to be clever and self-sacrificing. In another story that combines courage and intellect, a man knocks on the door of Mariam's house at night. The man says that he is a traveler and he needs a place to stay, but Mariam's mother thinks he may be a spy and that would be harmful for the motherland. She wakes eight-years old Mariam up and sends her to the military outpost 8 kilometers away. The road is so scary that Mariam is usually scared to walk it even in the daytime. However, now the little patriot Mariam courageously walks this scary road and when she arrives at the outpost the commander is shocked to see that an eight-years old girl has taken that road alone at night.⁸¹⁷

The description of Amankeldi Imanov's childhood provides another interesting example. Amankeldi, the hero of the 1916 rebellion who was martyred while fighting on the side of Bolsheviks, does not fail to play all kinds of games in his childhood.⁸¹⁸ Yet, teenagers often despise and tease him. He gets beaten badly but does not cry. Later he steals three yellowbirds from the children who had beaten him.⁸¹⁹ What is praised in the

⁸¹⁷ Lekeroi Asqar, "Kishkentay Patriot," *Pioner* 4 (1939): 21-22.

⁸¹⁸ For a carefully researched study on how 1916 rebellion was made the founding revolutionary myth for Kazakhs and how Amankeldi came to be the main hero of this process, see: Danielle Ross, "Domesticating 1916: The evolution of Amankeldi Imanov and a foundation myth for the Kazakh Soviet Socialist Republic (1916-1939)" in *The Central Asian Revolt of 1916: A Collapsing Empire in the Age of War and Revolution*, eds. Aminat Chokobeva, Cloe Drieu and Alexander Morrison (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2019).

⁸¹⁹ Ramazan, "Batyrдын Balalyq Shagy," *Pioner* 4 (1939): 14-16.

story is how he could steal the birds without getting caught; hence just like street fights, theft is used to teach the children how to act courageously and cleverly.

Soviet children's courage and patriotism could bring more serious consequences for them, but a patriot should be ready to face them. In a translated story published in 1940, in a town somewhere between Krasnoyarsk and Abakan, pioneer Gena Shshukin hears his stepfather's conversations with his friends. Gena understands that these are enemies of the people and wants to report them. The stepfather threatens Gena. The next day he gives his Pioneer scarf to his friend Kostya "as if he knows he is going to die". Eventually, we learn that the young Leninist Gena has been killed by the enemies of the Soviet Union, but no details about his death are provided.⁸²⁰ It should be kept in mind that the cult of Pavlik Morozov appeared in Kazakh-language sources only in 1941 and the image of a martyr child was absent for the most part. Therefore, little Gena's story is an exception for Kazakh children, but as it is a translated story, it represents the union-wide need to return to such a myth under the expectation of the coming war.

Although the Stalin cult was omnipotent and omnipresent in late 1930s, there was a smaller cult around Voroshilov.⁸²¹ Students also read and wrote about him, and this Voroshilov cult appears to have served as a substitute for the lack of a strong tradition of militarized discourse for Soviet Kazakh children's literature: the praise of Voroshilov included an emphasis on military values. The best example of this Voroshilov cult was

⁸²⁰ Oleg Matskevich, "Shyn Pioner," *Pioner 2* (1940): 6-8.

⁸²¹ Leaders other than Stalin too appeared in Soviet children's literature. For the general Soviet picture, Molotov and Voroshilov figured routinely, but Molotov's image was more powerful who was considered the patron of Artek. Kelly, *Children's World*, 107. Voroshilov, not Molotov, appeared as the most important Soviet leader after Stalin in Kazakh children's literature.

presented in a 1937 poem by the old bard Zhambyl and it was published in a collection of poems for pioneers:

“Resembles Zulfiqar⁸²²
Such a sword cuts stone
Passes through sevenfold earth.
Don’t praise Alexander
Don’t remember Rustam;
They are not a match
They couldn’t be like our Klim!
Manas came out from the Kyrgyz
He was not like him too.”⁸²³

The poem not only stand out for making references to Kazakh history (the rest of the poem also refers to Kazakh batyrs Naūryzbay and Kenesary in addition to the reference to the legendary Kyrgyz hero Manas), but to Islamic and ancient Persian history (references to Zulfiqar and Rustam). As discussed in Chapter 1, by the 1930s, local traditional literary forms became the unquestioned base of Kazakh literature. On the one hand, localized expressions legitimized Soviet rule. On the other hand, these local and traditional themes provided a sense of national continuity that proved much more significant than serving socialist content.

The Rise of the Child Hero during the War Years

According to Kucherenko, the Soviet regime did everything to prevent children from actively participating in the war. During the war, propaganda images and messages did not call children to combat.⁸²⁴ However, the heroes that children were taught to admire

⁸²² The name of fourth caliph Ali’s sword, a significant image for Muslims.

⁸²³ Zhambyl, “Klim Batyr,” in Zh. Saīn ed., *Pionerler öleñderi* (Almaty: Qazaqstan körkem ädebiet baspasy, 1937), 6.

⁸²⁴ Kucherenko, *Little Soldiers*, 149-150.

were those who, one way or another, participated in the conflict, beyond serving as activists on the home front.⁸²⁵ The war years witnessed the dominance of two different images of childhood: the child as victim and the child as hero. The image of the child as victim was for adults, whereas the child victim was overshadowed by a more active, heroic image of child in the images of children *for* children.⁸²⁶

When the war started, Kazakh authorities called on schools to introduce the life stories of Kazakh heroes to Kazakh children⁸²⁷ alongside a focus on Russian historical figures such as Alexander Nevskii and revolutionaries in world history including Spartacus, Thomas Müntzer and Marat.⁸²⁸ However, it took some time before Kazakh authors started to write stories about Kazakh heroes (including historical figures, but mostly heroes of the Great Patriotic War). Even then translations from Russian dominated children's and youth's literature. These translated stories usually had nothing to do with Kazakhstan or Kazakhs. Kazakh children were invited to read about the front, which means that for the first time they were expected to read almost exclusively about their Russian, Ukrainian, Belarussian and Jewish comrades.

Not surprisingly, the Komsomol was more active during the war years than children's organizations. Hence, many of the publications during the war primarily targeted teenagers rather than children, but we can assume that those were also consumed by children (at least by older ones if not by the younger ones) since there was no separate children's literature or periodicals during the war years. The Komsomol published booklets

⁸²⁵ Kelly, *Children's World*, 120.

⁸²⁶ deGraffenried, *Sacrificing Childhood*, 104-105; 112.

⁸²⁷ *Otan Soghysy Zhaghdayynda Mektepte Oqū-Tārbīe Zhumysyn Uyymdastyruv* (Almaty: Qazaqtyn Birikken Memlekettik Baspasy, 1941), 7.

⁸²⁸ *Ibid.*, 14-17.

of instructions for youth which were obviously composed of translations from various Russian sources even though the original source was almost never provided. Kazakh children or youth could not find anything about Kazakhstan in these publications.⁸²⁹ They read stories of Komsomol members (allegedly real-life stories) who fought heroically and even some child heroes who gave their lives for the motherland. Authors were always careful to include stories of soldiers from various units such as snipers, pilots and tankmen.⁸³⁰ Some of these kinds of collections included both stories of soldiers at the front and activists back on the home front.⁸³¹

In the early days of the war, the hero was usually a child who helped army units or partisans either in supply units or as spies. For example, little Volodia and his friends provide milk and bread for the soldiers at the front and they ask to join the army to fight against the fascists. The soldiers tell them war is not for children, however, they assign them a duty to go to a neighboring village and report on Germans forces there. Yet, at the end we learn that Volodia joins the partisans later in the war and shoots a German with a gun.⁸³² In subsequent years, child heroes are more directly imagined as fighters and even as martyrs who give their lives for the motherland without hesitation. In Vasilevskaia's translated story, two fifteen-year-old boys who are already experienced in fighting and

⁸²⁹ Zh. Esbatyrov ed., *Komsomolets Qanday Bolu Kerek* (Almaty: Qazaqtyn Memlekettik Birikken Baspasy, 1944).

⁸³⁰ *Batyr Komsomoletsterdin Erlikteri: Otan Soghysynyñ Qaharmandary* (Almaty: Qyzyl Äsker Kitabphanasy 1942).

⁸³¹ *Maydanda ZhäneTylda (Faktiler men dokumentter)* (Almaty: Qazaqtyn Memlekettik Birikken Baspasy, 1942).

⁸³² Al. Isbakh, "Äkesine Tartqan Ul" in *Batyr Balalar (Otan soghysyna qatysyp zhürgen balalar tūraly 4 ängime)* (Almaty: Qazaqtyn Memlekettik Birikken Baspasy, 1941), 3-9 (Originally published in *Pravda* on August 6, 1941).

masters of rifles are described.⁸³³ More strikingly, she narrates another story in which six Germans come to a village in Ukraine and ask a child where the partisans are. The child answers that they are everywhere. Then in a second, he takes a grenade from his chest so quickly that Germans cannot even understand what is happening. A twelve-year-old child gives his life for the homeland, but he kills six Germans. At the end, the author lets us know that it is not important by which name his mother called this child, because he is one of hundreds of heroes.⁸³⁴ A grenade is the weapon of another child martyr too. In one poem written by a Kazakh poet, Germans burn a Ukrainian village near Dnieper and massacre people including our hero's mother, father and brother. Then the boy vows vengeance, takes a grenade and takes revenge.⁸³⁵

In 1943, Kazakh authors started to add stories about Kazakh heroes to published collections.⁸³⁶ These collections included poems about batyrs from Kazakh history such as Edige, Qoblandy, Targyn and Isatay or about the Civil War hero Amankeldi⁸³⁷, but the focus was on Kazakh soldiers who fought in the Great Patriotic War. The author Ghabīt Musirepov wrote allegedly real-life stories of Nursultan Esbolatov and Alikbai Qosaev,

⁸³³ V. Vasilevskaia, "Balalar" in *Dästur: Qazaq khalqynyñ ertedegi erleri men uly otan soghysysyn maydanyñdaghy, tyldaghy erleri türaly öleñ, ängime, ocherkter zhiinaghy* (Almaty: Qazaqtyn Birikken Memlekettik Baspasy, 1943), 59-61.

⁸³⁴ *Ibid.*, 57-58.

⁸³⁵ K. Zharmaghambetov, "Kekti Bala," *ibid.*, pp. 61-63.

In revenge stories we also see the image of child as victim. In one poem named "Court of Revenge" by Zhuban Moldaghaliev (written in 1942), one five or six-year-old boy was killed by a Nazi air strike, but immediately after the child's death a Soviet airplane comes and takes the boy's revenge and other children happily watch this scene. Zhuban Moldaghaliev, *Shygharmalar Zhyinaghy – Öleñder I Tom* (Almaty: Zhazūshy, 1979), 33-34.

⁸³⁶ The year 1943 also witnessed the reemergence of Kazakh oral literature and folk tales for children. See: *Böbek Zhyry: Khalyqtyn Aūyz Ädebietindegi Balalar Zhyry* (Almaty: Qazaqtyn Memlekettik Birikken Baspasy, 1943); Saparghalī Begalīn, *Qyran Kegi* (Almaty: Qazaqtyn Memlekettik Birikken Baspasy, 1944).

⁸³⁷ See poems in *Dästur*, 1-7.

both among Panfilov's 28-Guardsmen.⁸³⁸ These stories reflect exactly the standard Soviet Kazakh narrative about saving poor children from the rich. Nursultan was orphaned early in his life, served for a rich Kazakh and was saved by the Soviet authorities. Then he became a "red fighter", joined the Panfilov battalion and was martyred heroically. According to the story, Alikbai Qosaev had exactly the same life trajectory. It can be argued that this narrative of saving poor (preferably orphan) children from the rich was the most dominant theme in Kazakh children's literature and it provided a point of continuity for images of children in Kazakhstan from 1930s to the war years. Other authors as well introduced Kazakh heroes with the same narrative.⁸³⁹

Musirepov's career apexed with the publication of *Qazaq Batyry* (The Kazakh Hero) in 1945 which described the life story of Qayyrgali Ismagulov, another Kazakh soldier from Panfilov's battalion.⁸⁴⁰ Qayyrgali's life story not only echoed Musirepov's short stories, but also the literary role model of new Kazakh man of 1930s: Beyimbet Maylin's Azamat Azamatych, whom we were introduced to in Chapter 3. Just like little Qozhalaq of Maylin's novel, Qayyrgali grew up in a detdom. Just like little Qozhalaq, Qayyrgali also changed his name. Maylin's hero chose a Kazakh name that reflected the soul of the new age in 1930s: Azamat Azamatych. Musirepov's hero chose a Russian name: Kostya (Konstantin Ivanovich).⁸⁴¹ Yet, it does not mean that he assimilated into Russian culture. On the contrary, he was first of all *the* Kazakh batyr and when he was awarded the

⁸³⁸ Ghabīt Musirepov, "Sovetter Soiuzyñ Geroy"; "El Üshin Tūghan Er," *ibid.*, 11-13; 29-32.

⁸³⁹ B. Kenzhebaev, "Mergen," *ibid.*, 18-21.

⁸⁴⁰ Ghabīt Musirepov, *Qazaq Batyry* (Almaty: Qazaqtyn Birikken Memleket Baspasy, 1945). An extended version of the book was to be published in 1949 with the title "Qazaq Soldaty" (The Kazakh Soldier) and became one of the cornerstones of Kazakh literature.

⁸⁴¹ Embracing Russian nicknames was common among Central Asian soldiers during the war years. See, Charles Shaw, "Soldiers' Letters to Inobatxon and O'g'ulxon".

title “hero of the Soviet Union”, he described the moment as he “became a Qoblandy” (one of legendary batyrs).⁸⁴² This Kazakh identity went hand in hand with a discourse of friendship of peoples; his closest comrades included an Uzbek, Ukrainians and Russians. Adopting a Russian name symbolizes the big brother role of Russians; but at the same time, it can also be interpreted as a claim to equality since adopting a Russian name was a step towards becoming a member of the Soviet community.

It was not a contradiction for Kazakh poets to write epic poems about both Kazakh and Russian heroes while praising both Kazakh and Russian history. In his poem dedicated to Zoya Kosmodem'yanskaya, Tair Zharoqov decided to have Zoya state “Great Russian is my nationality”. The poem is full of references to Kutuzov, Napoleonic Wars, the Kremlin and so on.⁸⁴³ However, such an emphasis on Russian history and the Russian nation does not mean that Kazakh identity was suppressed. If we compare Zharoqov’s poem about Russian partisan Zoya with Qapan Satybaldin’s epic about the Kazakh female sniper Äliya Moldaghulova, who died in 1944 at the age of 19, we have a better understanding of how Russian and Kazakh heroes were promoted and how Russian and Kazakh national discourse were celebrated simultaneously.⁸⁴⁴ Satybaldin’s poem includes references to almost all famous Kazakh historical or legendary female characters: Äliya is referred to as the sister of Qzy Zhibek, granddaughter of Baian Sulu, daughter of Ayman

⁸⁴² Musirepov, *Qazaq Batyry*, 92.

⁸⁴³ Tair Zharoqov, “Zoya Turaly Zhyr” (originally published in 1944) in Tair Zharoqov, *Tandamaly Shygharmalary* (Qazaqtyn Memlekettik Korkem Adebiet Baspasy, 1951), 201-215.

Zoya Kosmodem'yanskaya was still a high school student in 1941 when she volunteered to join a partisan unit. She was executed by the Nazis in November 1941 after acts of sabotage against the Nazi armies. She was posthumously declared a hero of the Soviet Union and eventually became one of the most famous Soviet heroines.

⁸⁴⁴ Qapan Satybaldin, “Äliya” (originally written in 1945) in Qapan Satybaldin, *Tandamaly Shygharmalar, Birinshi Tom* (Almaty: Zhazushy Baspasy, 1972), 187-211.

Sholpan and so on. Various male batyrs are referred to in the poem as well. On the one hand, Satybaldin established an essentialist primordialist Kazakh identity, on the other hand, he situated Äliya in world history. In the poem, Jeanne d'Arc hugs and kisses Äliya and Illiad and the Battle of Karbala are called childish in comparison to Äliya's heroism. The poem is not only full of Kazakh historical and legendary characters, but also of nazires to Greek mythology, Voltaire, Lermontov, Byron and so on. Kazakh authors such as Abay and Zhambyl are treated in the same group with these figures.

By the end of the war, the image of child as hero was overshadowed by the image of adult heroes. The role models for Kazakh youth and children were both Kazakh and Russian heroes of the Great Patriotic War. What is interesting to note is that if we exclude specific historical references, the epic language of poems for Russian and Kazakh heroes was very similar; the message of heroism itself was probably more important for children than the content of these poems. Nevertheless, Kazakh authors and poets consolidated a primordial and essentialist conception of Kazakh identity and national discourse while simultaneously embracing Soviet patriotism and love for Russia. Even though it is possible to interpret this as the superiority of Russian nation, it was indeed a claim to equality and a place claim in world history.

Children on the Home Front

The ideal Soviet Kazakh child is described in one of Musirepov's short stories. Aqay, whose two older brothers are in the army, is a student in the eighth grade. He thinks about how he can prepare for the war; he passes his exams with flying colors, studies even when he does not have any homework, is interested in sports, swims and studies the art of

war. That is a very generic description of an ideal Soviet child; yet, in addition to these, Aqay also thinks of himself as the descendant of Kazakh batyrs from time immemorial. Hence, during the war years, the ideal Kazakh child differs from the generic Soviet child only so far as he is imbued with Kazakh national consciousness, one which was definitely not contradictory with Soviet patriotism.⁸⁴⁵

There was surprisingly strong emphasis on the importance of regular school education under such brutal war conditions.⁸⁴⁶ Soldiers wrote letters to children's institutions and children sent letters to the front. Time and again children were reminded how important education was. In his letter to school No 36 in Almaty, front-line soldier Kuklachenko urged children to study excellently and be disciplined, for discipline is "the mother of glory".⁸⁴⁷ In their personal letters too, soldiers frequently reminded children that studying perfectly was the best way they could help to the soldiers at the front.⁸⁴⁸ In his letter to Qyzylorda pioneers, having expressed his happiness for them being safe far from the front, major general Vershinin tells them that they should not think they cannot help to beat the enemy: studying well, collecting metals, keeping discipline and developing oneself is true help for the front.⁸⁴⁹

Hence studying well was not the only way children could help the front. They were expected to help soldiers' families, collect metals and herbs and learn

⁸⁴⁵ G. Musirepov, "Albyrt Zhas," in *Dästur*, 51-53.

⁸⁴⁶ For a description of education under war conditions, see, L. N. Nursultanova, *Kazakhstan v Gody Velikoi Otechestvennoi Voiny (1941-1945 gg.)* (Almaty, 2011), 63-73.

⁸⁴⁷ "Schet Imeni 36-y Shkoly (Pis'mo frontivka Kuklachenko I. M. pioneram i shkol'nikam shkoly No. 36 gor. Alma-Ata) in *Pis'ma s Fronta* (Almaty: Kazogiz, 1944), 139.

⁸⁴⁸ "Panfilovshy Kapitan Ivan Mihailovich Manaenkonyñ Sem'iasyna Zhazghan Khattarynan" in *Sälem Saghan Maydannan, Qazaqstan!* (Almaty: Qazaqstan baspasy, 1975), 24.

⁸⁴⁹ "Pis'mo General-Maiora Aviatsii K. A. Vershinina Kyzylordinskim Pioneram," *Leninskii Put*, January 20, 1942.

firefighting.⁸⁵⁰ The children were supposed to learn that service to the motherland was not only fighting at the front; working at factories, kolkhozes and other units was also valuable.⁸⁵¹ They were supposed to join the campaign to collect warm clothes for the army and help adults in agriculture.⁸⁵² These were the duties for being a young patriot during the war years.

Yet, not surprisingly patriotic education and military training dominated the discourse about children during the war. The resolution of a meeting of propaganda workers in Gur'ev oblast included limitless devotion to the motherland, genuine patriotism, bravery, dedication, hatred towards fascist monsters, and unshakable faith in victory among the values to be instilled in children.⁸⁵³ Even pupils who were just learning how to read were to be introduced to military concepts: for example, teachers were supposed to give examples such as *armiia*, *bomba*, *vintovka*, *tank* while teaching the letter “a”.⁸⁵⁴ Little children were introduced to the art of war: they were taught about armies, air strikes, chemical strikes, first aid, topography, how to survive on mountains, features of various guns and using a gun.⁸⁵⁵ Imagination of childhood in Kazakhstan was homogenized to the degree that one could not find anything specific to Kazakhs.

⁸⁵⁰ *Otan Soghysy Zhaghdayynda Mektepte Oqū-Tärbīe Zhumysyn Uyymdastyruv* (Almaty: Qazaqtyn Birikken Memlekettik Baspasy, 1941), 9-10.

⁸⁵¹ *Ibid.*, 19.

⁸⁵² *Oqūshylar Egin Zhumysynda* (Qazaqtyn Memlekettik Birikken Baspasy, 1942).

See also the document “Young Patriots”, APRK, f. 708, d. 6/1, op. 483, ll. 9-16 (Iunye Patrioty).

⁸⁵³ APRK, f. 708.5/1, d. 688, ll. 114-117 (Rezoliutsiia – Soveshania agittrabotnikov Gur'evskoi oblasti ot 20/9.1941 g.).

⁸⁵⁴ *Otan Soghysy Zhaghdayynda*, 20.

⁸⁵⁵ M. Zanegin, *Pioner men Mentep Oqūshysynyñ Soghys Öneri Zhönindegi Serigi* (Almaty: Qazaqtyn Birikken Memleket Baspasy, 1942).

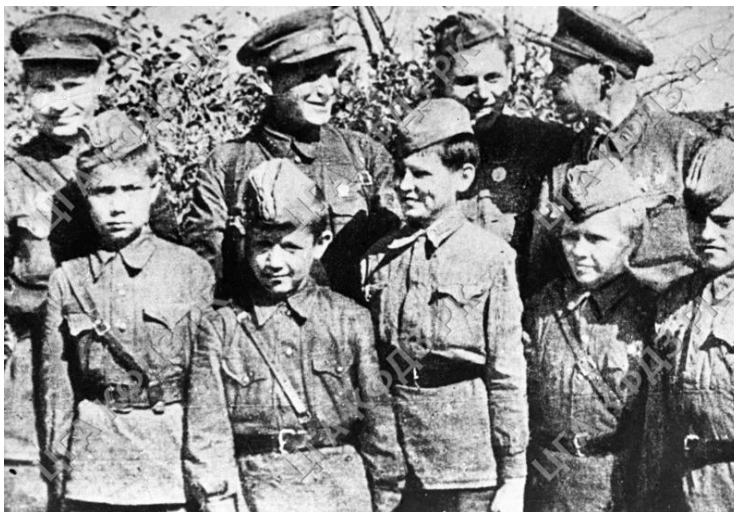


Image 14: “Panfilovites’ pupils” (1942)⁸⁵⁶

Military training was much more important for older students. In 1941, high school students were required to complete 360 hours of military training in three years. The courses included the history of the Red Army, physical education, target training, topography, health sciences and so on.⁸⁵⁷ Compared to the previous period, patriotic education and military training during the war was remarkably less ideological and more practical, at least in Kazakhstan.

Kucherenko suggests that Soviet children were not impressed by working in agriculture or industry, but they were fascinated by the romance of military life and stories of young heroes.⁸⁵⁸ A report from Kazakhstan confirms this: children were most curious about what was happening at the front and abroad. The city’s library for children held lectures, offered reports, reading sessions, excursions to museums and exhibitions. In only a few months in 1942, the library had 654 reading sessions with the participation

⁸⁵⁶ TsGAKFDZRK, 2-67254.

⁸⁵⁷ *Orta mektepterdin, tekhnikumderdin, rabfaktardyn zhäne solarmen teñ oquv oryndarynyñ oqūshylarynyñ shaqyryluvgha deyin āskerlikke dayyndav programmasy* (Alma-Ata: Qazaqtyn Birikken Memlekettik Baspasy, 1941), 7.

⁸⁵⁸ Kucherenko, *Little Soldiers*, 141.

of 5681 children. The themes of the sessions included Soviet patriotism, heroes of the Soviet army (including pilots, tankmen, machine gunners and foot soldiers), Soviet women at the front and the home front and the participation of pioneers in the war effort. Timur squads were formed by fifth-class students and they visited families of soldiers, helped them with house affairs and took care of children.⁸⁵⁹ In the year 1941-42, authorities were generally satisfied with the military training at the schools. Lectures and seminars about military themes, physical education, and war games continued to mobilize children for the rest of the war.⁸⁶⁰

On the one hand, the war for the first time created free spaces for Soviet citizens. On the other hand, the state initiated a more interventionist approach to the lives of children and youth, partially caused by panic due to the weakening state control. In her study of street children during the war years, Olga Kucherenko argues that these interventionist policies were more about exercising control over the population than protecting children from wartime hardships. Political and ideological considerations weighed more heavily than humanitarian concerns. Since the state needed to mobilize everyone, its attitudes and expectations towards children changed from protectionist to openly exploitative.⁸⁶¹ The goal of establishing more strict control over children was a priority in Kazakhstan too, at least in Almaty. In June 1942, children were prohibited from going out after 9 pm without their parents. There were a series of restrictions for

⁸⁵⁹ APRK, f. 708, d. 6/1, op. 483, ll. 9-16 (Iunye Patrioty).

After the publication of Arkady Gaidar's influential book *Timur and His Squad* in 1940, Timur squads started to be formed based on the book and it became a massive phenomenon across the Soviet Union.

⁸⁶⁰ TsGARK, f. 1692, op. 1, d. 620, ll. 34-61 (Itogi Raboty Shkola za 1941-1942 Uchebnyi God i Zadachi v Novom Uchebnom Godu, June 24, 1942).

⁸⁶¹ Kucherenko, *Soviet Street Children*, 1-10.

children and teenagers younger than 16 concerning public spaces such as cinemas and dining halls. Playing cards and other harmful games on the street and buying or selling any product other than school books were prohibited for them.⁸⁶² Although teenagers were mobilized for the war effort just like adults, the decrees concerning children's public behaviors defined the ones younger than 16 as children and brought many more restrictions in the coming years even after the tide of the war turned in favor of the Red Army.⁸⁶³ In fact, it is difficult to determine whether the state succeeded in fulfilling its goals under the war conditions. However, the legacy of wartime restrictions paved the way for a stricter control over children and teenagers in the post-War period.

Images of Children for Adults or How Kazakh Soldiers Made Sense of the War

When the war broke out, civilians killed by the Nazis were immediately publicized; the media said they were shot, bombed, used as human shields, starved, gassed and subjected to biological warfare. The propaganda also covered victims of rape, deportation and "fascist penal servitude".⁸⁶⁴ Images of mothers functioned in Soviet propaganda as national symbols and were used to reimagine the nexus between home and nation, family and state.⁸⁶⁵

⁸⁶² S. Sharipov and A. Chepcheva, "Balalardyn baqylaüsyzydyghyna qarsy küresü sharalary türaly," *Sotsialistik Qazaqstan*, June 4, 1942.

⁸⁶³ P. Orekhov and A. Chepcheva, "Balalardyn qoghamdyq oryndarda ädep saqtaüy türaly erezhe: Eñbekshiler deputattarynyñ Almaty qalalyq keñesi atqaru komitetiniñ 1944 zhylghy 22 marttaghy No 5 mindetti qaüylisy," *Sotsialistik Qazaqstan*, May 16, 1944, 4.

⁸⁶⁴ Karel C. Berkhoff, *Motherland in Danger: Soviet Propaganda during World War II* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2012), 125-131.

⁸⁶⁵ Lisa Kirschenbaum, "'Our City, our Hearths, our Families': Local loyalties and private life in Soviet World War II propaganda," *Slavic Review* 59, no. 4 (2000): 825.

Children too became a powerful symbol of Nazi brutality and provided legitimacy for Soviet vengeance. The Soviet Union was distinctive in its choice to publicize suffering and dying children for motivational purposes. The most common image of the child in Soviet propaganda was that of the child as victim.⁸⁶⁶ Stalin himself described the threat by references to rapes and murders of women and children.⁸⁶⁷ Journalists and correspondents appealed to men to save women from sexual violations and children from mistreatment. They used images of Nazis humiliating families and villages, not the state, the party or the leader. In this narrative of family and private life, suffering was embodied in individual loss and personal relationships.⁸⁶⁸ Posters portrayed women, children and sometimes elderly people at the hands of the Nazis.⁸⁶⁹

Some historians argue that the official propaganda and later the official memory completely shaped individuals' understanding of the war.⁸⁷⁰ However, this top-down approach to the myth of the war has been criticized by many historians.⁸⁷¹ According to Kirschenbaum, it is not really a productive way to look for "true" stories, not because propaganda shaped individuals' minds, but because from the beginning individual memory informed official narratives. Indeed, the war myth reflected something of the

⁸⁶⁶ deGraffenried, *Sacrificing Childhood*, 102-105.

⁸⁶⁷ Jeffrey Brooks, *Thank You, Comrade Stalin! Soviet Public Culture from Revolution to Cold War* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2001), 163.

⁸⁶⁸ *Ibid.*, 179-183.

⁸⁶⁹ Mark Edele, "Paper soldiers: the world of the soldier hero according to Soviet wartime posters," *Jahrbucher fur Geschichte Osteuropas* 47, no. 1 (1999).

⁸⁷⁰ Berkhoff, *Motherland in Danger*; Catherine Merridale, *Ivan's War: Life and Death in the Red Army, 1939-1945* (New York: Picador, 2006); Nina Tumarkin, *The Living and the Dead: The Rise and Fall of the Cult of World War II in Russia* (London: Basic Books, 1995).

⁸⁷¹ Jeffrey Brooks, "Pravda Goes to War" in *Culture and Entertainment in Wartime Russia*, ed. Richard Stines, (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1995); Edele, "Paper soldiers"; Lisa Kirschenbaum, "Nothing is Forgotten: Individual Memory and the Myth of the Great Patriotic War" in *Histories of the Aftermath: The Legacies of World War II in Comparative European Perspective* eds. Robert Moeller and Frank Biess (Berghahn Books, 2010); Alexis Peri, *The War Within: Diaries from the Siege of Leningrad* (Harvard University Press, 2017).

average citizen's understanding of the war.⁸⁷² Concern for dear ones and brutal treatment at the hands of the Nazis and the "former people", (and not only propaganda), forged loyalty to Soviet power.⁸⁷³ In fact, war made the expression of more truthful and humane notions of agency possible. According to Jeffrey Brooks, a counter narrative to the official Stalinist discourse emerged thanks to motivations ranging from patriotism to self-interest, from revenge to protection of loved ones.⁸⁷⁴ The themes of love, loss and revenge dominated not only official propaganda, but also citizens' mindsets. The state was usually not at the center of people's decisions. The most fundamental reason why Soviet citizens fought was the simple fact that their country had been invaded. People justified "fighting for their homes, villages, towns, cities, the very soil of Belorussia, Ukraine, and Russia against a foreign invader, without reference to the governing apparatus at all".⁸⁷⁵ In general, the war myth's clichés such as accounts centered on children and women show the limits of the heroic narrative: "the forthright accounts of women and children who fought, suffered, and survived were as much a part of the war cult as stoic male partisans defying all odds and physical pain".⁸⁷⁶

Curiously, when it comes to images of children, this picture does not fit the narratives of Kazakh soldiers. The heroic vision of Soviet patriotism was shared by Kazakh soldiers; however, they understood the war differently from their Slavic comrades' vision at certain points. Although primordialist nationalist narratives were

⁸⁷² Kirschenbaum, "Nothing is Forgotten," 68-69.

⁸⁷³ Weiner, *Making Sense of War*, 305.

⁸⁷⁴ Brooks, "Pravda Goes to War," 14.

⁸⁷⁵ Roger R. Reese, "Motivations to Serve: The Soviet Soldier in the Second World War," *The Journal of Slavic Military Studies* 20, no. 2 (2007): 268.

⁸⁷⁶ Kirschenbaum, "Nothing is Forgotten," 75.

propagated for all Soviet nationalities,⁸⁷⁷ Kazakh soldiers' understanding of the war in national terms is distinctive, more so when we consider that Kazakhstan was not invaded. Almost all accounts by Kazakh soldiers are dominated by a vision of Kazakhs' centuries-old heroic tradition, a component of soldiers' accounts that proved resilient from the war years to the post-Soviet era. In this way, Kazakh soldiers symbolically detached the war from its context. More distinctively, Kazakhs' accounts of the war are strikingly less sentimental than their Russian or Ukrainian comrades' accounts. Their letters written during the war and memoirs written after significantly lack descriptions of civilians' sufferings in the war zones. Not the child as victim, but the child as hero dominates their narratives.

The focus on the heroes while largely ignoring victims has contributed to the long-term development of memory of the war and emotional culture in Kazakhstan. In Soviet Russia, as Kirschenbaum has observed, "Soviet memorials attempted to balance and integrate two essential tasks – mourning the country's staggering losses and celebrating the victory".⁸⁷⁸ Moreover, there is a significant struggle between the survivors' memoirs and the official vision of the commemoration in Leningrad.⁸⁷⁹ Yet, the commemorations in Kazakhstan are exclusively militaristic and there is no

⁸⁷⁷ Serhy Yekelchuk, "Stalinist Patriotism as Imperial Discourse: Reconciling the Ukrainian and Russian 'Heroic Pasts', 1939-1945," *Kritika: Explorations in Russian and Eurasian History* 3, no. 1 (2002); David Brandenberger, *National Bolshevism: Stalinist Mass Culture and the Formation of Modern Russian National Identity, 1931-1956* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2002); Yilmaz, *National Identities in Soviet Historiography*.

⁸⁷⁸ Lisa A. Kirschenbaum, *The Legacy of the Siege of Leningrad, 1941-1995* (Cambridge University Press, 2006), 205.

⁸⁷⁹ *Ibid.*, 207

noteworthy challenge to the official version.⁸⁸⁰ A sentimentalist vision focusing on the suffering of the people is simply absent in Kazakhstan; the heroic vision has shaped the Kazakh national discourse and has left no room for mourning or sentimentalism.

Historiography of World War II in Kazakhstan has not gone beyond glorifying Kazakh soldiers and the Kazakh people's contribution to the war effort.⁸⁸¹ The dominance of heroic vision and lack of sentimentalism towards civilians' suffering contributed to the emergence of an "emotional community" formed around self-praise and pride at the expense of more sentimental feelings.⁸⁸² When soldiers embraced the primordialist heroic vision full of pride and self-praise, their act of writing or remembering was an "emotional practice" that actively created this emotional community.⁸⁸³

It is tricky to write about the lack of something. Nevertheless, an examination of Kazakh soldiers' letters during the war, memoirs written after the war and those written in the post-Soviet period display a striking resilience to the heroic narrative and indifference towards suffering and sentimentalism that had proved so important for the mainstream Soviet propaganda and for the motivations of Russian soldiers. The Kazakh myth of the War was crystallized in a letter dated to February 1943 that was written to

⁸⁸⁰ Kundakbayeva and Kassymova claim that there is no alternative to official memory in Kazakhstan. Zhanat Kundakbayeva and Didar Kassymova, "Remembering and forgetting: the state policy of memorializing Stalin's repression in Post-Soviet Kazakhstan," *Nationalities Papers* 44, no. 4 (2016).

⁸⁸¹ Roberto Carmack provides a critique of Kazakh historiography and points out that the post-Soviet "scholarly" works simply reproduce the Soviet narrative of the war. Carmack, *Kazakhstan in World War II*. For the role of memory of the Great Patriotic War in post-Soviet Kazakh identity and for how Kazakhstan avoids painful memories of the Soviet past, see, Kasikci, "The Soviet and the Post-Soviet".

⁸⁸² For the concept of emotional community, see, Barbara H. Rosenwein, "Worrying about Emotions in History," *The American Historical Review* 107, no. 3 (2002).

⁸⁸³ For "emotional practices", see, Monique Scheer, "Are Emotions a kind of Practice (and is that What Makes Them Have a History)? A Bourdieuan Approach to Understanding Emotion," *History and Theory* 51, no. 2 (2012).

Kazakh soldiers in the name of Kazakh people and published in Pravda.⁸⁸⁴ The letter starts with a description of how the Russian colonial state and Kazakh *bay*s exploited the Kazakh masses, and of how the revolution saved them and the achievements of Soviet Kazakhstan continue unabated. The main themes in the letter are the Kazakh heroic tradition and Russian-Kazakh friendship. Unlike a propaganda text written to impress the Russian public⁸⁸⁵, the letter never turns to images of children or women as victims of Nazi invasion, and sentimentalism is totally absent in the text. Instead, fifteen-year-old Qarasay (one of famous *batyrs*) is claimed to say that his mother gave birth to him to raise the fame of the nation and to beat the enemies to death.

This letter was not unique to Kazakhs. When the Nazis were approaching Stalingrad and the Caucasus, propaganda units were ordered to intensify educational work among non-Russian combatants. The order called for an intensified connection between soldiers at the front and their home republics. Every “non-Russian” union republic and several autonomous republics sent letters to the front and many of them were printed in Pravda.⁸⁸⁶ Nevertheless, it would be naïve to think that this discourse was only a result of top-down propaganda. Roberto Carmack has already argued that war-time conscription contained an enormous amount of propaganda, and consequently it became

⁸⁸⁴ “Pis'mo Kazakhskogo Naroda Frontovikam-Kazakhham”, *Pravda*, February 6, 1943. Republished in *Pis'mo Kazakhskogo Naroda Frontovikam-Kazakhham* (Alma-Ata: KazOGIZ, 1943).

⁸⁸⁵ During the war, the term non-Russian excluded Ukrainians, Byelorussians and Jews. The most distinctive aspect of “non-Russian” was complete lack or poor command of Russian language. See, Brandon Schechter, “‘The People’s Instructions’: Indigenizing the Great Patriotic War Among ‘Non-Russians’,” *Ab Imperio* 3 (2012): 109-110. Hence in this section “Russian” is going to be used as a category that includes Ukrainians, Belorussians and Jews.

⁸⁸⁶ All of these letters appealed to soldiers as sons of a people and the descendants of carefully selected national heroes. Each of them made use of folk sayings and national poets to indigenize the war effort. Each mentioned the soldiers that received the gold Str of Hero of the Soviet Union and referred to a national epic or a legendary hero. Schechter, “‘The People’s Instructions’”, pp. 114-118.

the main source of both Soviet patriotism and Kazakh national distinctiveness.⁸⁸⁷ Hence wartime mobilization and propaganda was a main source of a heroic vision among Kazakh soldiers. However, I argue that Kazakh soldiers themselves contributed to the consolidation of such a vision; lack of sentimentalism towards frontline suffering paved the way for the consolidation of a primordialist national discourse.

Baūyrzhan Momyshuly and Mālīk Ghabdullīn, both Kazakhs, were leading non-Russian soldiers who fiercely promoted the primordialist heroic narrative.⁸⁸⁸

Ghabdullīn's letter written to the head of the Institute of Literature of the Academy of Sciences is an exemplary text of the primordialist heroic narrative: Ghabdullīn starts by stating that every nation praises and glorifies its own heroes. For Kazakhs these are Edige, Qoblandy, Targhyn, Syrym, Isatay, Makhambet, Abay (Qunanbay), Shoqan (Valikhanov), Kenesary, Naūryzbay, Amankeldi (Imanov) and Zhambyl (Zhabaev).⁸⁸⁹ Ghabdullīn provided a linear and uninterrupted progression of Kazakh history by including pre-Russian *batyrs*, leaders of anti-Russian uprisings, Russian-educated 19th century intellectuals and Bolshevik Kazakh heroes all in his list. The letter was indeed a complaint (even a warning) because Ghabdullīn wrote that Kazakh authors could not really make use of such a rich history. Ghabdullīn's intervention into Soviet propaganda mechanism clearly shows how Kazakh soldiers themselves were active in the formation of this narrative.⁸⁹⁰ The heroic vision can be found in almost all accounts of the Kazakh

⁸⁸⁷ Roberto J. Carmack, "History and hero making: Patriotic narratives and the Sovietization of Kazakh front line propaganda, 1941-1945," *Central Asian Survey* 33, no. 1 (2014).

⁸⁸⁸ Schechter, "The People's Instructions", 117.

⁸⁸⁹ "Narod Dolzhen Znat Svoikh Geroev (Pis'mo geroia Sovetskogo Soiuzu Gabdullina M. Zaveduiushemu sektorom literatury Īnstitūty iazyka, literatury i istorii Kazakhskogo filiala Akademii Nauk SSSR Īsmailovu Eset)" in *Pis'ma s Fronta*.

⁸⁹⁰ *Krasnoarmeets*, the most widely circulated journal in the army, published an article on Ghabdullīn's meeting with the Kazakh bard Zhambyl in which the bard stated "I have sung a lot of songs about batyrs in

soldiers. Even the most cosmopolitan and romantic of all, Baūbek Bulqyshev, declares that Kazakhs are the sons of heroes such as Qoblandy, Targhyn, Isatay, Makhambet, Amankeldi and Abay.⁸⁹¹



Image 15: M. Ghabdullin, hero of the Soviet Union, visits Zhambyl (1943).⁸⁹²

What is more striking is that this heroic vision is accompanied with an indifference towards the human face of the war. One apparent reason for the lack of sentimentalism is the fact that personal loss was not a motivation for Kazakh soldiers. Yet, Russian or Ukrainian soldiers, who were from Kazakhstan and whose families were also safe from the brutality of the war, describe Nazi brutalities and the tragedies of Soviet citizens in a strong sentimentalist language whereas Kazakh soldiers very rarely do. The collection of Kazakhstani soldiers' letters published in 1944 is full of Russian soldiers' descriptions of Nazi brutalities and civilians' sufferings. In his letter to a kindergarten in Almaty, senior lieutenant Sudarkin described how Nazis killed children:

my time, and in my old age I see a batyr with my own eyes". S. Marshak, "Akyn i batyr", *Krasnoarmeets* 2, no. 11 (1943), quoted in Schechter, "The People's Instructions", 118.

⁸⁹¹ "Shygysulyna Khat" in B. Bulqyshev, *Zaman Bizdiki* (Almaty: Qazaqtyn Memlekettik Birikken Baspasy, 1943), 26.

⁸⁹² TsGAKFDZRK, 2-71077.

“My dear children. Throughout 14 months at the front, I have seen what the cursed Fritzes want to do with you. I have seen children of your age killed by them. I have seen children whose parents were brutally tortured. I will never forget the terrible sight that appeared before my eyes when our unit knocked Fritzes out from one village: 47 people, women and children, were locked in a barn and burned alive”.⁸⁹³ Those letters were frequently published in newspapers. For N. Glukhova, Nazis were “cannibals”: “Dear fellow countrymen, with our own eyes we have seen Soviet cities and villages destroyed and burned to the ground, we have seen mothers whose children were taken away by these cannibals, we have seen children who were orphaned by fascists...”⁸⁹⁴

In their letters to their wives and children, political instructor Loshkarev and hero of the Soviet Union Klochkov described either dead or miserable children they met at the front, and they expressed how they remembered their own children when they saw them.⁸⁹⁵ However, in his letter to his son, Kazakh poet Tair Zharoqov preferred to describe the heroism of a Ukrainian child instead of describing dying and suffering children: “I will tell you about one Ukrainian boy, Grisha, and how he joined the partisan detachment. This boy is a real *dzhigit* – brave, smart, resourceful and very much loves his motherland”.⁸⁹⁶ The poet continues telling about Grisha’s heroic deeds and finishes his letter with the sentence: “Sweet son! Your father wants you to become as brave as

⁸⁹³ “Detoubiitsy (Pis’mo starshego leitenanta Sudarkina I. V. detskii sad No 20 g. Alma-Ata), January 19, 1943, in *Pis’ma s Fronta*, 167.

⁸⁹⁴ N. Glukhova, “Pis’mo s fronta,” *Priuralskaia Pravda*, August 13, 1942, 2.

⁸⁹⁵ “Sredi Dymiashikhsia Goloveshek (Pis’mo politruka Loshkareva A. V. k svoei zhene I detiam)”, November 13, 1942; “Radi Budushego Nashikh Detei (Pis’mo geroia Sovetskogo Soiuzna Panfilovtza Klochkova V. svoei zhene i docheri), August 25, 1941, in *Pis’ma s Fronta*, 128-129; 137-138.

⁸⁹⁶ “Pis’mo Synu (Pis’mo starshego leitenanta, poeta-ordenonostsa Taira Zharokova), August 2, 1942, in *Pis’ma s Fronta*, 159-160.

Grisha”. Hence, the Kazakh soldier shares a story of child heroism with his son instead of using his letter as a sentimental tool to communicate with him emotionally.

In 1950, Mälġk Ghabdullġn received a letter from a child named Volodia Gvardeitsev. This was a child Ghabdullġn had saved in a village close to Moscow during the war. Ghabdullġn remembers how the child was very scared when they found him. His father was in the army while the boy’s mother had been killed by the Nazis. The child did not even know his surname. An old man approached Ghabdullġn and said that Nazis had killed his mother and he was left an orphan. Ghabdullġn replied: “No, this child is not an orphan, not even one child is left an orphan in the Soviet Union”.⁸⁹⁷ It is striking that even when describing such an emotional letter from the boy and such a cruel scene, Ghabdullġn does not use any sentimental language. He narrates such a tragic story in the standard heroic Soviet narrative while he downplays the suffering and tragedy of the civilians. Occasionally, Kazakh soldiers write about civilians in the battle zones (like the stories of Grisha and Volodia), but they very rarely refer to civilians’ sufferings, and never dramatize them.

Kazakhs use a sentimental language only when they write about their youth and their desire to survive. Distinctively romantic Bulqyshev provides texts full of emotions of love, hate, desire to live and youth. However, his letters and diary entries are usually abstract literary products in which he positions himself in a long European/Russian literary tradition instead of covering real-life events.⁸⁹⁸ A few Kazakh soldiers are more interested in the mundane and describe their daily lives in detail instead of only providing

⁸⁹⁷ “Gvardeytsevtin Khaty” in Mälġk Ghabdullġn, *Maydan Ocherkteri* (Almaty: Qazaqtyn Memlekettik Kōrkem Ādebġet Baspasy, 1959), 211-216.

⁸⁹⁸ Bulqyshev, *Zaman Bizdiki*.

primordial heroism stories. For example, Äzil Khan Nurshayyqov is unique in his long descriptions of love, sexuality, eroticism and even rapes by Soviet soldiers.⁸⁹⁹ Yet, when a Russian soldier gets angry at a Kazakh and starts cursing Kazakhs, Nurshayyqov gets so offended that he devotes pages to describe how dangerous such an attitude towards Kazakhs is: now three soldiers are listening to Morozov, but what if one of them gets wounded and goes to a hospital, tells everyone at the hospital that “Kazakhs are bad” and then these soldiers go to the front again and further spread the word?⁹⁰⁰ This was the most saddening and heartbreaking moment for Nurshayyqov throughout the entire war.

Nurshayyqov’s offense is a good example of how an emotional community based on pride (and self-praise) was emerging among Kazakh soldiers: proving that Kazakhs were not lower than other nations was the main motivation for Kazakh soldiers. Letters praising not only Kazakh soldiers, but also Kazakh history, supposedly written by Russians published in newspapers and collections of soldiers’ letters, were used to provide this sense of pride.⁹⁰¹ In 1942, in the main Kazakh-language newspaper of the republic, one Russian soldier was even claimed to confess that he used to think Kazakhs were weaker soldiers: “I am from Almaty, my nationality is Russian. I don’t know why, but until the war I was thinking that Kazakhs would make weak soldiers. I hope Kazakh people will forgive my mistake. In fact, Kazakhs are persistent, they are courageous. It is Kazakhs’ custom to give their lives for a friend. I have many times seen such heroic

⁸⁹⁹ Nurshayyqov, *Äskerī Kündelik*.

⁹⁰⁰ *Ibid.*, 303-304 (Diary entry, September 12, 1943).

⁹⁰¹ “Maydangar Pavel Mikheevtin Külesh Bayseitovagha Zhazghan Khatynan”, February 17, 1943, in *Sälem Saghan Maydannan, Qazaqstan!*, 184-185.

deeds of Kazakhs”.⁹⁰² This emotional community based on pride and self-praise was so powerful that Zhälel Qīzatov’s memoirs, published in 1976, read more like a collection of Kazakh idioms, poems and stories (that he continuously tells to his Russian friends and commanders who without exception always admire these stories and praise Kazakhs) rather than an account of the war itself.⁹⁰³

The process by which letters were chosen to be published definitely plays a role in the construction of the war myth. Yet, it is not really logical to think that people who selected Kazakhs’ letters purposefully ignored letters that described civilian suffering while they did the opposite with letters written by Russians.⁹⁰⁴ What is important here is that there was a Kazakh narrative or myth of the war that clearly differed from the Russian version (while equally sharing Soviet patriotism) and this narrative was welcomed by soldiers themselves. It is important to note that both the primordialist heroic vision and lack of sentimentalism have proved resilient from the war years to the post-Soviet era. The most apparent difference between letters published during the war and the ones that were chosen to be published in the post-Stalin years is the latter’s emphasis on communist education.⁹⁰⁵ Yet, in these letters too Kazakhs embrace the heroic primordialist narrative while Russian soldiers describe suffering in a sentimentalist tone.

⁹⁰² “Dmitrii Trofimovtyn ‘Sotsialistik Qazaqstan’ gazetiniñ redaktsiyasyna zhazghan khaty,” *Sotsialistik Qazaqstan*, November 24, 1942.

⁹⁰³ Zhälel Qīzatov, *Ömir Ötkelderi (povest’)* (Almaty: Zhazūshy baspasy, 1976).

⁹⁰⁴ We do not exactly know who actually wrote letters addressing soldiers at the front in the name of a particular nationality. Schechter predicts that it was likely the task of the Writer’s Union and Republican Party Cadres which means that they were written by “non-Russians”. When it comes to soldiers’ letters published in newspapers or various collections, they were probably written collectively, probably under the guidance of a political officer. Schechter, “‘The People’s Instructions’”, 119; 127.

We can only be sure of the author of a letter when it is signed by a writer or a public figure such as Täzhibaev or Ghabdullīn.

⁹⁰⁵ For example, see Ivan Podol’stev’s letter to his wife, “Sovet Odaghynyñ Batyry Ivan Grigor’evich Podol’tsevtin Äyeline Zhazghan Khattarynan”, April 5, 1942, in *Sälem Saghan Maydannan*, 81.

In a letter addressed to Kazakh people and signed by Kazakh soldiers and commanders in the southern front they declare that “Sometimes we hear old batyrs’ voice. They are inviting us to heroism and victory. We know how our famous ancestors Qarasay, Edige, Isatay and Makhambet batyrs, who are recalled by bards and poets, tirelessly fought for their homelands...”⁹⁰⁶ On the other hand, Russian captain Fediukin’s letter to his son is similar to published letters by Russian soldiers in 1944: he describes how he remembered his son when he saw child victims at the front with references to Nazi brutalities.⁹⁰⁷

Memoirs written in the post-Soviet era are not that different when it comes to Kazakhs’ indifference towards civilians’ suffering in general and child victims in particular. Mukhamet Shayakhmetov who describes the miserable Kazakhs during the famine in detail does not even once refer to child victims during the war. Instead, Shayakhmetov prefers to create an account centered totally around himself.⁹⁰⁸ Neither does Turganbek Kataev, whose account is free from primordialist nationalist visions, pay attention to children’s suffering.⁹⁰⁹ For Süleymen Bekenov, the most chauvinistic of all Kazakh memoirists, writing a memoir is a tool to express his chauvinist nationalism in which Kazakhs appear to be the ultimate heroes whereas other ethnic groups, particularly Uzbeks (but not Russians), are depicted as cowards. Throughout the entire memoir, published in 2007, he only once describes a scene where little children cry after their mothers’ deaths. Their brigade helps these children, but he notes that it was Russians who

⁹⁰⁶ “Ontüstik Maydandaghy Qazaq Zhaungerleri men Komandirleriniñ Qazaq Khalqyna Zhazghan Khaty,” April 22, 1943, in *Sälem Saghan Maydannan*, 210.

⁹⁰⁷ “Kapitan P. Fediukinniñ Äyeli men Alty Zhasar Ulyna Zhazghan Khattarynan”, February 4, 1943, *ibid.*, 169.

⁹⁰⁸ Shayakhmetov, *The Silent Steppe*.

⁹⁰⁹ Kataev, *Pamiat’ o Voine*.

were particularly compassionate towards those children.⁹¹⁰ Nurshayyqov's memoirs (partially written as a diary) clearly shows that there is more diversity in accounts published in the post-Soviet era. However, while we read a lot about Nurshayyqov's correspondence with and ideas about the girl he was in love with, there is nothing about children and women victims at the hands of Nazis.⁹¹¹ There are exceptions. However, we can count exceptions (Kazakhs' descriptions of child victims) on one hand which means that exceptions prove the rule. An example is Nuryim Sydyqov, who fought in a partisan brigade in Belorussia: he describes how Nazis massacred children and women in a certain village and how survivors recalled this massacre in detail.⁹¹²

When the Nazis attacked the Soviet Union, it was Russians who overwhelmingly volunteered.⁹¹³ The state had the most difficulty mobilizing the rural population and the non-Russian nationalities.⁹¹⁴ Moreover, desertion and "counterrevolutionary organization" occurred at higher rates among non-Russians, who were led into battle without training and suffered heavy losses.⁹¹⁵ For example, non-Russians constituted a majority among self-inflicted wounds on the Southwestern Front. The official Soviet narrative and Central Asian historians presented the process of conscription as a culmination of heroism and patriotism in which Central Asian soldiers volunteered for the war effort by their own will. Yet, in contrast to how local historians portray the conscription process, studies have shown that this was not the case at the beginning of the war. Roberto Carmack shows how the

⁹¹⁰ Bekenov, *Qazaq Tutqyny*, 61.

⁹¹¹ Nurshayyqov, *Äskerî Kündelik*.

⁹¹² Nuryim Sydyqov, *Sönbeytin Ot – Derekti Povest* (Almaty: Zhibek Zholy, 2011), 105-107.

⁹¹³ Roger R. Reese *Why Stalin's Soldiers Fought: The Red Army's Military Effectiveness in World War II* (Lawrence: University Press of Kansas, 2011), 104.

⁹¹⁴ *Ibid.*, 141.

⁹¹⁵ Schechter, "The People's Instructions," 111.

conscriptio process of Kazakhs differed from the patriotic narratives even though it eventually proved successful.⁹¹⁶

Therefore, promoting national pride and fusing it with Soviet patriotism among non-Russians was a mobilizational priority. Harun Yilmaz suggests that Kazakh communists initiated a very strong nationalist propaganda campaign which became the leitmotiv of the public speeches of Kazakh officials, lectures, the publications of newspapers and the repertoire of performance art.⁹¹⁷ The Main Political Administration of the Red Army (PURKKA) published 16 Kazakh-language front-line newspapers, 2 front-line Kazakh journals, and a Kazakh language version of The Agitator's Notebook.⁹¹⁸ In January 1943, seven thousand copies of the booklet "On the *Batyr*s of the Kazak People" were published. One year later ten thousand copies of the booklet "*Batyr*s of the Kazakh People" were added to this number.⁹¹⁹ "The Heroic Sons of the Kazakh People in Ancient Times" was a permanent topic that various Kazakh *batyr*s were introduced in many volumes. An article from January, 1942 is a clear example of manipulation of Soviet discourse. The author quotes Stalin's sentence on the heroism of Russian warriors at the beginning, then continues to celebrate Abylay Khan as a hero of the Kazakh people. Lacking any kind of class analysis, the article argues that not all khans are enemies of the people, and there are khans like Abylay who only "sing the song of the people", only defend the homeland.⁹²⁰

⁹¹⁶ Carmack, *Kazakhstan in World War II*, 16-26.

For the Kyrgyz soldiers, Moritz Florin argues that subsequent Soviet propaganda of common patriotism and voluntary recruitment is baseless whereas most Kyrgyz men could only be drafted by force and intimidation. Florin, "Becoming Soviet though War", 495.

⁹¹⁷ Yilmaz, *National Identities in Soviet Historiography*, 146.

⁹¹⁸ Carmack, "History and hero-making," 97

⁹¹⁹ TsGARK, f. 1770, op. 1, d. 1.1.

⁹²⁰ B. Kenzhebaev, "Qazaq Khalqynyñ Erlik Tarikhynan: Abylay," *Sotsialistik Qazaqstan*, 01. 15.1942.

However, mobilization purposes alone cannot explain the making of such a discourse and emotional community. Unfortunately, we can only speculate about the other conditions that made this discourse possible. As explained before, proving that Kazakhs were not lower than others was a constant in Kazakh soldiers' accounts which can be interpreted as a claim to equal citizenship. Since Kazakh civilians did not share the same fate as Russians or Ukrainians (even though they were mobilized for the war effort too), not the discourse of suffering, but the discourse of heroism and patriotism was suitable for a claim to equality. In Ukraine, veterans articulated their own narrative of the war and peasants used wartime sacrifices and sufferings to present themselves as legitimate members in the Soviet society.⁹²¹ Similarly, Kazakh soldiers' emphasis on Kazakh heroism was an effort to make Kazakh national discourse acceptable for Soviet patriotism. We should also keep in mind that probably the majority of Kazakh soldiers had survived the famine of 1930-33, but they were never allowed to mourn their losses publicly. Suppression of the memory of such a catastrophe might have very well contributed to a national discourse indifferent to suffering.

However, it was not possible to provide care for war orphans in Kazakhstan without addressing emotions. A meeting of women of Almaty in 1943 declared that it was women comrades' duty to provide maternal care and affection for these children. Various examples of adoption that usually included a good portion of affection and sentimentalism were provided to trigger women's emotions. In all examples without exception, Kazakh women (and one Tatar) adopted a Russian or Belorussian child.⁹²² A

⁹²¹ Weiner, *Making Sense of War*, 9.

⁹²² *Kazakhstan v Pervyi God Otechestvennoi Voiny Protiv Nemetsko-Fashistskikh Zakhvatchikov* (Almaty: KazOGIZ, 1943), 30-31.

call to all women of Kazakhstan in a meeting devoted to evacuated children in Almaty starts with a description of dead children in Odessa, Minsk, Kharkov and Rostov: “children’s blood stained the hands of fascist scums”.⁹²³ Another call to women of Kazakhstan starts with a description of massacres and rapes of Soviet children and declares that “they want to exterminate Soviet children in order to destroy our hope and happiness – the future of the country of socialism!”.⁹²⁴ These calls usually continue with an explanation of how the “motherland” does everything for Soviet children and descriptions of Soviet women’s sacrifices for Soviet children. Hence, with regards to images of children for adults, sentimentalism was highly gendered and only targeted Kazakh women on home front.



Image 16: M. Yakupov, hero of the Soviet Union, is among the pioneers of school No 78, Almaty oblast (1952)⁹²⁵

⁹²³ APRK, f. 708, d. 6/1, op. 483, ll. 17-23.

⁹²⁴ APRK, f. 708, d. 6/1, op. 483, ll. 24-27.

⁹²⁵ TsGAKFDZRK, 4-472.

War veterans were active in the education of children and youth in the post-War years.

Conclusion

Russian historian Oleg Budnitskii criticizes the assumption that the masses were already Soviet patriots when the war began. He argues that most studies of Sovietization or Soviet subjectivities are based on the urban and educated segments of the society whereas, by 1941, peasant masses were far from being supporters of the Soviet state. The war significantly changed this and ultimately Sovietized peasants. Mobilization by the army and state, rising patriotism that relegated socialist ideals to backstage, and Nazi brutalities, all bolstered this process.⁹²⁶ On the other hand, Amir Weiner argues that the war not only provided Ukrainians a powerful myth, but also “victimization and fatalism gave way to celebration of activity and continuity, the traumas of collectivization, famine, and terror gave way to the triumphant war; collaboration to common suffering; and civil war to unification of the national family”.⁹²⁷

The transformative effect of the war on Central Asia was ignored for a long period. Nevertheless, recent historical works have demonstrated how Central Asians were Sovietized by the war akin to Sovietization of Russian peasants or Ukrainians. At the beginning of the war many rural Kyrgyz did not identify with Soviet patriotism or the war effort, but nonetheless, these same Kyrgyz men started to identify with the Soviet state as a result of the war. Importantly, Moritz Florin suggests becoming Soviet did not necessarily mean understanding and internalizing Soviet ideology for these soldiers.⁹²⁸ In

⁹²⁶ Oleg Budnitskii, “The Great Patriotic War and Soviet Society: Defeatism, 1941-42,” *Kritika: Explorations in Russian and Eurasian History* 15, no. 4 (2014).

⁹²⁷ Weiner, *Making Sense of War*, 384.

⁹²⁸ Florin, “Becoming Soviet though War,” 495.

According to Florin, due to hunger and the breakdown of the educational system, attempts to educate the masses and to make them socialist subjects failed before the war whereas the war did create Soviet patriots who often did not care about socialist ideology (p. 501).

his study of Uzbek soldiers, Charles Shaw proposes that Soviet Central Asian history should be viewed in two different eras separated by the war years. The war period's sacrifices, violence, and trauma were characterized by the emergence of a new, integrative, pan-Soviet identity.⁹²⁹ On the other hand, as Roberto Carmack shows for Kazakhstan, the labor mobilization campaign accelerated the integration of Central Asian republics' economies and workforce into the larger Soviet economy; Kazakhstan's economy was fully subordinated to the Soviet industrial core.⁹³⁰ According to Eren Tasar, the war allowed Central Asians to claim that they had fully participated in defense of the motherland and in this way, it created new possibilities for the accommodation between Soviet and Islamic belonging.⁹³¹

Wartime mobilization in Central Asia considerably consolidated ordinary people's participation in the Soviet project. It was no different for children. They helped soldiers' families, collected metals, vegetables and warm clothes and were subject to an increasing number of propaganda events. They were most impressed with war stories and extensively read and listened to those about both child and adult heroes. Simultaneously, the state attempted to establish more strict control over their lives which had significant consequences for the post-war period.

This chapter has argued that the war years brought about a homogenization of the image of childhood in Kazakhstan. Sudden changes and practical necessities under war

⁹²⁹ Shaw, "Soldiers' Letters to Inobatxon and O'g'ulxon," 521-522.

To my knowledge, this is the only work that approach Soviet Central Asia from a perspective of emotions.

⁹³⁰ Carmack, *Kazakhstan in World War II*, 63-91.

⁹³¹ Tasar, *Soviet and Muslim*, 50.

The war even Sovietized Sufi ishan lineages; ishans embraced Soviet patriotism while keeping their roles as Islamizers of Kazakh society. Allen J. Frank, *Gulag Miracles: Sufis and Stalinist Repression in Kazakhstan* (Austrian Academy of Sciences Press, 2019), 103-116.

conditions brought a halt to publications in Kazakh and Kazakh children consumed Russian sources more than ever as the decreasing number of publications in Kazakh meant most publications were translations from Russian. Consequently, the relative diversity of the pre-war years was replaced by images produced largely from outside of Kazakhstan. Towards the end of the war, Kazakh authors integrated stories of Kazakh heroes into literature for children and youth. In this way, Kazakh authors integrated Kazakh national heroes into the Soviet patriotic and heroic narrative while simultaneously embracing Russian heroes as role models for Kazakh children.

On the other hand, Kazakh soldiers' understanding of the war significantly differed from their Russian counterparts: they never dramatized civilians' suffering and almost never referred to child victims. Lack of sentimentalism and indifference towards suffering consolidated a primordial Kazakh national discourse. Consolidation of such a heroic vision was not contradictory with shared Soviet patriotism. The dominance of the heroic discourse over a sentimental one had long term effects that have influenced not only the commemoration of the war, but also the perception of the Soviet past and Kazakh national identity.

CHAPTER 5

SPEAKING RUSSIAN WITHOUT AN ACCENT: THE ORIGINS OF LINGUISTIC RUSSIFICATION IN KAZAKHSTAN, 1938-1953

In Central Asia, linguistic Russification was strongest in Kazakhstan, rivalling even Slavic republics of the Union. William Fierman notes that by the end of the Soviet era, over 80 percent, and quite possibly over 90 percent, of Kazakhstan's urban population was literate in Russian while only 10-15 percent of the whole population was literate in Kazakh. Most urban Kazakhs had graduated from Russian-language schools and they viewed linguistic and cultural Russification as valuable assets while looking down on the culture and language of rural Kazakhs.⁹³² Russian language fluency among Kazakhs far surpassed other Central Asian peoples. Bhavna Dave notes how Kazakhs in the 1990s were fond of their fluency in Russian: "We speak better and purer Russian than many Russians themselves" was commonly heard.⁹³³

Popular imagination and post-Soviet Kazakh nationalist interpretations of the Soviet past usually claim that this was the result of a deliberate Russification policy. Western scholarship during the Cold War was no different. Since then historians have reinterpreted Soviet nationalities policies and the status of non-Russian languages in the Soviet Union. We now know that the 1920s was a period of *korenizatsiia*. Native cadres, national cultures and non-Russian languages were supported in a way unprecedented in world history. Under the policy of *korenizatsiia*, quite contrary to nationalist and Cold

⁹³² William Fierman, "Language and Education in Post-Soviet Kazakhstan: Kazakh-Medium Instruction in Urban Schools," *The Russian Review* 65, no. 1 (2006): 101-102.

⁹³³ Bhavna Dave, *Kazakhstan: Ethnicity, Language and Power* (London: Routledge, 2007), 50.

War representations, Russians, not natives, were usually discriminated against in Central Asia. However, korenizatsiia eventually failed under Stalin's rule and Russian emerged as a lingua franca for the Soviet citizens.

This chapter argues that Stalin's rule, there was never an official policy of Russification in Kazakhstan. The famous 1938 decree about the obligatory Russian language education for non-Russian peoples was as much about the failure of Russian language education as it was about imposing Russian on non-Russians. Under the fear of an approaching war, the Soviet authorities took Russian language education much more seriously as a lingua franca for the whole Soviet society. This chapter provides a new glimpse into this process by focusing on memoirs to discuss how Kazakhs came to speak Russian. Linguistic Russification did not have a real impact throughout the 1920s and 1930s (since it was not an official policy), and only in the 1940s and 1950s did it become widespread, largely thanks to the multiethnic character of the country due to the famine and deportations. Several memoirists make it clear that they started speaking Russian, not because it was dictated at the school, but because they had very few Kazakh friends at the school or in their neighborhood. Kazakhstan's tragedy was a demographic catastrophe and Kazakhs became a minority in the republic after the famine. I argue that this demographic crisis was the main reason why Kazakhs were Russified more than their neighbors.

Non-Russian Languages and the Question of Russification in the Historiography

The early Bolshevik rule in non-Russian regions was characterized by the policy of korenizatsiia. This policy systematically favored the interests of indigenous peoples

over “newly arrived elements” and it was part of the Bolsheviks’ decolonizing rhetoric.⁹³⁴ As Terry Martin explains, in the Soviet East, the major problem was the lack of literate, educated cadres. Hence, unlike Ukraine where linguistic Ukrainization was fully embraced, in the East, korenizatsiia’s main goal was affirmative action in training and hiring to create national elites. Linguistic korenizatsiia, establishing national language as the official state language, could only be possible after this.⁹³⁵

Consequently, in Central Asia, as elsewhere in the Soviet East, linguistic korenizatsiia was never seriously attempted even though the national languages were promoted vigorously in the press and general education. In government, industry and higher education, the Russian language’s dominance was not seriously challenged.⁹³⁶ Martin suggests that the policy was more successful in the eastern republics such as Tatarstan, Chuvashia, Azerbaijan, Kazakhstan and Uzbekistan where the national language was being used in most government organs at the district and village soviet level.⁹³⁷ In fact, a 1923 decree required the introduction of parallel paperwork in Kazakh in all central government organs in thirteen months. A similar decree was accepted for Uzbek in December 1924. Nonetheless, by the end of the 1920s, neither republic could achieve even 10% success in conducting paperwork in the local language.⁹³⁸ Similarly, linguistic korenizatsiia largely failed in Turkmenistan despite the attempts to mandate the

⁹³⁴ Martin, *The Affirmative Action Empire*, 12.

⁹³⁵ *Ibid.*, 24.

⁹³⁶ *Ibid.*, 76-77.

⁹³⁷ Tatarstan was the most successful among all. *Ibid.* 134.

⁹³⁸ *Ibid.*, 133.

use of Turkmen in the state apparatus.⁹³⁹ The 1930s witnessed the retreat from the early promises of korenizatsiia and scholars offer different explanations for this change.

Echoing émigré nationalist circles, many Western scholars of Central Asia during the Cold War assumed that Lenin's promise of national autonomy was only a matter of pragmatism and Russification was the end goal under Stalin's rule. These scholars not only interpreted Stalinism as a period of Russification, but also dismissed the earlier promises of korenizatsiia. In his more sophisticated study of language and power in the Soviet Union, Michael Smith reinforced the same view. Although he admitted that the regime recognized the importance of native language learning, according to him, the message of the 1938 decree was to keep native languages weak and submissive.⁹⁴⁰ In a less read book chapter published 14 years after his book, Smith declared that cultural assimilation through Russian language was the ultimate goal of the Soviet regime no matter how far off it was delayed. While admitting that the motivation was more political or statist rather than ethnic, he even claimed that nativization was just a function of Russification; non-Russians first had to be nativized in order to be Russified.⁹⁴¹ Even though Smith's book provides significant discussions about how non-Russian languages were influenced by Russian and in some cases even the very nature of these languages were restructured according to the phonetic and grammatical rules of Russian, he presents

⁹³⁹ Edgar, *Tribal Nation*, 84; 88.

⁹⁴⁰ Micheal G. Smith, *Language and Power in the Creation of USSR, 1917-1953* (Berlin: De Gruyter, 1998), 143-160.

⁹⁴¹ In this book chapter, Smith even claims that historians recognized the prestigious status of Russian through the concept of speaking Bolshevik (which was, for Smith, equal to speaking Russian). Michael G. Smith, "The Hegemony of Content: Russian as the Language of State Assimilation in the USSR, 1917-1953", in *Kampf um Wort und Schrift. Russifizierung in Osteuropa im 19.-20. Jahrhundert*, ed. Zaur Gasimov (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 2012).

the Soviet Union's approach to nationalities as no different from assimilationist nation states' treatment of minorities or from full-scale colonial projects.

Even though Michael Smith's claims about the Soviet regime's ultimate goals are not supported by the state of Western historiography today, the dichotomy of the internationalist 1920s and Russifying 1930s remain persistent. According to Jeremy Smith, throughout the 1920s, the internationalist tendency dominated Soviet debates about Russian and minority languages and Russian as a universal language had insignificant support among early Bolsheviks.⁹⁴² Smith is right to say that the growth of the number of non-Russian schools in national administrative units after the Revolution was impressive by any standards.⁹⁴³ Consequently, by the end of the 1920s, the vast majority of children were studying in their national language. Although Smith agrees that the 1930s were a period of Russification, he suggests that the system was already too strong to be destroyed easily.⁹⁴⁴

Writing about Turkmenistan, Victoria Clement too suggests that linguistic Russification was unapologetically the goal of the Soviet regime by the late 1930s and it would persist through the end of the Soviet Union.⁹⁴⁵ In his study of cultural life in Kazan, Gary Guadagnolo defines language policies in the 1930s as an uneasy balance between Russification and nativization. Even though the evidence he provides usually challenges the claim of the existence of an official Russification policy, in conclusion he

⁹⁴² Jeremy Smith, "The Education of National Minorities: The Early Soviet Experience," *The Slavonic and East European Review* 75, no. 2 (1997): 285.

⁹⁴³ *Ibid.*, 295. However, it is problematic that Smith accepts official statistics at face value. Even though I agree that Soviet schooling of non-Russians was impressive, Smith provides a brighter picture than the reality. I briefly discussed how official statistics do not tell us much about the quality of education in Chapter 1.

⁹⁴⁴ *Ibid.*, 307.

⁹⁴⁵ Clement, *Becoming Turkmen*, 89.

suggests that the state's nature was fundamentally Russian. However, his discussion of the disparity between the rhetoric and reality of Russian language instruction contributes to our understanding of how Russian remained peripheral to the lives of most non-Russians until the war.⁹⁴⁶

Debates on linguistic Russification in the 1930s mostly focus on the 1938 decree on the obligatory Russian language education for non-Russians. Many Cold War scholars, and the contemporary ones including Michael Smith and Victoria Clement as discussed above, understand this decree as an evident manifestation of the state's goal of Russification. Yet, Simon Crisp argues that although this decree can perhaps be seen as a precursor, the Russian language's expanded role in education as a tool of bringing universal bilingualism belongs to the post-Stalin period whereas there was more genuine commitment to the national language education between 1917 and 1953.⁹⁴⁷

However, it is questionable whether the 1938 decree was a precursor of Russification policies. Peter Blitstein, who has provided the most detailed study of this decree, argues that the Stalin regime not only retained native-language instruction for non-Russians, but even sought to extend it while simultaneously bringing obligatory Russian language instruction in non-Russian schools. Hence, the era was characterized by this contradiction and attempts to find a balance between native and Russian languages, rather than a full-scale project of Russification.⁹⁴⁸ Blitstein emphasizes the point that

⁹⁴⁶ Gary Guadagnolo, "Creating a Tatar capital: National, cultural, and linguistic space in Kazan, 1920-1941," (PhD diss., University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill, 2016), 57-59.

⁹⁴⁷ Simon Crisp, "Soviet Language Planning, 1917-1953," in *Language Planning in the Soviet Union* ed. Michael Kirkwood (London: Palgrave Macmillan, 1990), 38-39.

⁹⁴⁸ Peter A. Blitstein, "Nation-Building or Russification? Obligatory Russian Instruction in the Soviet Non-Russian School, 1938-1953," in *A State of Nations: Empire and Nation-Making in the Age of Lenin and Stalin* eds. Ronald Grigor Suny and Terry Martin (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2001), 253.

Narkompros had long worried about the quality of Russian instruction in non-Russian schools and Stalin himself raised the issue in October 1937, allegedly because of military considerations. The decree was accepted on practical assumptions and ended with Stalin's warning that converting Russian from a subject of study to the language of instruction would be harmful. According to Blitstein, the final version of the decree indeed meant a defeat for the supporters of a radical policy of Russification. Proposals aimed to radicalize the goals of the decree were rejected.⁹⁴⁹

It is now widely accepted that the real turning point for the increasing status of Russian at the expense of non-Russian languages was not the 1938 decree, but rather the Khrushchev period with its openly declared focus on turning Russian into the second language for non-Russians. The 1959 Soviet education law allowed parents to choose their children's language of instruction and decide if they would get any native language instruction at all. This was starkly in contrast to the previous commitment to native language education; free choice under Soviet rule usually meant choosing the only available option.⁹⁵⁰ During the Khrushchev era, non-Russian languages were relegated to backstage, even though they were never attacked directly.⁹⁵¹ Surprisingly, languages of major nationalities benefited in this period due to the relative revival of cultural freedom

⁹⁴⁹ Ibid., 255-259.

⁹⁵⁰ Isabelle T. Kreindler, "Soviet Language Planning since 1953," in Kirkwood ed., *Language Planning in the Soviet Union*.

⁹⁵¹ Khrushchev's efforts to promote Russian as a second language for non-Russians coincided with a policy change in the cultural diplomacy of the Soviet Union. While Stalin was still in power, the Soviet state played a minor role in the propagation of Russian abroad. By the late 1950s, officials in Soviet ministries and social organizations, began to promote Russian on the global stage. This policy change was motivated by the Cold War rivalry with the Western world. The main goal was to showcase Soviet economic and cultural achievements, to create a platform for promoting Soviet policies to foreigners, and to increase the country's prestige on the global stage. Rachel Applebaum, "The Rise of Russian in the Cold War: How Three Worlds Made a World Language," *Kritika: Explorations in Russian and Eurasian History* 21, no. 2 (2020): 348-350.

while “small” languages were seriously threatened. Hence, even though the centrality of Russian language was openly declared, the results of the language policies were contradictory.⁹⁵² Therefore, even under Khrushchev, the impact of Russification was not that straightforward albeit many non-Russian languages were severely affected.

The impact of language policies significantly differed for different nationalities. By 1959, a quarter of all Kazakh children were attending Russian schools; by 1966-67 32% were. On the other hand, only 1% of Uzbek children were attending Russian schools in the early 1960s. In the 1970s and 1980s, very few Kazakh schools existed in the urban areas and Russian enjoyed a de facto supremacy in the republic.⁹⁵³ For many urban Kazakhs, Russian was no longer a second language; it replaced Kazakh as the native language of the younger generations.

Not surprisingly, the question of Russification is usually studied or interpreted by nationalist authors in Kazakhstan. Ultranationalist academic Mekemtas Myrzakhmetov, whose reminiscences about the famine were used earlier in this dissertation, wrote a famous book entitled “How Kazakhs were Russified”.⁹⁵⁴ The book can hardly be called an academic study, however it formed the basis of many subsequent interpretations including allegedly more academic works. Indeed, most of the book is devoted to discussion of Tsarist Russia’s Russification policies and a special emphasis is given to missionary activities. However, Myrzakhmetov, just like other nationalist authors, does

⁹⁵² Kreindler, “Soviet Language Planning,” 51-52.

⁹⁵³ Dave, *Kazakhstan*, 64.

⁹⁵⁴ Mekemtas Myrzakhmetov, *Qazaq Qalay Orystantyryldy* (Almaty: Atamura, 1993).

Anecdotal note: I ordered the book at the National Library in Almaty in February 2020. When I was taking the book from a library worker, she said “Everyone is reading this book now. So many have ordered it recently”.

not differentiate between the Tsarist and Soviet regimes. According to him, Stalin realized what the Tsarist regime only dreamt about (Russification of Kazakhs). His list of ten steps of Russification includes replacing Arabic script with “Russian” script, settling peoples in other nations’ lands, cleansing Crimea of Crimean Tatars and the Caucasus of Muslims, increasing the number of mixed schools, and assimilating non-Russian nations into one nation. In other words, a Russified Soviet nation.⁹⁵⁵

In their book published by Kazakh University (an academic publishing house in the country), Mäshimbaev and Mäshimbaeva quote Myrzhakhmetov’s ten steps word by word as “evidence” to prove their claims.⁹⁵⁶ Similar to Myzhakhmetov, Mäshimbaev and Mäshimbaeva devote many pages to discussing Tsarist Russia’s Russification policies and then present the Soviet regime as no more different, if not worse. According to them, the Soviet policy of bringing nations closer to each other was nothing more than a policy of Russification of non-Russians or depleting them of their nationality.⁹⁵⁷ The goal of cultural revolution and opening national publishing houses, schools, theaters, clubs, libraries was also just Russification.⁹⁵⁸ For them, opening schools was a tool of Russification, but then they also note that in 1926-27 30% of Russian children were schooled while only 8-12% of Kazakh children went to school which shows, according to them, that the Soviet Empire’s national policy was not different from Russian

⁹⁵⁵ Ibid., 107-108.

⁹⁵⁶ S. A. Mäshimbaev and G. S. Mäshimbaeva, *Patshalyq Resey zhäne Keñes imperiyalarynyñ Qazaqstandaghy rükhani otarlaū sayasatynyñ zardaptary (XIX ghasyrdyn 70-80 zhyldary – XXI ghasyrdyn basy)* (Almaty: Qazaq Universiteti, 2013).

⁹⁵⁷ Ibid., 171.

⁹⁵⁸ Ibid., 186.

Empire's.⁹⁵⁹ In other words, both schooling children and the low level of schooling among Kazakh children are presented as proofs of Russification.

While they claim that “the Red Soviet Empire” always aimed to Russify non-Russians, we almost never see any evidence to support these claims other than repeating Myrzhakhmetov’s statement that the Soviet Empire realized what the Tsarist regime could only dream of.⁹⁶⁰ In addition, while discussing the Tsarist regime, nationalist Kazakh authors frequently use Soviet discourse on the Tsarist era as evidence to support their point while totally dismissing other aspects of Soviet discourse. Even those Kazakh scholars who are less anti-Soviet have a significant problem providing evidence other than official decrees and statements. Another problem of Kazakh scholarship is treating the Soviet past as a unified period and using examples from random decades without really discussing the differences between different epochs.⁹⁶¹ Consequently, many academic works by Kazakh scholars are no different than the popular sentiments.⁹⁶²

⁹⁵⁹ Ibid., 223.

⁹⁶⁰ Ibid., 218.

Many of these interpretations of Russification are written by academics, but the language they use is far from being academic. Another article that claims Soviet education’s goal was to separate children from their national character starts the article by saying each nation has unique characters and uses a quote by a Kazakh poet who said there is no other language more noble and richer than Kazakh as an evidence for her claims. See, Baqytgul Särsembina, “Orystandyryshylar men Oghan Qarsylasushylar,” *Qazaq tarikhly* 3 (2010): 20.

⁹⁶¹ See for example, G. Dadabaeva, “Osobennosti Protsessa ‘Rusifikatsii’ v Sovetskikh Respublikakh I Problemy Kazakhskogo Yazyka,” *Alash* 1, no. 22, (2009): 104-110.

Due to their assumptions Kazakh historians reach very contradictory conclusions. For example, in her study of Kazakh-language press between 1917-1937, Leyla Nurghalieva praises Soviet governments’ promotion of literacy, education, cultural revolution, while simultaneously claiming that Russification was the main goal of the Soviet regime and it resembled an ideology of genocide. Leyla Nurghalieva, *Tarikh zhāne baspasöz (1917-1937 zhyldardaghy Qazaqstan tarikhynyñ özehti mäseleleri baspasözde: tarikhnamalyq zertteü)* (Almaty: Qazaqparat, 2000), 52-56.

⁹⁶² As an example of popular imagination, one newspaper article repeats the same cliché that for the policy of Russification of Kazakhs, the Soviet government was worse than the Tsarist government which is called as a regime that expected the dream of world proletariat which is beyond mankind’s imagination that aimed to destroy the concept of nation. The Soviet regime’s real goal was to turn Kazakhstan into a second Russia. See, Aydyn Yrysbekuly, “Qazaq Qalay Orystandyrylsa, Solay Qazaqtandyrylū Kerek!,” *Qazaqstan Zaman*, July 3, 2014, 5.

Oddly, the 1938 decree which is so important for Western scholars in their discussion of Russification is almost totally ignored by Kazakh authors; it is only mentioned by Mäshimbaev and Mäshimbaeva and even for them it is only a minor issue.⁹⁶³ This lack of attention is partially caused by the fact that Russification is accepted as a given by Kazakh authors and the Soviet era is essentialized to a degree that they do not see any difference between different periods. Hence, they do not attempt to explain changes in Soviet policy. To my surprise, while discussing linguistic Russification, the most popular point of reference is script change. Myrzakhmetov himself devotes pages and pages to claim that changing the script from Arabic to Latin and eventually to Cyrillic was a planned operation of Russification. Myrzakhmetov and others claim that it was an attempt to make people forget their history.⁹⁶⁴ Mäshimbaev and Mäshimbaeva

⁹⁶³ Mäshimbaev and Mäshimbaeva, *Patshalyq Resey zhäne Keñes*, 212-213.

⁹⁶⁴ Script reform is possibly the most criticized policy of the Kemalist regime (it happened simultaneously in Turkey and Central Asia). Conservative groups blame Kemalists to make people forget their history, their civilization. It is true that the Kemalist revolution's main motivation was to bring Turkey closer to the Western world and Arabic alphabet was seen backward. Yet, at the same time, these reforms were conducted in the name of nationalism. For a complex picture of language policies in Kemalist Turkey, see: İlker Aytürk, "Turkish Linguists against the West: The Origins of Linguistic Nationalism in Atatürk's Turkey," *Middle Eastern Studies* 40, no. 6 (2004). The cliché that "in one day we became ignorant (of our history and civilization)" is so popular among the conservative circles in Turkey which is also echoed among Kazakh authors. This trend creates a myth that as if a significant portion of the society was literate and as if books were so easily available in the late Ottoman and early Republican Turkey. Recently, historians working on culture of reading in the Ottoman Empire questioned this myth and showed how circulation of books was very limited. Hence, the popular idea that Turks forgot their history and civilization because of the script change is very much exaggerated, if not totally inaccurate. For a discussion of libraries and the culture of reading in the Ottoman Empire, see, İsmail Erünsal, *Osmanlılarda Kütüphaneler ve Kütüphanecilik* (İstanbul: Timaş Yayınları, 2015).

Therefore, when I recognized that for Kazakh authors script change was the most important topic to discuss linguistic Russification, I was quite surprised. Kazakh was a very young written language by 1928 and the number of books published in Kazakh in Arabic script was very few in comparison to more established written languages. Kazakh culture was still mainly oral, and arguably, it was among the last "national" cultures to be influenced by script change in such a great scale. I think Kazakh authors' emphasis on alphabet is extremely exaggerated and attributing it so much importance for linguistic Russification is simply inaccurate. Even though the contemporaries emphasized that Latin alphabet was an obstacle for the development of Russian in the country, its effect on linguistic Russification was limited. My explanation is that since adapting Cyrillic alphabet is a concrete attempt it is easier to claim that there was an official policy of linguistic Russification whereas the whole story of linguistic Russification is more complex and requires much more evidence. Secondly, as noted before, Myrzakhmetov's book established the parameters

repeat the same idea that Kazakhs lost their native language because of the script change although it is impossible to prove that script change makes a nation lose their language.⁹⁶⁵ A popular claim is that the Arabic alphabet was replaced not directly by Cyrillic (in order not to anger Kazakhs!), but by the Latin alphabet, but the eventual switch to Cyrillic was planned from the start as part of the policy of Russification.⁹⁶⁶ These authors claim that Goloshchekin wrote a letter to Stalin in 1925 in which he suggested to change the Kazakh alphabet twice in order to “make Kazakhs forget their past”.⁹⁶⁷

These authors ignore the fact that the Latinization campaign was largely a Muslim project and not imposed by Moscow. As Uluğ Kuzuoğlu shows in his study of the origins of alphabet reforms within the entangled Russo-Ottoman space, the first calls to reform the Arabic script came from Muslim intellectuals in the Caucasus and turned into a wide-ranging campaign overtime.⁹⁶⁸ In fact, Latinization in the Soviet East represented an indigenously sponsored project of cultural revolution which adapted the prerevolutionary Islamic reform movement.⁹⁶⁹ Azerbaijani intellectuals led the campaign for Latinization

of discussion of Russification and I think many other works attribute this issue so much importance just because they follow Myrzakhmetov. It is probable that Myrzakhmetov himself borrowed this idea from the Turkish context.

⁹⁶⁵ Mäshimbaev and Mäshimbaeva, *Patshalyq Resey zhäne Keñes*, 188; 209-212.

⁹⁶⁶ *Ibid.*, 209.

⁹⁶⁷ I have not been able to identify such a letter, because these claims are made either without providing any source or making references to likewise sources. For example, see, Yrysbekuly, “Qazaq Qalay Orystandyrylsa”.

In a more academic study, Suleimenova describes Russification as an implicit direction of language policies in Prerevolutionary Russia, the USSR and the Russian Federation. The main goal of this policy was linguistic homogenization of a multilingual society. Suleimanova compares Russification with Kazakhization in contemporary Kazakhstan and writes that Russification is not only an internal policy of Russia but conducted even in other countries while Kazakhization is specific to Kazakhstan. In addition, according to the author linguistic Russification had the end goal of Russifying the residents of any territory while linguistic Kazakhization has no goal of Kazakhifying other ethnic groups. E. D. Suleimenova, *Yazykovye Protssesy i Politika* (Almaty: Qazaq universiteti, 2011), 51-52. Suleimanova rightly emphasizes that the idea of equality of languages existed only in theory, but she too essentializes the Soviet past.

⁹⁶⁸ Uluğ Kuzuoğlu, “Telegraphy, Typography, and the Alphabet: The Origins of the Alphabet Revolutions in the Russo-Ottoman Space,” *International Journal of Middle East Studies* 52, no. 3 (2020).

⁹⁶⁹ Martin, *The Affirmative Action Empire*, 197.

of Turkic languages and the 1926 Turcological congress in Baku endorsed their program.⁹⁷⁰ Kazakh intellectuals were not among the prominent leaders of Latinization though. The leading Kazakh linguist, Akhmet Baytursynov, had been working on a reformed Arabic alphabet for Kazakh, but he stood against Latinization as late as 1927. However, influential figures within the party such as Zhürgenov, Asfendiyarov and Zhandosov were in favor of Latinization and eventually they won.⁹⁷¹

Debates over the 1938 Decree

The infamous decree was published on March 13. Kazakh Sovnarkom accepted a separate decree on April 5.⁹⁷² It was mostly a reproduction of the original decree that adapted its general language to Kazakhstan. It was declared that the study of Russian was to begin in Kazakh primary schools at the second year of education and in Kazakh incomplete secondary and secondary schools at the third year. In line with the general decree, it emphasized the point that Kazakh remained the language of instruction in Kazakh schools and Russian was only a subject of study and attempts to make it the language of instruction would be harmful and wrong.

Table 6: The planned number of hours devoted to the study of Russian per week

	Primary schools	Incomplete secondary and secondary schools
Second grade	2 hours	

⁹⁷⁰ Ibid., 186-187.

⁹⁷¹ D. Amanzholova, "Language Policy and Management Class Formation in the Kazakh Autonomous Soviet Socialist Republic. 1920-1936 years," *Khabarshy* 88 (2018): 14-15.

⁹⁷² Document No 65: "Postanovlenie TsIK i SSK KazSSR 'Ob obiazatel'nom izuchenii russkogo yazyka v kazakhskikh shkolakh – 5 aprelya 1938 g.," in E. D. Suleimenova ed., *Yazykovaia Politika v Kazakhstane (1921-1990 gody) – Sbornik Dokumentov* (Almaty: Qazaq Universiteti, 1997), 152-156.

Third grade	4 hours	4 hours
Fourth grade	4 hours	4 hours
Fifth grade		4 hours
Sixth grade		5 hours
Seventh grade		5 hours
Eight grade		4 hours
Ninth grade		4 hours
Tenth grade		4 hours

The decree indeed was a confession of the failure of Russian language education in non-Russian schools and an attempt to take it much more seriously than before. By 1937, the problem of teaching Russian in Kazakh schools came to dominate the pages of the Kazakh-language pedagogical journal. Just in volume 4 of 1937 there were three articles dedicated to this issue. One Kazakh author claimed that Russian was necessary for Kazakhs to get acquainted with science. It was also the language of the Russian proletariat, he continued, the language of October and of Lenin and Stalin.⁹⁷³ Indeed, practical reasons were emphasized in the decree itself: learning Russian was necessary as a language of interethnic communication, in order to prepare Kazakh cadres in the sciences and technical fields and for Kazakh soldiers who were recruited to serve in the Workers' and Peasants' Red Army and Navy. In factories, sovkhoses, kolkhozes, new buildings, all-Union party, professional and other meetings and conferences; in other words, wherever members of various nationalities met Russian was to serve as the

⁹⁷³ G. Nurseitov, "Qazaq mektepterinde orys tilin oqytuv," *Aūyl Mughalimi* 4 (1937): 34.

instrument of inter-ethnic communication. Knowledge of Russian made a deeper study of Marxism-Leninism possible.⁹⁷⁴ Similar arguments about the practical necessity of learning Russian were common across the Union. One more point emphasized in these texts was the necessity of learning Russian if non-Russians wanted to pursue vocational or higher education.⁹⁷⁵

Those practical reasons continued to be repeated to explain why such a decree was necessary.⁹⁷⁶ However, there were other explanations that focused on the greatness of the Russian language. The same texts usually emphasized the point that Russian was the language of Lenin and Stalin and the Russian proletariat. An author noted that Russian was the language of the leaders of the world proletariat and Marx himself learned Russian to become familiar with Russian people's life and history.⁹⁷⁷ Another article claimed that Marx and Engels said it was necessary to learn Russian. Latin was the language of civilization in the Middle Ages, as was French in the 18th and 19th centuries, and similarly Russian had become the language of Socialist civilization.⁹⁷⁸ In an article about the script change from Latin to Cyrillic, the Minister of Education declared that Kazakhs benefitted from the treasures of world civilization, science, arts and literature through Russian language. However, that practical explanation was not enough. He repeated Lomonosov's famous quote that Russian possessed the majesty of Spanish, the

⁹⁷⁴ E. V. Krotevicha and N. T. Saurambaeva, *Russkii Yazyk v Kazakhskoi Shkole: Sbornik Statei* (Almaty: Kazgosizdat, 1939), 3-4.

⁹⁷⁵ Blitstein, "Nation-Building or Russification?," 254; Gary Guadagnolo, "Creating a Tatar capital," 48-49.

⁹⁷⁶ For example see, "O Prepodavanii Russkogo Yazyka v Kazakhskikh I Drugikh Nerusskikh Shkolakh," *Khalyq Mughalimi* 1-2 (1940): 6.

⁹⁷⁷ T. Fomenko, "Orys Tilin Oqytüdy Zhoghary Satygha Kötereyik," *Aüyl Mughalimi* 6 (1938): 21.

⁹⁷⁸ "Orys tili – Sovet qalqtarynyñ ğhylyghy," *Aüyl Mughalimi* 15 (1938): 2.

vivacity of French, the firmness of German, the delicacy of Italian and the richness and imagery of Latin and Greek.⁹⁷⁹

Studying the post-Stalin era, Kreindler suggests that the most radical promoters of the Russian language (and the Russian people) were the Communists of the southern republics; the Uzbek leader Rashidov was a good example.⁹⁸⁰ It was true for Kazakh authors too. Kazakh authors liked to remind their readers that Abay, whose canonization as the national poet of Kazakhs in this era was discussed in Chapter 1, called on Kazakhs to learn the Russian language and culture and argued that Russians were the source of all sciences.⁹⁸¹ Sabit Mukanov, the famous Stalinist Kazakh writer, provided a vivid expression of admiration of Russians in his 1949 biographical novel *The School of Life*. Having described in detail how young Sabit saw a train for the first time in his life, the conversation that follows is a very good example:

-“... We claim that we are a nation, how are we supposed to be a nation? We are not even able to do our housework. Urban people are the possessors of all arts”.

-“What you call ‘urban people’ are Russians”, said Saqtar. “Russians are the possessors of all arts and sciences. We are only talking about what we have seen of Russians. How much we haven’t seen yet!”.

-“What you have seen is only one in a thousand”, said Emenaly. “Go to cities such as Qorghhan and Qyzylzhar and see the wonders of what Russians have done”.

-“Qorghhan, Qyzylzhar are nothing to compare with Petersburg and Moscow” said someone who stopped Emenaly’s talk.

...

-“Look at your bedding, carpets, dishes, devices and other possessions at your house, what is there which is not a product of Russians’ arts?”.⁹⁸²

⁹⁷⁹ M. Ädi qalyqov (Oqū Qalq Komissary), “Orys grafikasyña negizdelgen zhaña alfavitke köshū tūraly,” *Khalyq Mughalimi* 11-12 (1940): 4.

⁹⁸⁰ Kreindler, “Soviet Language Planning since 1953,” 53.

⁹⁸¹ Tezhimbet Äbishev, “Abaydyn pedagogikalyq közqarasy,” *Khalyq Mughalimi* 11-12 (1940): 18. Indeed, Abay did say it, so even though his words were exploited for these authors’ political and ideological goals, it was not a baseless claim.

⁹⁸² Mukanov, *Ömir Mektebi*, 117.

The novel continues with Mukanov's advice about how Kazakhs need to learn from Russians, and he declares that in order to learn Russians' arts Kazakh children need to get a Russian education.

Nevertheless, such an image of admiration of Russian culture and the necessity of learning Russian language was accompanied by a discourse of how Russians in Kazakhstan also needed to learn Kazakh. In 1930, Narkompros issued a decree for obligatory teaching of Kazakh in Russian schools (eight years before the 1938 decree). It was emphasized that Kazakh was the state language together with Russian and suggested that Kazakh should be taught in Russian schools for four hours weekly from fifth to tenth classes.⁹⁸³ The issue was reconsidered again in the subsequent years.⁹⁸⁴

The image of Russian adults (teachers, workers etc.) and children who spoke fluent Kazakh was a dominant one in Soviet Kazakh literature. For example, the hero of a children's story from 1941 presents a Russian detdom teacher who was fluent in Kazakh [*Qazaqshagga suday äyel*].⁹⁸⁵ In a more interesting example, written by a Kazakh teacher [allegedly a real-life story], Russian parents want to send their son Anatoli to a village school. They ask him in which language Anatoli wants to have his education. Anatoli starts to count his Kazakh friends' names, and desires to study together with them. His father replies: "That is what I was expecting from you. Learn your friends' language, study with them". Subsequently, Anatoli starts the second class of the Kazakh school in

⁹⁸³ Document No 50, "Tsirkuliarnoe rasporyazhenie Narkomprosa KASSR vsem okruzhnym otделам narodnogo obrazovaniya ob obyazatel'nom izuchenii kazakhskogo yazyka v russkikh shkola – 3 yanvaria 1930 g.," in Suleimenova ed., *Yazykovaia Politika*, 103-106.

⁹⁸⁴ For example, see, Document No 60, "Postanovlenie Prezidiuma KazTsIKa 'Ob obiazatel'nom izuchenii kazakhskogo yazyka v nekazahskikh shkolakh,'" Ibid., 145-146.

⁹⁸⁵ "Eki Zhaz," *Pioner* 2 (1941): 15.

1935, and in 1941 when the story was written he was reported to be a seventh-grade student who spoke fluent Kazakh.⁹⁸⁶

Not surprisingly though, the quality of Kazakh language education in Russian schools was terrible, much worse than Russian language education in Kazakh schools. There were no schools preparing Kazakh language teachers for Russian schools, hence, on the eve of the war, there were few in this profession.⁹⁸⁷ As one Kazakh author wrote, Kazakh language education in Russian schools existed only in name.⁹⁸⁸ As Guadagnolo notes for Tatar, the average Russian student in non-Russian republics felt no institutional pressure to learn languages of the titular nations.⁹⁸⁹ Practice was already not satisfactory, and eventually learning Kazakh was officially made optional for non-Kazakh children in 1957-58.⁹⁹⁰

As already discussed in Chapter 1, contemporaries were confidently condemning the Tsarist authorities for their imperialist and Russifying policies. In contrast, Soviet authorities were proud of providing education in non-Russians' native languages. Mukhtar Auezov contrasted Soviet rule with the Tsarist regime and wrote that under Tsarist rule it was unlikely for non-Russians to get education and even when they did, the only available option was education in Russian. Consequently, those students were alienated from their own people.⁹⁹¹ Works promoting Soviet nationalities policies

⁹⁸⁶ M. Asqarov (S. Qazaqstan Lenin atyndaghy Qazaq mektebiniñ oqytūshysy), "Bizdin Anatoli," *Pioner* 1 (1941): 16.

⁹⁸⁷ *Mektep tázhiribeleri: Orys mektebinde Qazaq tilin oqytuv metodikasy mäseleleri* (Almaty: Qazaqtyn birikken memlekettik baspasy, 1941), 3.

⁹⁸⁸ *Ibid.*, 49.

⁹⁸⁹ Guadagnolo, "Creating a Tatar capital," 46.

⁹⁹⁰ Särsembina, "Orystandyrūshylar," 22.

⁹⁹¹ Evezuly, *Qazaqstandaghy ulttar* (Almaty: Qazaqstan 10 zhyldyq toyyn ötkizūshi komissiya baspasy, 1930), 7.

emphasized that before the Revolution Kazakhs were not only discriminated against, but were even made fun of, considered to be useless and so on. Among many stereotypes, it was believed that Kazakhs were mentally not capable of pursuing secondary education.⁹⁹² Not surprisingly, this negative picture of the Tsarist regime was contrasted to Soviet practice. The authorities declared that the Kazakh language was being fully used in the spheres of agriculture, judiciary, trade and so on. Kazakh was the only language in 54 districts, whereas it was used together with Russian in 50 others.⁹⁹³

In fact, providing Russian language education for the masses was also presented as a gift to the Kazakh people and as a socialist initiative. An article in the pedagogical journal claimed that knowledge of Russian used to be the privilege of the national bourgeoisie: only the children of landowners, capitalists and clergy had had the opportunity to learn it.⁹⁹⁴ In contrast, under Soviet rule educated Kazakhs knew, loved and developed their native language, yet, in addition, they also wanted to learn Russian because it was the language of the most developed socialist civilization. In another text published in 1939 the authors wrote that the Russian language used to be an instrument in the hands of Russians landowners and capitalists for the policy of Russification, whereas

⁹⁹² *Ult mäselesi zhäne kommunist partiyasy men keñes ükimetiniñ Qazaqstandaghy ult sayasaty* (Almaty and Moscow: Ortalyq partiya komitetiniñ baspasy – Qazaqstandyq bölim, 1932), 18.

⁹⁹³ *Ibid.*, 24-25.

⁹⁹⁴ “Orys tili – Sovet qalqtarynyñ ĩghylyghy,” *Aıyl Mughalimi* 15, (1938): 1.

The ideologically loaded language of the statement aside, it is apparent that the claim was not baseless. Under Tsarist rule, knowledge of Russian was mostly, if not exclusively, a cultural capital of the Kazakh elite which in turn made them intermediaries between the Empire and the steppe. See, Campbell, *Knowledge and the Ends of Empire*.

Nadezhda Krupskaya also emphasized that before the Revolution, only wealthy non-Russians had been able to study Russian. Blitstein, “Nation-building or Russification?,” 254.

in the socialist epoch, Kazakh workers, just like workers of other nationalities, realized the necessity of and were burning with the desire to learn Russian.⁹⁹⁵

There is no evidence to support the claim that the Kazakh masses were burning with the desire to learn Russian. It was a foreign language that was imposed top-down. At best, it was an additional burden for Kazakh children and adults who had to devote extra hours for the study of this foreign language. At worst, it was a barrier of communication that alienated Kazakhs in their republic. A letter written by a newly arrived Kazakh migrant to Almaty to the Party officials from the 1950s is a good example of this alienation: “Russian doctors refuse to take Kazakh-speaking patients, even require that [we] bring along interpreters. The sales personnel in cities speak only Russian and refuse to serve Kazakh-speaking customers. Similarly, no one speaks Kazakh in the spheres of trade, industrial enterprises and government offices. It is impossible for Kazakhs from the aul to find any jobs here.”⁹⁹⁶

Does that mean that we can assume the Kazakh masses were burning with a desire to resist learning the Russian language? That was, as Bhavna Dave notes, more or less, what some Western scholars were arguing for during the Cold War.⁹⁹⁷ They assumed that all Central Asians had a natural desire for education in native languages. Yet, in contrast, many Kazakhs, particularly the intelligentsia, overwhelmingly preferred to send their

⁹⁹⁵ Krotevicha and Saurambaeva, *Russkii Yazyk v Kazakhskoi Shkole*, 4.

This claim that all Soviet peoples voluntarily learned Russian was repeated time and again until the end of the Soviet rule. For example, see, E. K. Kapanin, *Uly Oktiabr zhäne Qazaqstandaghy mädeni qurylys* (Almaty, 1977), 6.

⁹⁹⁶ Quoted in Dave, *Kazakhstan*, 61.

By the end of the 1950s, Almaty was virtually a Russian city. Kazakhs formed under 10% of its population. Dave notes that the old residents of Almaty described the city completely as a “European” space up to mid-1990s.

⁹⁹⁷ *Ibid.*, 54.

children to Russian schools. Not only Kazakhs in Almaty, but also the ones living in provinces were aware that education in Russian was a significant asset for a better life.⁹⁹⁸

That is obvious for the mid Soviet era, however, even in the 1930s some Kazakh parents understood the importance of Russian and wanted to send their children to Russian schools. In 1933, one pedagogue complained that in some cases Kazakh and Russian children studied together and consequently Kazakh children started speaking Russian and did not understand their native language. There were parents who asked authorities to accept their children to Russian kindergartens; they desired their children to learn Russian, that was what they thought children needed.⁹⁹⁹ At the meeting of directors of detdoms and children's hospitals, one director from Qostanay said the majority of 81 children in his institution were Kazakhs, but some of them did not speak Kazakh and studied at a Russian school. He was told that this was wrong, and children should be educated in their native language. In response, the director said, "how can I force a child to study in Kazakh, if he does not want to".¹⁰⁰⁰

Notwithstanding the institutional structures that made knowledge of Russian a necessary asset for a better life, it is obvious that in some cases native language education was conducted not because of, but despite, the natives' demands. Nationalist interpretations assume that each person who is supposed to be a member of the national community has a natural desire to protect the national language. When reality does not fit into this nationalist imagination, people who willingly assimilate into other languages are

⁹⁹⁸ Ibid., 65.

⁹⁹⁹ Mariyasina, *Qazaqstandaghy mektepke deyingi tärbiē*, 20-21.

¹⁰⁰⁰ TsGARK, f. 1473, op. 1, d. 3, ll. 205-206 (Stenogramma: Kraevogo soveshchaniia direktora detdomov i detbol'nits – 8 dekabrya 1936 g. (utro)).

either claimed to be betrayers or to lack national consciousness. In fact, throughout history what Tara Zahra calls “national indifference” was no less common than national consciousness, even in the 20th century. Zahra shows how thousands of parents in Bohemia in the first half of the 20th century were indifferent to nationalist projects. Education of children in their “native” language was essential for these national projects, but nationalists found a borderland population that was not easy to persuade.¹⁰⁰¹ Scholars of non-Russian peoples in the Soviet Union rarely acknowledge the agency of non-Russians who eagerly preferred Russian to their native language. For sure, there were obvious incentives to learn Russian due to the language’s institutional advantages.¹⁰⁰² Yet, acknowledging the agency of non-Russians only when they prefer their native language is inadequate. The examples quoted in the previous paragraph show that one source of linguistic Russification in the Soviet Union was non-Russians’ national indifference which contradicted the official promise of native language education.¹⁰⁰³ Yet, it should also be noted that although the promise of native language education was

¹⁰⁰¹ Zahra, *Kidnapped Souls*.

¹⁰⁰² Michael Smith discusses this institutional structure from a sociolinguistic perspective in Chapter 6 and Chapter 7 of his book. See, Smith, *Language and Power*.

¹⁰⁰³ A similar example can be found in Tatarstan. See, Guadagnolo, “Creating a Tatar capital,” 60. What is interesting is that Kazakhs were always underrepresented in party, state and professional organizations up until the death of Stalin when there was genuine adherence to native language instruction. Kazakh proportion in the party started to increase in the late 1950s, eventually making Kazakhs overrepresented. In Bhavna Dave’s words, “The rising educational levels and professional qualifications among Kazakhs led to a steady erosion of the privileges and status that Russians had enjoyed in the early Soviet years.” Dave, *Kazakhstan*, 83. In other words, when native language education was genuinely supported Kazakh cadres were at a certain disadvantageous position vis a vis their European comrades and their increasing power in the republic corresponded to increasing linguistic and cultural Russification. It is a reminder that the status of national language or culture is not the ultimate criteria for power relations in interethnic societies or not the ultimate criteria to decide whether a situation is colonial or not. After the war, the autonomous republics in the RSFSR demanded changes in the 1938 arrangements. These officials were under the pressure from parents to improve Russian language education largely because knowledge of Russian was required for higher education. Blitstein, “Nation-building or Russification?,” 263-265.

not abandoned after the 1938 decree, priorities changed. Earlier instances when Russian and Kazakh children studied together were criticized due to fears of linguistic Russification, but towards the end of the decade at least some authors promoted mixed education as a tool to make learning Russian easier for Kazakh children.¹⁰⁰⁴

Russification in the 1930s?

As discussed in Chapter 3, Soviet detdoms in Kazakhstan are seen as institutions of Russification in the popular imagination. Separated from their families, children in these institutions were better candidates for Russification than the ones in formal schools. A look at these institutions show that there was no official desire for linguistic Russification throughout the decade. It is true that due to the lack of Kazakh cadres, in many detdoms Kazakh children were educated by Russian teachers. However, first of all, this was not a general situation, and secondly, it was never supported by the central authorities. On the other hand, it is not possible to say that instruction in native language was encountered less. Ideally, in all detdoms Russian and Kazakh children were educated in different groups,¹⁰⁰⁵ and the major goal was instruction in native language. Whenever Kazakh children were taught in Russian, it was always problematized by the officials. Yet, local authorities or detdom educators were usually less concerned about education in native language. Hence, in practice, some detdoms did function as institutions of

¹⁰⁰⁴ Fomenko, "Orys Tilin Oqytūdu," 24.

¹⁰⁰⁵ Some detdoms had their own schools, some of them sent children to the nearest school. In some cases, the detdom had education only for one of the two groups, thus the other group went to a school whereas one group studied at the detdom.

Russification, but this was against the official policies and it occurred mostly because of the lack of Kazakh cadres.

The number of Kazakh children in the detdoms substantially increased during and after the famine. The number of Kazakh cadres had always been insufficient since the Revolution, but now the situation was chaotic. It was the perfect environment for a policy of Russification if that was ever the official goal. In contrast, officials kept problematizing the failures of native language education. At a presidium of the Children's Commission in June 1934, pedagogue Polianskii complained that because of the insufficient number of Kazakh teachers, there were cases when Kazakh children read and sang in Russian. The struggle for korenizatsiia was not properly carried out.¹⁰⁰⁶ The dominance of the Russian language was criticized at another anonymous meeting, possibly from 1934, when criticism was voiced over Kazakh children being supervised by Russians who could not communicate with them. The importance of mother-language education was highlighted.¹⁰⁰⁷

Even outside of the Kazakh Republic, Kazakh children's education in Russian was problematized. According to a report which was sent to the head of the Kazakh Children's Commission, Qulymbetov, there were 367 Kazakh children at Sol'-Idetsk detdom in Middle Volgar region who were mostly orphans who had come from Western Kazakhstan and Aqtöbe. The report states that there were eleven educators at the detdom, but none of them were Kazakhs. Two of them were Tatars who could speak a little Kazakh (possibly they spoke Tatar, but Tatar and Kazakh were mutually intelligible to

¹⁰⁰⁶ TsGARK, f. 509, op. 1, d. 216, l. 44 (Prezidiuma Tsentral'noi Detkomissii KTsiK, June 19, 1934)

¹⁰⁰⁷ TsGARK, f. 509, op.1, d. 207, l. 48.

some extent), but almost always Russian was spoken and educational work was not possible at the detdom. They asked for two or three Kazakh educators-pedagogues specifically for instruction in their native language. Kazakh-language textbooks and other materials were also requested.¹⁰⁰⁸

Linguistic assimilation was not always one way, from Kazakh to Russian. In some detdoms in Middle Volga region, Kazakh children started speaking Tatar instead of their native language since the educators were Tatars. This was also problematized.¹⁰⁰⁹ There were also officials who were worried about Russian children's use of Russian. In 1938, one detdom director claimed that Kazakh children were partially educated in Russian, partially in Kazakh, which was also true for Russian children. For that reason, the director complained, Russian children were completely losing their accent, and even losing their language.¹⁰¹⁰

When Kazakh children were taught in Russian it was problematized. Yet, what happened to children of other nationalities? At a meeting of detdom directors, one, named Ayupov, asked what to do if 2-3 children from other nationalities (for example Korean children) came to a detdom. He himself responded that it was not correct to find an educator for them, rather they should be educated either in Russian or in Kazakh. When someone asked what should be done if these children did not understand those languages, Ayupov said it would only be difficult at the beginning, pedagogical practice historically

¹⁰⁰⁸ TsGARK, f. 509, op. 1, d. 315, ll. 22-26 (Dokladnaia Zapiska: O Sostoianii Kazakskikh Detdome v Sol'-Idetske Sredne-Volzhsкого Kraia).

¹⁰⁰⁹ TsGARK, f. 30, op. 2, d. 1132a, ll. 80-84 (O Polozhenii detei kazakhov v detdomakh Sredne-Volzhsкого Kraia, March 29, 1934).

¹⁰¹⁰ TsGARK, f. 1473, op. 1, d. 66, ll. 183-184 (Stenogramma: Vechernogo Zasedaniia Soveshchaniia direktorov detdomov i detlechebnits Kaz. SSR, g. Alma-Ata – 12.3.38).

proved that they would get used to it later.¹⁰¹¹ Throughout the decade Kazakh children were the majority, while Russians constituted the second considerably large group in the detdoms. Yet, documents frequently referred to small numbers of Tatar, Ukrainian, Uzbek, Uyghur, Armenian and even Mordvin children. With the exception of a few Uzbek and Uyghur detdoms, there was no instruction in native language for these groups in Kazakhstan's detdoms. It should be also noted that what Ayupov said about pedagogical practice and minority children was possibly how a lot of other detdom educators thought about Kazakh children too. In contrast to the official promises, many detdom educators did not see it as a big problem for Kazakh children to be educated in Russian.

The real blow for education in languages other than Russian and Kazakh came during the Great Terror under the pretext of fighting against bourgeois nationalists and anti-Soviet elements. With a Sovnarkom decree in April 1938, German, Korean, Dungan, Turkish, Bulgarian, Tatar, Chuvash, Armenian and other national schools were liquidated. Children of these nationalities were supposed to be educated either in Kazakh or Russian. Uyghur schools were kept only in three raions of Almaty oblast, Uzbek schools in five raions of Southern Kazakhstan oblast, and Tajik schools were only in one raion of Southern Kazakhstan. Uyghur, Uzbek and Tajik children in other areas were to be educated either in Kazakh or Russian.¹⁰¹² Therefore, the official policy required "Kazakhization" or "Russification" of minority children whereas Kazakhs did not face

¹⁰¹¹ TsGARK, f. 1473, op. 1, d. 65, l. 274 (Stenogramma: Vechernogo soveshchaniia direktorov detdomov Kaz. SSR – 14.3.1938").

¹⁰¹² GAAO, f. 685, op. 4, d. 133, ll. 11-13 (O reorganizatsii natsionalnykh shkol, April 13, 1938).

the same fate.¹⁰¹³ Yet, in practice, it is possible to assume that the great majority of these minority children were schooled in Russian schools since there were not enough Kazakh cadres for Kazakh children themselves.

Indeed, the Great Terror had a less direct impact on the linguistic Russification of Kazakhs. Edgar argues that, in the Turkmen republic, control of language reform passed from Turkmen linguists and intellectuals in Ashgabat to Russian linguists and centralized committees in Moscow between 1930 to 1938. Consequently, the role of local elites was greatly diminished.¹⁰¹⁴ Suleimenova argues that the Terror created a similar impact on the Kazakh language. Most of the leading Kazakh linguists and pedagogues perished in 1937-38. Consequently, the development of Kazakh language was affected quite negatively.¹⁰¹⁵ In addition, it is probable that there was a more conscious unofficial policy for Russification of Kazakh children who were separated from their parents during the Terror. In contrast to children of famine, these children quite frequently started speaking Russian in children's institutions. Galiya, daughter of the famous Kazakh writer Beyimbet Maylin, was raised in Taldyqorghhan and Sarqant detdoms. After the war, she found her mother in Karaganda. At the time, Galiya did not speak any Kazakh while her mother Künzhamal did not know any Russian.¹⁰¹⁶ Roza Dzhamanova remembers that when her mother visited her father in the prison, he urged her mother that Roza must be

¹⁰¹³ Bhavna Dave reports that her Kazakh informants claimed that there was a systematic "closure" of Kazakh schools from the 1930s onwards, however, there is no archival evidence for this. Dave's interpretation is that the decrease in the number of Kazakh schools was a gradual process and the momentum for this process came from local Kazakh officials, not from Moscow. Dave, *Kazakhstan*, 64.

¹⁰¹⁴ Edgar, *Tribal Nation*, 153; 164.

¹⁰¹⁵ Suleimenova, *Yazykovye Protsessy*.

¹⁰¹⁶ Tasymbekov, *Zhan Daūysy*, 71-72.

educated in a Russian school.¹⁰¹⁷ It is still unclear if these children were purposefully Russified, but many among them were sent to detdoms in the Russian SSR and came to speak Russian.¹⁰¹⁸ It is also possible that, as in the case of Roza, parents themselves were encouraging them to go to Russian schools because they were labelled as children of nationalists.

After 1938

Throughout the 1930s, there were serious difficulties in teaching Russian in non-Russian schools across the Soviet Union. Insufficient training of teachers of Russian, distribution of textbooks and lack of methodological literature were among the main problems.¹⁰¹⁹ In non-Russian schools, Russian was taught poorly when it was taught at all. Consequently, non-Russian school children were in general reported to be illiterate in Russian. In addition, it was not uncommon that national republics resisted increasing hours devoted to the study of Russian.¹⁰²⁰ There was no standardized Russian language curriculum for non-Russian schools until 1932. Consequently, most non-Russian schools, as in the case of Tatarstan, did not incorporate Russian language teaching in the curriculum and these schools' graduates had almost no command of Russian.¹⁰²¹

Across the Soviet Union, some non-Russian schools began teaching Russian in the second grade, some started in the middle school, while many others, particularly rural

¹⁰¹⁷ Roza Dzhamanova, "My Boyalis' Govorit' Pravdu o Roditeliakh" in Degitaeva and Gribanova eds., *Stranitsy Tragicheskikh Sudeb*, 92.

¹⁰¹⁸ For an example, see, Tasymbekov, *Zhan Daūysy*, 110-112.

¹⁰¹⁹ Blitstein, "Nation-building or Russification?," 254.

¹⁰²⁰ *Ibid.*, 256-257.

¹⁰²¹ Guadagnolo, "Creating a Tatar capital," 47.

schools, simply lacked any Russian language education. The level of Russian language education in Kazakhstan was no different. In 1936, it was decided that Russian was to be taught starting from the third grade (and Kazakh was to be taught in Russian schools starting from the fifth grade).¹⁰²² However, as late as 1938, Russian was not taught at all in 271 Kazakh primary schools, 21 Kazakh incomplete secondary schools and 2 Kazakh secondary schools. The quality of teaching Russian was so low that only 1 of 26 students studying at Almaty middle schools who were tested by inspectors wrote the dictated text correctly.¹⁰²³ Naturally, rural schools were far worse. Teachers at Kazakh schools were usually not even aware of the official decrees since those were often only available in Russian.¹⁰²⁴

The quality of Russian language education continued to be very poor even after the 1938 decree. In fact, it was true for the whole Soviet Union, and Russian was not taught in many schools, particularly the rural ones, in 1938-1939. In September 1940, numerous problems in Russian-language instruction in non-Russian schools were acknowledged. Textbook production was a disaster mainly because of the lack of paper and training of teachers was “completely unsatisfactory”.¹⁰²⁵ In 1941, the director of Kazan’s Institute for Teacher Improvement called Russian education in Tatar schools the “weakest link” in the educational system.¹⁰²⁶ The main reason, according to the Kazakh

¹⁰²² *Khalyq Aghartuv Qyzmetkerleriniñ Bilimin Köterüv Zhayynda Basty Materialdardyn Zhīnaghy No. 2* (Qyzylorda: Qazaqstan Baspasy, 1936), 16-17.

¹⁰²³ “Qazaq mektepterinde orys tilin oqytuv zhumysy bolshevikshe uyymdastyrylsyn,” *Aūyl Mughalimi* 10 (1938): 25-27.

¹⁰²⁴ Sādūaqasuly, *Bastāyush mektep tūraly*, 36.

¹⁰²⁵ Bliststein, “Nation-building or Russification?,” 260-261.

¹⁰²⁶ Guadagnolo, “Creating a Tatar capital,” 56.

pedagogical journal, was that teachers themselves did not know Russian.¹⁰²⁷ Indeed, teachers had been criticized before the decree as well. Insufficient education of Russian language teachers was commonly seen as the main problem. As of January 1, 1938, 373 of 1414 Russian language teachers in the country were Kazakhs and Tatars who themselves poorly knew Russian. On the other hand, the majority of Russian teachers did not know Kazakh and hence could not communicate with their Kazakh students. Russian teachers' complete ignorance of Kazakh language and Kazakh teachers' poor level of Russian continued to be criticized. One group of inspectors reported that many Kazakh teachers for the most part spoke Kazakh in Russian language classes and one even did not utter one word of Russian for 45 minutes.¹⁰²⁸

Immediately after the publication of the 1938 decree, short-term courses for Russian language teachers were offered in many parts of the republic. Yet, many course attendees left these courses without completing them and the problem was far from being solved.¹⁰²⁹ 3156 teachers were retrained in these short-term courses, yet, due to the lack of teachers, Russian was still not taught in many regions in 1939. Only a tiny number of the teachers had higher education and the great majority had only primary or incomplete secondary education.¹⁰³⁰

At a meeting dedicated to discussing Russian language education in 1939, one inspector, Droiaranov, criticized teachers harshly. According to him, teachers themselves

¹⁰²⁷ G. Abdrafiqova, "Qazaq mektebinde orys tilin oqytūdu zhogharghy satygha kōtereyik," *Khalyq Mughalimi* 14 (1939): 65.

¹⁰²⁸ APRK, f. 708, op. 3/1, d. 1104, ll. 1-3 (Prepodavaniia russkogo yazyka v kazakhskikh i nerusskikh shkolakh po g. Chimkentū i 11 raionam Yuzhno-Kazakhstanskoi oblasti – 1-go apreliia 1939 goda).

¹⁰²⁹ "Oqū zhylyna zhaqsy dayyndayyk," *Khalyq Mughalimi* 12 (1939): 2.

¹⁰³⁰ Document No 72: "Otchet Narkomprosa Respubliki o sostoianii prepodavaniia russkogo yazyka v kazakhskikh shkolakh KazSSR – 10 apreliia 1939 g." in Suleimenova ed., *Yazykovaia Politika*, 171-174.

did not understand the importance of teaching Russian and their own responsibility. They considered teaching Russian unnecessary and perceived Russian as a foreign language. Droiaranov compared Kazakhstan to Uzbekistan and said that the situation was much brighter in Uzbekistan. It is surprising that once, Russian language education was better in Uzbekistan than Kazakhstan when we consider the subsequent linguistic Russification levels in two republics.

Nevertheless, we should not forget that officials under Stalin almost always blamed local authorities and cadres for the inadequacies. Yet, the lack of educated cadres signified a general problem and inefficiency of Soviet policies. In some cases, authorities did not even know whether Russian was taught at schools or not. For example, Almaty OblONO was not aware throughout the first quarter of 1939-1940 education year that 11 primary schools in the Uyghur raion completely lacked any Russian language course.¹⁰³¹ Yet, Soviet authorities never admitted any mistake on their part. When the Soviet pedagogues looked for reasons for the poor level of Russian language education in national schools the soul of the age of Terror provided ready-made answers. Russian was taught so poorly because the enemies of the people in Kazakh schools under the leadership of “the spy-bandit” Zhürgenov, former Minister of Education, prevented the development of it.¹⁰³² These people’s enemies’ goals were to separate the Kazakh nation from the USSR and from the “great Russian people”.

¹⁰³¹ “O Prepodavanii Russkogo Yazyka v Kazakhskikh i Drugikj Nerusskikh Shkolakh,” *Khalyq Mughalimi* 1-2 (1940): 9.

¹⁰³² Fomenko, “Orys Tilin Oqytüdu,” 23.

With the start of the war, the Russian language capabilities of men who were liable to military conscription appeared as a significant problem.¹⁰³³ As a matter of fact, a lot of non-Russians easily perished at the beginning of the war due to the fact that they could not understand commands in Russian. Shayakhmetov recalls how those Kazakh soldiers who did not know Russian did not have the ability to learn even the basic skills required for frontline soldiers.¹⁰³⁴ In June 1941, Kazakh Narkompros published a decree and opened Russian language courses for the illiterate and those who did not know Russian born in 1922 or earlier.¹⁰³⁵ In 1942, recruited soldiers who did not know Russian were required to attend 90-hours Russian language training. At first, only citizens who were born in 1925 were supposed to attend these courses.¹⁰³⁶

By 1944, authorities started claiming that the quality of Russian language education had improved in the republic. Yet, lack of cadres was still a significant problem as a result of which Russian was not taught at many schools, particularly in primary schools.¹⁰³⁷ Two decades of Soviet rule brought no considerable linguistic Russification and Russian remained peripheral in the lives of non-Russians. In fact, school education was not the primary motivation for learning Russian.

¹⁰³³ TsGARK, f. 1692, op. 1, d. 325, l. 57 (O khode obucheniia negramotnykh, malogramotnykh i nevladiushikh russkim yazykom voennoobiazannykh 105-1918 g. rozhdeniia po sostoianiiu na 1/8.1941 goda).

¹⁰³⁴ Shayakhmetov, *The Silent Steppe*, 273.

¹⁰³⁵ Document No 87: "Dokladnaia zapiska narkoma prosvesheniia KazSSR v TsK KP(b) Kazakhstana o khode obucheniia negramotnykh, malogramotnykh i ne vladeiushikh russkim yazykom prizyvnykov 1922-1923 godov rozhdeniia i starshikh vozrastov" in Suleimenova ed., *Yazykovaia Politika*, 211-216.

¹⁰³⁶ TsGARK, f. 1692, op. 1, d. 616, l. 41 (Postanovleniia Soveta Narodnykh Komissarov (28 sentiabria 1942, No. 493) – Ob izuchenii russkogo yazyka grazhdanami, prokhodiashimi voennoe obuchenie i ne vladeiushimi russkim yazykom).

¹⁰³⁷ APRK, f. 708, op. 7/1, d. 715, ll. 32-34 (O Vypolnenii Resheniia X-Plenuma TsK KP/b/Kazakhstana, po Voprosam Narodnogo Obrazovaniia).

How did Kazakhs come to speak Russian?

As I have already discussed, Western scholars place too much emphasis on Russian language education as a possible tool of Russification. Kazakh authors, on the other hand, almost universally accept Russification as a given and claim that Kazakhs were forcefully Russified by any means. Neither approach ask why Kazakhs were linguistically Russified more than other Central Asians. In addition, the poor quality of Russian language education up until the late Stalinist era is never discussed by Kazakh authors. At least for the Stalinist period, the available memoirs show that school education was not the most important means to learn Russian. Several memoirists remember how they did not start speaking Russian at school, but rather through making friends with Russian children and through living in highly multiethnic environments. For sure, the multiethnic structure of the country put pressure on Kazakhs to learn Russian, however, these memoirists usually remember the process of learning and speaking Russian more as a natural one than a forced policy. Therefore, looking at how Kazakhs actually came to speak Russian provides us a fresh view on the question of linguistic Russification.

There was no significant degree of linguistic Russification in Kazakhstan up until the war and even later, although we do not have reliable statistics. German deportee Berta Bachman remembers how she witnessed Kazakh villages in which not even one person understood Russian at all during the war years.¹⁰³⁸ It was not possible for some deported

¹⁰³⁸ She notes how these Kazakhs were indifferent to official policies and lived a relatively autonomous life; for this reason, the few Germans among them lived better off than those in strictly controlled Russian villages. Berta Bachmann, *Memories of Kazakhstan: A Report on the Life Experiences of a German Woman in Russia* (Lincoln, 1981), pp. 50-51.

children to be schooled in either their native language or in Russian. Many deported Volga Germans were settled in Kazakh-majority regions and a lot of them could not be schooled since only Kazakh language instruction was available in many of the kolkhozes in which they were settled.¹⁰³⁹

When Mukhamet Shayakhmetov was recruited in a reinforcement unit that was entirely composed of Kazakh troops, he saw how those Kazakhs coming from rural areas of Semey did not speak any Russian at all.¹⁰⁴⁰ Roberto Carmack suggests the great majority of Kazakh soldiers arrived at the front line with almost no knowledge of Russian.¹⁰⁴¹ Indeed, Russian language was peripheral in the lives of many Kazakhs even after the war. Academic Bazylova remembers how her Russian was very poor when she started secondary school in the town Qarsaqpay in Karaganda oblast in 1946. It was a Kazakh school, but due to the lack of Kazakh teachers, some lessons were conducted in Russian.¹⁰⁴² Even many Kazakhs who lived in the Russian SSR did not speak any Russian as late as 1945. Tälip Äbishev was born in Sverdlov (Ekaterinburg) in 1937 and moved to a rural kolkhoz in Cheliabinsk in 1944. He remembers that he knew not a word of Russian when he started school in 1945.¹⁰⁴³

Several Kazakhs remember how difficult Russian language courses were for them. On the one hand, it shows how Russian language education was a burden for Kazakhs, but on the other hand, it also shows that school education was not as important

¹⁰³⁹ APRK, f. 708, op. 6/1, d. 542, ll. 19-20 (Sravochnyi Material': Po uchebno-vospitatel'noi rabote v shkolakh za 1'oe polugodie 1941-42 uch. goda).

¹⁰⁴⁰ Shayakhmetov, *The Silent Steppe*, 273.

¹⁰⁴¹ Carmack, *Kazakhstan in World War II*, 41.

¹⁰⁴² K. B. Bazylov and S. K. Bazylova, *Ömir Zhalghastary* (Almaty, 2014), 18.

¹⁰⁴³ Tälip Äbishev, *Ömir Ötkelderi* (Almaty: Ghylym, 2001), 28.

as many contemporary scholars think for linguistic Russification. During the famine, Äzilkhan Nurshayyqov's father sent him to live with a relative who was working in a Sovkhoz. Little Äzilkhan knew no Russian at all; for the first time he contacted Russians daily in this sovkhoz. One day he was sent to buy bread and the shopkeeper who did not understand Kazakh taught him his first Russian words: *dai khleb* (give bread). Later in a letter to his father, he enthusiastically wrote that he learned a lot of Russian words.¹⁰⁴⁴ Having finished seventh grade successfully, little Äzilkhan was accepted to a school in Almaty. Yet, it was very difficult for him because all classes were conducted in Russian. He received his highest grades from classes based on numbers, such as algebra, geometry and trigonometry, but when he attended classes that required oral communication, he was tongue tied.¹⁰⁴⁵ Zhälel Qīzatov began an agricultural technical secondary school in 1936 when he was 16 years old. It was a Kazakh school, and for him, the hardest class was the Russian language. He remembers that the majority of the Kazakh children knew Russian very poorly. Yet, their teacher, Marta Danilovna, was a dedicated woman; she used to visit the students in their dormitories after school to teach them Russian.¹⁰⁴⁶ Having survived the famine, in 1935, Mukhamet Shayakhmetov started a Russian school since there was no separate Kazakh school in that Russian-majority village. He remembers how his Russian was so poor and whenever his goodhearted teacher corrected his mistakes, he understood only the words “never mind” and had no idea what else the teacher was saying.¹⁰⁴⁷

¹⁰⁴⁴ Nurshayyqov, *Äskerī Kündelik*, 10-12.

¹⁰⁴⁵ *Ibid.*, 20-21.

¹⁰⁴⁶ Qīzatov, *Ömir Ötkelderi*, 45.

¹⁰⁴⁷ Shayakhmetov, *The Silent Steppe*, 238-239.

Yet, Shayakhmetov also notes that by the end of the semester his Russian vocabulary steadily improved. His teacher Trofim Adamenko was as devoted as Zhälel Qīzatov's teacher, and he mostly credits his teacher for his improvement. Yet, studying at a Russian school and living in a Russian-majority village might well have helped him at least as much as his teacher and school education did. In fact, several other memoirists remember they started speaking Russian while simply playing with Russian children. For example, General Kulakhmet Khalmenov remembers he first heard Russian while playing with two Russian children; he later became very close friends with them. Khalmenov remembers he had Uzbek friends too and learned speaking Uzbek from them. His Uzbek friend Atakhodzhaev spoke Kazakh too.¹⁰⁴⁸ Khalmenov's example clearly shows how easy it was for children to pick up another language. While scholars emphasize official decrees, statements and ideologies, for a child it was almost as easy as learning his parents' language. Another Kazakh child who learned Russian while playing with Russian children was Rafika Nurtazina. In the 1930s, they rented one room of their house to a family who came from Leningrad. Little Rafika learned Russian while playing with their daughter Sara.¹⁰⁴⁹ As noted before, little Tälip Äbishev knew no Russian at all when he started school even though he lived in Cheliabinsk. Yet, he learned it quickly not in the class, but through playing with Russian children. Äbishev himself writes that it is easy to learn a language in childhood. In a funny example, Baqyt, a relative of Äbishev,

¹⁰⁴⁸ Kulakhmet Khalmenov, *Vospominaniia Generala Militsii* (Almaty: Däüir, 2001), 10-13.

Khalmenov was not the only child who spoke Uzbek. Süleymen Bekenov took refuge in Uzbekistan during the famine. Even though he expresses his hatred towards Uzbeks on every page, when he went back to Kazakhstan and started school again, other students laughed at him because he frequently used Uzbek words. Bekenov, *Qazaq Tutqyny*, 35.

Examples of Kazakh children speaking Tatar or even Russian children speaking Kazakh were provided before in this chapter.

¹⁰⁴⁹ Nurtazina, *Vospominaniia*, 16.

once came home and said that he became *drug* (friend) with a Russian child. When he was told “how can you be? You don’t know Russian”, Baqyt answered “I looked at him and smiled, he looked at me and smiled, then we became *drug*”. Äbishev’s case further supports the point that it was usually not a matter of national politics for children to learn another language.

At least in some cases, deported and evacuated children too experienced language switch easily. Polish children who were sent to Kazakhstan during the war were quick to adapt to the Russian language. There was no Polish literature available for them. But in 1946, Polish children in one kindergarten were reported to understand Russian well. Yet, it had not always been like this. It was written that Polish children were not schooled before since they did not know Russian.¹⁰⁵⁰ Once again, we see how the war brought linguistic Russification for non-Russians.

Hence, having contact with Russians daily or living in a cosmopolitan environment was the main source for learning Russian for Kazakh children. Shayakhmetov remembers how in the mid-1930s, Kazakhs lived separately from Russians and there was little communication between them. Kazakh children hardly mixed with Russian children, and they rarely picked up their language.¹⁰⁵¹ But after the famine, Kazakhs experienced a demographic catastrophe and their number decreased significantly. Subsequent deportations of various nationalities that started before the war, but accelerated during the war, made Kazakhstan a truly multiethnic republic. From then

¹⁰⁵⁰ Document No 143: “Otchet o Rabote Pol’skogo Detskogo Safa No 4 g. Dzhabula (ne ranee 6 marta 1946)” in *Iz Istorii Poliakov v Kazakhstane (1936-1956 gg.) – Sbornik Dokumentov* (Almaty: Arkhiv Prezidenta Respubliki Kazakhstan, 2000), 226.

¹⁰⁵¹ Shayakhmetov, *The Silent Steppe*, 238.

on, a great proportion of Kazakhs started living in cosmopolitan environments with very few Kazakh neighbors and friends. Polish Jewish deportee Janka Goldberger was astonished that even though she was in Kazakhstan, there were no Kazakh children around and there were no Kazakh language lessons at the school.¹⁰⁵² Rafika Nurtazina lived in Tastaq district of Almaty with her family starting from 1942 (up to 1971). She remembers her German, Jewish, Chechen, Ingush, Greek and many Russian neighbors. However, theirs was the only Kazakh family on their street. Her children grew up in this environment where nobody spoke Kazakh outside of their family. It was the same in the neighborhood or at the school.¹⁰⁵³ Famine survivor and war veteran Baghdad Zhandosay settled in Almaty after the war. There were around 20 families in the barracks they lived. Theirs was the only Kazakh family. Although Zhandosay always spoke Kazakh at home, his children grew up in this Russian-speaking environment.¹⁰⁵⁴

Eventually, the war became one of the most important sources of linguistic Russification throughout the Soviet Union. Many Kazakhs mastered Russian not at schools or detdoms, but in the army. As Roberto Carmack argues teaching Russian to non-Russians was a wartime necessity and the war turned into a significant school for learning Russian. Yet, even during the wartime, Russian language instruction did not aim to be Russifying. Russian and Kazakh were treated as complementary languages.¹⁰⁵⁵ These soldiers brought back their cultural capital, knowledge of Russian, to their homeland and they were usually quite proud of this cultural capital. Kemel Toqayev's

¹⁰⁵² Janka Goldberger, *Stalin's Little Guest* (Janus, 1995), 103.

¹⁰⁵³ Nurtazina, *Vospominaniia*, 34.

¹⁰⁵⁴ Private conversation with the late Raykhan Uzbekova.

¹⁰⁵⁵ Carmack, *Kazakhstan in World War II*, 46-49.

account is relatively positive about detdoms and boarding schools in the 1930s. However, even he confessed that he did not learn any Russian at school. According to his son's words, the war became the first life university for him that taught him being a real citizen and Russian language. Even many years later, he proudly remembered how he learned Russian not at the school, but under war conditions.¹⁰⁵⁶

Conclusion

By the late Soviet period, Kazakhstan had become a highly Russified republic. According to the first ethnographic study on the topic, an estimated 40 percent of Kazakhs were no longer fluent in Kazakh in 1989 and nearly 75 percent of the urban Kazakhs did not use it in daily life.¹⁰⁵⁷ Linguistic Russification started to be felt by the Khrushchev era. Popular imagination and nationalist interpretations in Kazakhstan almost universally treat Russification as a given, as the ultimate goal of the Soviet regime (with a special focus on Stalin's rule) and hence they rarely try to explain the differences between different epochs. Western scholars, on the other hand, have opposing ideas on the nature of Russification and unlike Kazakh authors they focus too much on the 1938 decree to discuss the goals of the regime. While some historians have provided very valuable discussions of language policies, none has attempted to cover the experiences of real children and hence none has discussed how non-Russians in practice came to speak Russian

¹⁰⁵⁶ Tokayev, *Slovo ob otse*, 122.

¹⁰⁵⁷ The study was done by the Russian ethnographer Olga Naumova based on her ethnographic observations in Kazakhstan in 1988-1989. Cited in Dave, *Kazakhstan*, 52.

This chapter has reconsidered the origins of linguistic Russification in Kazakhstan. Neither the poor quality of Russian language education throughout the 1920s and 1930s (even up to the late Stalinist years), nor the question of whether there was a significant level of Russification among Kazakhs up until the war are discussed by Kazakh authors. In contrast, I have argued that Russification was rare in the 1930s and it was always problematized by the authorities even though local cadres did not always follow the official line. In addition, I have argued that one of the origins of linguistic Russification in Kazakhstan was the national indifference of Kazakhs which I have treated as the agency of Kazakhs rather than the nationalist interpretation of them as lacking national consciousness.

Kazakh historians also do not discuss the impact of World War II on linguistic Russification in the country. Among them, only Dina Amanzholova notes, in one sentence in passing, that the need for communication among Soviet citizens under the threat of war required a greater role for Russian.¹⁰⁵⁸ The myth of World War II is so strong for Kazakh national discourse, hence admitting that it indeed was the first major source of linguistic Russification would challenge nationalist myths. Available evidence suggests that the war not only changed the meaning of being Soviet, but also became the first significant source of linguistic Russification in the country.

Scholars who support the idea that Russification was the ultimate goal of the Soviet regime do not try to explain why some groups (such as Kazakhs) were Russified more than others. I have argued that Kazakhs were Russified more than other Central Asians, mostly because of the demographics of the country. The Kazakh population

¹⁰⁵⁸ Amanzholova, "Language Policy," 18.

decreased enormously due to the famine of 1930-33. Coupled with the deportations of various other ethnic groups, Kazakhs became a minority in the republic and new generations grew up in highly cosmopolitan environments. A few scholars have paid attention to this point. While discussing linguistic Russification, Suleimenova emphasizes how Kazakhs were a minority in Kazakhstan up until 1966.¹⁰⁵⁹ Dadabaeva, on the other hand, pays attention to the urban-rural divide.¹⁰⁶⁰ According to Dave too, urbanization was the main source of Russification in Kazakhstan. The collapse of the nomadic life and the flow of Kazakhs to new industrial and urban areas populated by Russians brought Russification.¹⁰⁶¹ In fact, the urban-rural divide remained important up until the end of the Soviet Union (and even up until today), and in the late Soviet era, a high proportion of rural Kazakh children were studying in Kazakh schools.¹⁰⁶² In other words, where Kazakhs constituted a majority, Kazakh remained the language of education.

The Soviet experience was far from being ideal and there was definitely no equality of languages from the beginning. Linguistic korenizatsiia failed and the state organs predominantly functioned in Russian at the national level, while Kazakh was used in many regional organs. However, this was not the result of a colonial policy. In contrast, early Soviet efforts to support non-Russian languages were unprecedented and impressive by any standards. These efforts failed largely because of practical necessities. The lack of native cadres was the most obvious one, but there were other obstacles. Even Mäshimbaev and Mäshimbaeva admit that the main reason why Kazakh was to a great

¹⁰⁵⁹ Suleimenova, *Yazykovye Protsessy*, 64.

¹⁰⁶⁰ Dadabaeva, "Osobennosti Protsessa 'Rusifikatsii'".

¹⁰⁶¹ Dave, *Kazakhstan*, 57.

¹⁰⁶² Fierman, "Language and Education," 99.

extent neglected throughout the 1920s in internal correspondence of state organs was the lack of materials in Kazakh and lack of publishing capacity in Arabic script.¹⁰⁶³

There was definitely a retreat from early policies. However, this retreat was not towards a Russifying state. In fact, linguistic korenizatsiia was a utopia that did not fit into the realities in many non-Russian areas of the Soviet Union. Hence, the retreat was from a utopia towards realism: in many cases adhering to the principles of utopic korenizatsiia would mean no state functioning or no higher education for non-Russians since the means for these usually did not exist in local languages.¹⁰⁶⁴ As a modern polity, the Soviet Union desired homogeneity in a vast land of heterogeneity. However, the Soviet Union did not become an assimilationist nation state or an unapologetic colonial regime. Nevertheless, although the Russian language emerged, probably naturally, as a lingua franca for Soviet citizens, we must be careful to differentiate the Soviet experience from historical and contemporary examples of forced assimilation.¹⁰⁶⁵ The Soviet regime

¹⁰⁶³ Mäshimbaev and Mäshimbaeva, *Patshalyq Resey zhāne Keñes*, 194.

In fact, printing was a major motivation for the Latinization movement among Muslims of Russian and Ottoman empires. Uluğ Kuzuoğlu argues that neither the paradigm of modernization, nor that of Western colonialism is sufficient to understand the origins of the reform movement. The reformers' anxieties were deeply interwoven in the technological developments of the age. The new mode of knowledge and information production that involved the telegraph and printing technology, challenged the medium of the Arabic letters themselves. Kuzuoğlu, "Telegraphy, Typography, and the Alphabet".

¹⁰⁶⁴ Higher education in Kazakhstan was almost completely in Russian. This was an influential motivation for parents to prefer Russian language education for their children.

¹⁰⁶⁵ Forced linguistic assimilation of natives in colonial situations or minorities in nation-states is almost universal. The Soviet regime strictly differed from these examples. For forced assimilation of children under French colonial rule, see White, *Children of the French Empire*; Christina Firpo, "Crises of Whiteness and Empire in Colonial Indochina: The Removal of Abandoned Eurasian Children from the Vietnamese Milieu, 1890-1956," *Journal of Social History* 43, no. 3 (2010). For the assimilation of indigenous children in Australia, New Zealand, Canada and the US, see, Andrew Armitage, *Comparing the Policy of Aboriginal Assimilation: Australia, Canada and New Zealand* (Vancouver: UBP Press, 1995); Margaret D. Jacobs, *White Mother to a Dark Race: Settler Colonialism, Maternalism, and the Removal of Indigenous Children in the American West and Australia, 1880-1940* (University of Nebraska Press, 2011); David Wallace Adams, *Education for Extinction: American Indians and the Boarding School Experience, 1875-1928* (University Press of Kansas, 2020).

Colonial regimes even sterilized native women and removed indigenous children from their families in an attempt to control indigenous families. For a study of these practices, see, Brianna Theobald, *Reproduction*

never tried to annihilate non-Russian languages. In fact, the promise of native language education was at times even contradictory to natives' own demands. Contradictions of the Soviet rule brought different levels of linguistic Russification to different peoples. Yet, even when we look at one of the most Russified peoples such as Kazakhs, we see that structural factors, including conscription in the Great Patriotic War or the demographic character of the republic, were more important than official or unofficial imposition of Russian. It would be the topic of a counterfactual history to ask what would have happened to non-Russian languages if the Soviet Union acted as a nation-state.

on the Reservation: Pregnancy, Childbirth, and Colonialism in the Long Twentieth Century (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2019).

Contemporary Chinese regime in Xinjiang represents one of the most brutal examples of colonialism in the 21st century. While an estimated one to two million Uyghurs, Kazakhs, Kyrgyz, Hui and others have been detained in concentration camps, prisons and forced labor factories; children of detainees are taken to state-run institutions even though the scale of this policy is unclear. Human Rights Watch, "China: Xinjiang Children Separated from Families," September 15, 2019, <https://www.hrw.org/news/2019/09/15/china-xinjiang-children-separated-families>.

CHAPTER 6

FROM KAZAKHSTAN WITH HAPPINESS: THE MYTH OF HAPPY CHILDHOOD AND ITS RECEPTION IN KAZAKHSTAN

Despite its authoritarian political system, unlike Turkmenistan, Kazakhstan is not a country that one might immediately associate with a Stalinist-like closed dictatorship. However, a quick look at contemporary periodicals for Kazakh children might surprise the reader with the endurance of one of the most popular Stalinist myths: the myth of “happy childhood”. Even decades after independence, Kazakh children are still subject to the direct legacy of this Stalinist discourse. An eleventh-grade student states that “It is not possible to compare the situation at that time [the first years of independence] with today’s conditions. I have spent my *happy childhood* peacefully together with my parents and siblings. I think this is the result of our homeland’s peacefulness and independence”.¹⁰⁶⁶ What makes this statement a direct legacy of Stalinism is not only the use of the term “happy childhood”. The student openly associates her happy childhood with the regime’s status (independence) and claims of success, and just like the Stalinist myth, justifies happiness through a comparison with the past. In the rest of the piece, the fate of Kazakh youth is presented as a gift of the Kazakh President Nursultan Nazarbayev’s intelligence and capabilities. Poems by little pupils illustrate, even more strikingly, the resilience of the myth of happy childhood. For example, in a 2016 poem

¹⁰⁶⁶ Aydana Maūlen, “Dūnie kōz aldymyzda ōzgerūde,” *Zhas Ghalym* 12, (2016): 8.

This discourse is so prevalent in contemporary Kazakh children’s journals that one can see similar texts constantly. For example, see Aygerim Aqbarova, “Men Tāūelsiz eldin perzentimin,” *Zhas Ghalym* 12 (2016): 22; Nurīla Āzirbay, “Men ōz elimniñ patriotymn!,” *Zhas Ghalym* 10 (2016): 23.

titled “I am a Happy Child”, a second-grade student writes: “I am a happy child, / Kazakhstan that gathers all nations / is my homeland. / I magnify you [Kazakhstan]!”¹⁰⁶⁷



Image 17: Nazarbayev visits Qyzylorda (2017)¹⁰⁶⁸

Not only it is possible to find numerous other texts about happy childhood, but also contemporary school celebrations share much with the Stalinist era. How could this be possible? How can such a myth of the Stalinist era be so vibrant in a “Westernizing” and globalizing (though not really democratizing) Kazakhstan? Chapter 1 argued that revolutionary utopian visions of childhood never had a considerable influence in Kazakhstan and socialist values were overshadowed by the reality of post-famine Kazakhstan in the upbringing of children. However, in the second half of the 1930s,

¹⁰⁶⁷ “Men baqytty balamyn, / Barlyq ultty zhīnaghan / Qazaqstan otanym. / Seni maqtap tutamyn!” Shapagat Polatov, “Men baqytty balamyn,” *Zhas Ghalym* 10 (2016): 20.

This kind of poems about “happy childhood” by Kazakh pupils are frequently published. For example, see another poem with the title “Happiness”, Zhanna Iliyasova, “Baqyt,” *Zhas Ghalym* 8 (2016): 6.

¹⁰⁶⁸ The photo is available on <https://en.egemen.kz/article/president-nazarbayev-visits-kyzylorda%C2%A0region>.

This photo was shared on facebook by the editor of the newspaper *Egemen Qazaqstan* (former *Sotsialistik Qazaqstan*) with the caption “Today, this child’s happiness must be limitless”. If we replace Stalin’s photo with Nazarbayev’s, the photo and the caption would make a perfect Stalinist depiction.

Soviet Kazakh discourse fully adopted the features of Stalinist childhood with its emphasis on patriotism, authority, discipline and the leader cult.

This chapter argues that happy childhood (and the leader cult) was one of the most important and tenacious myths of Stalinism in Kazakhstan and it came to define childhood more than any other discourse. Stalinist happiness in general, and the myth of happy childhood in particular, is mostly studied by scholars of literature.¹⁰⁶⁹ Yet, the reception of this myth by Soviet citizens is rarely discussed.¹⁰⁷⁰ This chapter brings together the making of the myth with its reception by Kazakh children through a discussion of post-Soviet Kazakh memoirs and other autobiographical accounts.¹⁰⁷¹

I argue that post-Soviet memoirists construct an opposite discourse of unhappy childhood in which they frequently assert that they never really lived a childhood.

¹⁰⁶⁹ The edited volume by Marina Balina and Evgeny Dobrenko is the most comprehensive discussion of the concept of happiness in the Soviet Union. Marina Balina and Evgeny Dobrenko eds., *Petrified Utopia: Happiness Soviet Style* (New York: Anthem Press, 2009). For happy childhood, see also, Kelly, *Children's World*; Evgeny Dobrenko, "'The Entire Real World of Children': The School Tale and 'Our Happy Childhood,'" *The Slavic and East European Journal* 49, no. 2 (2005). In her treatment of wartime childhood, Julie deGraffenried pays special attention to the myth and its transformation. deGraffenried, *Sacrificing Childhood*.

¹⁰⁷⁰ For a discussion of the impact of happy childhood on memory, see, Catriona Kelly, "A Joyful Soviet Childhood: Licensed Happiness for Little Ones" in Balina and Dobrenko eds., *Petrified Utopia*.

¹⁰⁷¹ Oral history is now a widely used method to study the Soviet experience in Central Asia. Some of the leading historians of the region have drawn on oral histories both for the Stalinist and post-Stalinist periods. Kamp, *The New Women in Uzbekistan*; Igmen, *Speaking Soviet with an Accent*; Jeff Sahadeo, *Voices from the Soviet Edge: Southern Migrants in Leningrad and Moscow* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2019); Adrienne Edgar, *Marriage, Modernity, and the "Friendship of Nations": Interethnic Marriage in Soviet Central Asia* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, forthcoming); See also, "Forum: Oral History and Memory Soviet Central Asia," *Kritika: Explorations in Russian and Eurasian History* 20, no. 2 (2019).

However, interestingly, very few historians of Soviet Central Asia have used published memoirs for their research. Very recently, an initiative by a group of scholars has started a project to collect and catalogue Central Asian memoirs of the Soviet era. As of now the project is based almost totally on memoirs from Tajikistan. On the one hand, the project draws attention to how Central Asian memoirs are usually overlooked by researchers. On the other hand, it admits that there is, and tries to overcome, the problem that many of these memoirs are difficult to obtain, even by local libraries, due to the small number of copies published and financial obstacles of the publishers. <https://islamperspectives.org/rpi/collections/show/18>. However, historians' lack of attention to published memoirs is still inexplicable.

Unless otherwise noted, all the memoirs I discuss in this chapter, as well as testimonies collected by scholars, were published in the post-Soviet period.

Growing up early is an important theme of post-Soviet memoirs and, in actuality, this was a common experience for Kazakh children under Stalin. Yet, it should be noted that this discourse is not necessarily consciously anti-Soviet. Many people focus on their own experiences without any concrete reference to state policies, even though there are also memoirists who are politically more conscious.

The myth of happy childhood had an impact even on people who suffered enormously under Stalin. They too recount happy moments in their childhoods. Not surprisingly, the myth is much stronger in the memoirs for the late Stalinist era. I argue that in the 1940s and later, the conception of happiness and being Soviet was primarily shaped by personal lives and not by ideological assumptions of socialism. This is mainly the consequence of the transformations brought by the Great Patriotic War. Hence, what made Kazakhs Soviet was not socialist ideology or revolutionary zeal, but their shared everyday experience and the opportunity to imagine their lives in more personal, and less political ways in contrast to the earlier expectations of the socialist state. In contrast to the 1920s and 1930s, children were not anymore expected to sacrifice themselves for the sake of the collective in a radical manner. Changing conceptions of being Soviet was what allowed more and more children to share Soviet identity without necessarily devoting themselves to the ideals of socialism.

The Making of a Myth: Happy Childhood and the Stalin Cult in the 1930s

Kelly argues that in the mid-1930s all commitment to children's autonomy was abandoned. Now, the model child was obedient, and grateful to adults. The era witnessed

the rehabilitation of academic education and disciplinary control.¹⁰⁷² However, Kirschenbaum suggests that the Stalinist approach to childhood was not a clear break with the previous conceptions of childhood, but rather the often paradoxical reworking of earlier arrangements and conceptions of childhood. In this respect, the child remained the revolutionary par excellence who now acted in the name of the patriarchal state.¹⁰⁷³

What dominated the discourse on childhood in the second half of the 1930s was the cult of the leader and the myth of happy childhood. Stalinist public culture in the 1930s depended on an assumption that all citizens owed their lives and all the goods and services available in Soviet society to the state and to Stalin personally. In this society, public allocations of resources were presented as moral transactions and Soviet citizens were permanently in debt. Each Soviet citizen was a performer who publicly thanked Stalin in order to validate personal ties to the leader.¹⁰⁷⁴ Albert Baiburin and Alexandra Piir suggest that in this conception of happiness, Stalin took the place of God. In its traditional form, happiness was provided by God whereas Stalin is now the new caregiver.¹⁰⁷⁵ It should be noted that this conception of happiness was firmly located in the future; it was a typical example of the so-called “deferred happiness”.¹⁰⁷⁶

¹⁰⁷² Kelly, *Children's World*, 93-95.

¹⁰⁷³ Kirschenbaum, *Small Comrades*, 6.

¹⁰⁷⁴ Brooks, *Thank You, Comrade Stalin!*, 83-84.

¹⁰⁷⁵ Albert Baiburin and Alexandra Piir, “When We Were Happy: Remembering Soviet Happiness,” in Balina and Dobrenko eds., *Petrified Utopia*.

¹⁰⁷⁶ *Ibid.*, 167.



Image 18: Poster: “Long Live the Stalinist Constitution” (1938)¹⁰⁷⁷

Yet, children were the exception to the rule: their happiness was already real. Children’s happiness was an omnipresent good provided by Stalin, hence the myth of happy childhood was one of the most visible aspects of the Soviet public culture. According to Kucherenko, the discourse was indeed successful and Soviet children generally accepted the leader cult.¹⁰⁷⁸ The notion that Soviet children were destined for a happy childhood was not created by Stalin; it was already available in the 1920s.¹⁰⁷⁹ Yet,

¹⁰⁷⁷ TsGAKFDZRK, 5-80 (Issued by Kazizdatom, Artist: I. Savel’ev, 16.04.1938).

¹⁰⁷⁸ Kucherenko, *Little Soldiers*, 71-72.

¹⁰⁷⁹ Marina Balina, “‘It’s Grand to be An Orphan’: Crafting Happy Citizens in Soviet Children’s Literature of the 1920s,” in Balina and Dobrenko eds., *Petrified Utopia*. However, Stalinist happiness was a simplified and standardised version of the earlier picture of an infinite variety of different levels and types of happiness. Happiness was reduced to a kind of social “common denominator”, producing a kind of “state-sponsored view of licit happiness”. Baiburin and Piir, “When We Were Happy,” 164. In fact, the 1920s were a period of global spread of the association of childhood with happiness. The United States is an example where the idea of childhood happiness exploded in the 1920s. Peter N. Stearns, “Defining Happy Childhoods: Assessing a Recent Change,” *The Journal of the History of Childhood and Youth* 3, no. 2 (2010): 166-167. Stearns argues that the 1920s was a global turning point and brings examples from other parts of the world. Yet, he totally dismisses the Soviet myth of happy childhood. Neither is the pre-Soviet Russian conception of happy childhood discussed in the article. For the Russian

it became omnipresent and was forever tied to the leader cult in the 1930s. In the Soviet center, worship of the the leader was secured at the end of 1933 or at the beginning of 1934.¹⁰⁸⁰ In Kazakhstan, however, the image of the shepherd child, as discussed in Chapter 1, continued to dominate the discourse, and as far as we can follow from the published sources, the myth of happy childhood and the Stalin cult began in 1936, but in 1936 it was not more powerful than the Lenin cult yet. A book published in that year for pioneers included numerous poems not for Stalin, but for Lenin. Stalin appears in the poems only as a secondary figure.¹⁰⁸¹

Once the new discourse infiltrated Kazakh-language publications in 1936, it immediately gained widespread popularity. One of the earliest examples of the happy childhood myth is top students (*otlichniki*)' meeting with Levon Mirzoyan in 1936. The emphasis is on success at school. Children proudly tell Mirzoyan how they became *otlichniki*.¹⁰⁸² Children were again and again told that they were the happy children of the Soviet country, and they did not know [the suffering of] the past.¹⁰⁸³ But having read this kind of rhetoric one cannot find the answer as to why Soviet children were actually happy. It is almost a tautology that Soviet children were happy because they were Soviet children. Baiburin and Piir call this “happiness by passport”; it was enough for someone to be a Soviet citizen to experience universal happiness.¹⁰⁸⁴ Zhürgenov asks the same

case, see, Andrew Wachtel, *The Battle for Childhood: Creation of a Russian Myth* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1990).

¹⁰⁸⁰ Kelly, *Children's World*, 105.

¹⁰⁸¹ See for example the poem, “Lenin bizdin zhürekte” (“Lenin is in our hearts”), in Qurmanbaev, *Pionerler*, 60.

¹⁰⁸² The multinational composition of children is also remarkable; among them are not only Kazakhs and Russians, but also Uyghur and Dungan pupils. K. Kernerman, *Baqytty eldin Baqytty balalary* (Almaty: Qazaqstan Baspasy, 1936), 7.

¹⁰⁸³ *Ibid.*, 44.

¹⁰⁸⁴ Baiburin and Piir, “When We Were Happy,” 166.

question and his answer is that Soviet children have the opportunity to get a good education and learn the highest form of culture on earth.¹⁰⁸⁵ Thus, the only source of children's happiness, beyond being Soviet children, is a guaranteed education. According to a piece published in the Kazakh journal *Pioner* in 1939, Soviet children, unlike their ancestors, and unlike children in other parts of the world, never suffered. Happy life is provided for them forever. The source of their happiness is the care they receive from the Bolshevik party and more importantly from their genius father Stalin.¹⁰⁸⁶

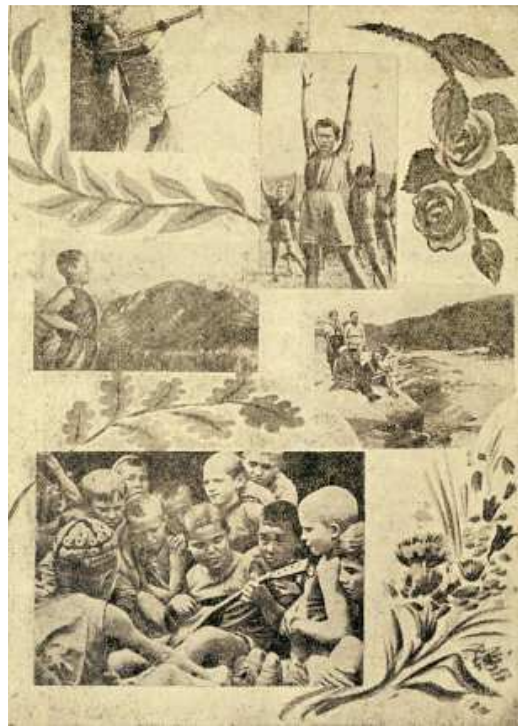


Image 19: Happy childhood (1939)¹⁰⁸⁷

In 1939, a collection of children's own works, named *Altyn Däüren* (Golden Age), declared that across the globe only Soviet children were given the opportunity to

¹⁰⁸⁵ Zhürgenov, *Qazaqstanda Mädeniät Revolutsiyasy*, 42.

¹⁰⁸⁶ Zhüsip, "Sabaq Bastaldy," 1.

¹⁰⁸⁷ Saïn and Särsenov eds., *Altyn däüren*.

become happy.¹⁰⁸⁸ Now the source of Soviet children's happiness is nothing more than Stalin himself:

“Your name is in the hearts of millions,
Dear granddad, people love you
You made our people powerful and happy
You raised our reputation in the world.”¹⁰⁸⁹

There are so many examples of this type of poems written allegedly by children themselves that it is not possible to quote all of them. However, the following poem written by little Tursunbek is such a good example of this tradition of worshipping that it is better to quote it here at length:

“Stalin, mastermind of the centuries
Stalin, my forever shining sun.
Stalin, sparkling flower, priceless.
I love golden law in a Stalinist way [referring to the Soviet constitution],

Stalin, my truth in the sky,
Stalin, my bright day spreading light.
Stalin, he is my leader, his heart is a river,
Stalin, the song of happiness on my mouth.

Stalin, steel body, great ocean,
I am singing by shouting “Stalin”.
Stalin is the captain of my life,
Oh, my life, how happy you are spent in Stalin's age.

Stalin is in my homeland – at the Kremlin.
Stalin is at the heart of all the peoples.
Stalin is the actor of the golden age,
Here we are, Stalin's generation”.¹⁰⁹⁰

¹⁰⁸⁸ Ibid., 10.

¹⁰⁸⁹ Ibid., 22.

¹⁰⁹⁰ Ibid., 21.

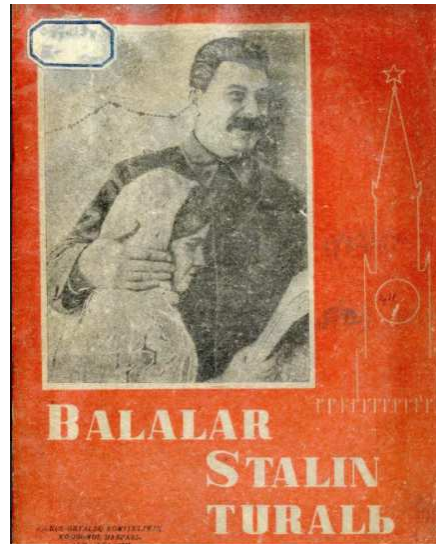


Image 20: The cover page of Altaybaev, *Balalar Stalin Turaly* (1939)

The depiction of Stalin as a demi-God is balanced with the image of Stalin the human. Thus, on the one hand, he is the source of all happiness in the world, just like a God, yet, on the other hand, he is such a modest person that when he wants to give some money to a little girl for travel he notices that he has no money in his pocket. Then he asks Voroshilov if he has any money.¹⁰⁹¹ When the famous Kazakh novelist Sabit Mukanov visited Moscow in his youth to meet Stalin, not surprisingly, Stalin welcomed this student from the steppe in his very humble room. When Stalin offered cigarettes, Mukanov took only one, but then Stalin said, “put the packet in your pocket, you are a student”. According to Mukanov, Stalin was a master of jokes too.¹⁰⁹²

¹⁰⁹¹ Zh. Altaybaev ed., *Balalar Stalin turaly* (Almaty: Qazaqstan LQZhS ortalyq komitetiniñ Komsomol baspasy, 1939).

¹⁰⁹² Sabit Mukanov, “Stalin Zholdasqa Zholyqqanda,” *Khalyq Mughalimi* 12 (1939): 20-21.



Image 21: Roza Shamzhanova with her friends, No. 12 school (1938)¹⁰⁹³

Delegations of children from the different parts of the Soviet Union frequently visited Stalin, and some of Stalin's photos (and paintings) with those children are quite famous. One of those children was the little Kazakh girl Roza Shamzhanova who wrote her memoirs of the visit for the journal *Pioner* in 1939 with the title "An Hour Never to be Forgotten". Roza writes that "Those hours that I met the great genius of humankind, Stalin, and that I presented a gift to him in the name of the Kazakh people are never to be forgotten in my life. The great Stalin's warm smiling is always in front of my eyes. You only forget our father, our guardian who has given us happy childhood when you are dead! You only do not love the person who have made all the people to run from happiness to happiness when you are dead!".¹⁰⁹⁴ Young Zhumaqul Balgaev who worked at the construction of Turksib also met Stalin. His 1940 description of that moment is similar to little Roza's: "Before we had taken a photo, Comrade Stalin said, 'I am

¹⁰⁹³ TsGAKFDZRK, 5-49 ("Otlichniki ucheby shkoly No. 12 imeni Kirova. Shamzhanova Roza – pioner-ordenonosets so svoimi podrugami", 15.03.1938).

¹⁰⁹⁴ Roza Shamzhanova, "Māñgi Umytylmytyn Saghat," *Pioner* 12, (1939): 16.

congratulating you for your award Comrade Balgaev' and shook my hand. I cannot express my joy at that moment with words. I was amazed how he knew my surname".¹⁰⁹⁵ Just like Stalin's warm smiling was always in front of Roza's eyes, his gentle voice was always tinkling in Zhumaqul's ears.



Image 22: Kindergarten, Dzhezda settlement - Karaganda oblast (1945)¹⁰⁹⁶

In fact, officially children had the privilege to have informal relations with the leader. In Kazakh children's poems, Stalin is sometimes their father, sometimes their friend:

“Salut to You, Iosif
Vissarionovich Stalin!
Wrote greetings – children-
We, your little *friends*.

Listen to us, great *father*,
Whose intelligence is a sea, great soul
Writes letter, your son, daughter

¹⁰⁹⁵ Zhumaqul Balgaev, “Este Qalghan Eki Kün,” *Pioner* 5-6, (1940): 5.

¹⁰⁹⁶ TsGAKFDZRK, 5-853.

From happy Kazakhstan.”¹⁰⁹⁷

In the following poem, childhood [in the Soviet Union] is great, because the age is golden. For sure, no other child in the world can be happy:

“Children like us are happy
It is for sure no lie.
A child cannot reach happiness
In the abroad, dreaming [of happiness]”.

Depicting poor Kazakh children working as shepherds used to be the main reference point for the opposite image of the happy Soviet childhood. In fact, this contrast between old and new had never come to an end. Public figures were used for reproducing this discourse in the children’s publications. For example, an article about the life story of the famous folk musician Dina Nurpeisova depicts a scene where Nurpeisova tells the children around her: “Oh, my dear children, what haven’t we suffered? What haven’t the Kazakh toilers experienced under the Russian Tsardom? Especially, the local rich exploited us so much. ... It was so easy to cut off the poor’s nose or ears”. According to the text, Qurmanghazy, the famous nineteenth century Kazakh bard and Nurpeisova’s master, was among the ones who had suffered most. The *bays* imprisoned Qurmanghazy, and “the people’s poet” was enchained in a dark prison.¹⁰⁹⁸ People’s suffering before the Revolution was again and again emphasized. In one story published in 1941, a woman explains to a little child why her husband’s hair has turned grey although he is very young: “We have experienced all hardships, we have experienced all pains. In the past, came the year 1916. Father was separated from son; mother was separated from daughter.

¹⁰⁹⁷ “Uly Äkemiz Stalin,” *Pioner* 10 (1940): 14-15.

¹⁰⁹⁸ Qonaqbaev, “Kompozitor Ana,” 6-7.

... Pregnant women were disemboweled and killed".¹⁰⁹⁹ Life stories published in this period generally begin with a description of their unhappy childhood which is then contrasted with their happy Soviet lives. For example, one child starts "speaking" by saying he does not want to talk about his miserable life before the October Revolution and rather desires to tell his "flaming new summer" and "flowering happy fate."¹¹⁰⁰

Consolidated in the 1930s, the myth of happy childhood continued to be influential in the later decades. Julie deGraffenried shows that this myth was disrupted by the brutal reality of the war experience. This was an abrupt shift away from the major components of the happy childhood. Instead of a paternalistic state that could protect them, now the state admitted that it could not save them and indeed needed children's willing help.¹¹⁰¹ However, even under those brutal conditions, the myth of happy childhood with its rhetoric of attention and care was partially resurrected starting from 1943.¹¹⁰²

What Evgeny Dobrenko defines as "the school tale", although first emerged in the 1930s, made its peak in the postwar years. This genre described a nonexistent comfort in which both adults and children supposedly lived.¹¹⁰³ The myth survived de-Stalinization,

¹⁰⁹⁹ Slanov, "Pioner Kündeligi," 9.

¹¹⁰⁰ Mambetov, Äbishev, Muzdybaev, Köshekov and Slanov eds., *Qazaqstannyñ aldyñghy qatarly zhastary*, 86-87.

¹¹⁰¹ deGraffenried, *Sacrificing Childhood*, 147.

¹¹⁰² *Ibid.*, 153.

¹¹⁰³ Evgeny Dobrenko, "The Entire Real World of Children".

According to Dobrenko, postwar literature lost all traces of the revolutionary past and it was conservative and antirevolutionary (indeed all genres originating in the Stalinist era were openly antirevolutionary). The ideal happy life described in this genre embodied all the ideals of the bourgeois family (pp. 233-234). Moreover, Dobrenko argues that this genre was a kind of adult conspiracy by hijacking the future of children. It derealized the world of children and deprived them of social support (p. 246). Kelly also notes that the emphasis on childhood happiness (as opposed to health, security or adequate education) was primarily about the Soviet state's own presentation of itself as uniquely humane. Kelly, "A Joyful Soviet Childhood," p. 8.

but in the post-Stalin era it was accepted that children's happiness had different sources such as family. In Kelly's words, "what persisted was the conviction that happiness was children's essential condition, a dogma that remained undisputed throughout the Soviet period, and that continued to be widely accepted after 1991".¹¹⁰⁴ Although this chapter does not cover the post-Stalin era, a brief look at a pseudo autobiography of a Kazakh komsomol member published in 1959 is a good example of the persistence of this myth.¹¹⁰⁵ The contrast between the unhappy childhood of the pre-Soviet times with the happy present was an indispensable part of this myth. In the subsection *Baqytsyz Balalyq Shaq* (Unhappy Childhood), Qusayynbek Ämirov writes when he witnesses the joy and laughter of little children on the romantically described streets of Almaty; he recalls his unhappy pre-Soviet childhood which was full of misery, hunger and various other difficulties.¹¹⁰⁶

"We had no childhood!": Post-Soviet Memory of Stalinist Childhood

Having witnessed how communist activists burned the books in their house during dekulakization in 1928, Baghdad Zhandosay recalled in his 1999 "genealogy-novel", that he was lost in thought and anxiety at that night. He later wrote: "Who are they? Where did they come from? Thinking about why they were so cruel I could not sleep till the morning due to grief; whenever I saw people who were laughing in my

¹¹⁰⁴ Ibid., 8.

¹¹⁰⁵ Andrew Wachtel argues that a conception of a happy childhood was created in the nineteenth century Russian literature in a genre that he calls "pseudo autobiography". This is a form that allows the constant interplay of memory and invention, of fact and fiction; these texts presented the autobiography of a narrator rather than the actual author. Wachtel, *The Battle for Childhood*, 15.

¹¹⁰⁶ Qusayynbek Ämirov, *Zhastyq Shaq: Qart Komsomoletstin Esteligi* (Almaty: Qazaqtyn Memleketik K rkem  deb iet Baspasy, 1959), 7.

childhood (in that period, only one out of a hundred laughed), I would stretch my jaws with the fingers of my both my hands wondering how they could laugh”.¹¹⁰⁷

These were the years when in fact few Kazakhs laughed at all. In obvious contrast to the Stalinist myth of happy childhood, most Kazakh children had a desire to forget the brutal years of Stalinism. As the proud War veteran Qadan Bekenov, who was taken to a detdom during the famine, puts it: “I do not want to recall my childhood often, which was a mysterious period for even myself”.¹¹⁰⁸ What comes back to Qadan’s memory about his detdom life is how he collected and cleaned cowpat all day. However, forgetting was not easy. In his 1993 testimony, Bolat Shazhaliev recalled an unspecified day in the late Soviet era when he was still a school student. His father had a guest whom Bolat had never seen before. Suddenly the guest asked his father: “oh brother, have you not forgotten the Tülkibas detdom?”. His father answered: “It was an unforgettably difficult period, you know. How can I ever forget? Whenever I remember it, my whole body trembles”. Having heard this, Bolat became curious and later asked his father what this conversation was about. He thus learned about the famine for the first time in his life. Having explained how he ended up at a detdom, his father said: “May God give what we witnessed there [in the detdom] to nobody”.¹¹⁰⁹

Neither was remembering possible under the Soviet rule. Memory of the famine years was long suppressed and openly discussing the famine became only possible in the

¹¹⁰⁷ Zhandosay, *Shoshqanyñ Qumy*, 7.

The author calls his book as a “shezhire-roman” (genealogy-novel), but it reads more like a memoir. In fact, he provides one of the few book-length memoirs of the Stalinist repression in Kazakhstan.

¹¹⁰⁸ Bekenov, “Täuelsiz elimniñ ‘Soghys ardageri goi!’ dep kurmettegen bir aңыз sözine eshteñe zhetpeydi”.

¹¹⁰⁹ Bolat Shazhaliev, “Beymezgil Qonaq Ashqan Syr,” in Qystaubaev and Khabdina eds., *Qyzyldar Qyrghyny*, 233.

last few years of the Soviet regime.¹¹¹⁰ As a result, a counter-narrative of unhappy childhood or having no childhood at all emerges from post-Soviet famine testimonies (both oral histories and memoirs). This counter-narrative is a product of the enormous suffering that Kazakhs experienced in the 1930s. However, it is also a reflection of how the myth of happy childhood ultimately defined the meaning of being a child. In traditional societies a perception that childhood in general was a particularly happy time does not exist.¹¹¹¹ Consequently, while reflecting on how they had no childhood, Kazakhs not only stress their suffering, but also how they lacked the means that are associated with a happy childhood. The same attitude can be seen in the testimonies of Soviet children of kulaks throughout the U.S.S.R. who were deported from their homes; “we had no childhood” is a common theme in their accounts too.¹¹¹²

According to Taūman Törekanov’s 1999 memoirs, having described her experiences during the famine years, his grandmother finished her words by saying her children never had a real childhood. All her children experienced was poverty and hunger.¹¹¹³ Ämir Alipbayuly’s testimony, published in 1993, is a more direct expression of this narrative of unhappy childhood. During the famine years, Alipbayuly lost two of his sisters and even though he looked for them for decades after the famine, he never found them. In his words: “My unhappy childhood was spent in the detdom of Turar

¹¹¹⁰ There is no comprehensive study of the memory of the famine yet. As discussed in Chapter 2, scholars are not even aware of the existing testimonies of the famine and consequently the discussion of memory exclusively focus on commemoration, or the lack of commemoration, in post-Soviet Kazakhstan. For a discussion of the memory of the famine, see: Isabelle Ohayon, “The Kazakh Famine: The Beginnings of Sedentarization”, <https://www.sciencespo.fr/mass-violence-war-massacre-resistance/en/document/kazakh-famine-beginnings-sedentarization.html>.

¹¹¹¹ The necessity to train children for serious work and very high infant mortality rates limited the association between childhood and a general happiness. Stearns, “Defining Happy Childhoods,” 168.

¹¹¹² Kaznelson and Baron, “Memories of Displacement”.

¹¹¹³ Törekanov, *Köz körgender edi...*, 87.

village in Qaskeleñ district in 1929, in No 5, 9 and 10 detdoms and No 1 detgorod in Tastaq district between 1930-1934.¹¹¹⁴ Alipbayuly's testimony represents a strong contrast to the official Soviet narrative of happy orphans and it is evidence of how children themselves understood their experiences in detdoms.

In a piece written in 2009, Äliya Beysenova combines the tragic 1930s with the war years: "When I think about it, oppression, famine, poverty, War made us grow up early. We did not go to kindergarten, did not play with toys. We did not have the age of carefree and joyful childhood when [children] freely play and laugh".¹¹¹⁵ Beysenova's statement is a good example of how the new concept of childhood happiness shaped people's consciousness: childhood is a joyful period when children play and laugh. Kasym Taukenov, who tells how life was gradually improving after the war, also remembers how he then, and later, never played any games or had fun. He never had time for fun because he was always helping his parents working.¹¹¹⁶

Growing up early is a major theme in childhood memoirs of Stalinism. Perhaps this is most obvious in the widely read (translated into English) famine memoirs of Mukhamet Shayakhmetov. Throughout the memoirs, we see little Mukhamet surviving the system which punished him as the son of a kulak, taking extreme trips on the dangerous and starving steppe to feed his family, and having to assume the role of head of his family.¹¹¹⁷ Five-year old Nurziya Qazhybaeva's trip to China with her family is another example of this theme. She remembers in her old age: "I covered the whole

¹¹¹⁴ Ämir Alipbayuly Sheripay urpaghy, "Men Dozaqty Kördim," 250.

¹¹¹⁵ Äliya Beysenova, "Bizdi Soghys Erte Eseitti," *Dala men Qala*, September 14, 2009; republished in Serik Qırabaev and Äliya Beysenova, *Akademikterdin Otbasy 60 Zhasta* (Almaty, 2010), 56.

¹¹¹⁶ Kasym Taukenov, *Pamiat' ... o vremeni, sobytiakh, liudiakh (Vospominaniia)* (Astana, 2002), 19.

¹¹¹⁷ Shayakhmetov, *The Silent Steppe*.

distance myself, *like the adults*, walking without anybody's help".¹¹¹⁸ How little children acted like adults is time and again repeated in famine testimonies. Süleymen Bekenov, who took refuge in Uzbekistan during the famine years, went to look for his parents who then were living in a different place¹¹¹⁹; 5-6 years old Äliya Beysenova cared for his bedridden father.¹¹²⁰

In his 1995 memoirs, Turganbek Kataev provides the most politicized picture of childhood in the 1930s. According to him, Lenin's name was very popular in Kazakh villages. Poets composed poems in the name of Lenin, and students recited those at village gatherings. Equality, struggles against social and national oppression, labor without exploitation: these were the promises of socialism. Kataev states that Kazakhs believed in these promises, but were betrayed by the Bolsheviks.¹¹²¹ Yet, the same Kataev also claims that all the Kazakh traditions were alive during the 1930s including *aytys* (competition of bards), Kazakh wrestling, *kökpar* (a traditional sport game played on horses with a goat carcass), wedding or birth ceremonies, Nauryz celebrations and even the Ramadan festival.¹¹²² His focus on betrayal probably led him to exaggerate how far Kazakhs believed in Bolshevik promises and to draw an inconsistent picture in which a high level of belief in Bolshevik promises coexisted with all Kazakh traditions

¹¹¹⁸ Nurtazina, "Great Famine of 1931-1933 in Kazakhstan," 118. Qazhybaeva thinks Allah gave her the strength. At first she complained a lot, but when her father said that he would leave the heavy load and instead carry her on his back, she begged her father: "Please, don't leave any load; I'll walk myself" and never complained again. Here we see a critical moment of growing up which can be seen in other accounts too.

¹¹¹⁹ Bekenov, *Qazaq Tutqyny*, 24-25.

¹¹²⁰ Qırabaev and Beysenova, *Akademikterdin Otbasy*, 32.

¹¹²¹ Kataev, *Pamiat' o Voine*, 13.

¹¹²² *Ibid.*, 16.

including religious ones. Kataev turned out to be not only a Soviet patriot, but also a proud party member, which makes his case even more curious and inconsistent.

Baghdad Zhandosay provides another politically conscious, but more consistent, account of dekulakization and famine. Zhandosay, who worked for the newspaper *Leninshil Zhas* (Young Leninist) for decades later in his life, is anti-communist in his attitude towards all Bolshevik policies. Most obviously, Zhandosay was disgusted by the Bolsheviks' persecution of religion. In his book, he shares quotes from his sister Sara's diary (he claims that this diary is lost and he recites what he remembers). In these quotes, Islam is defined as the real revolutionary force, and Prophet Muhammad as the true revolutionary, whereas Bolshevism is defined as an ungodly calamity that was unheard of from time immemorial.¹¹²³ Zhandosay was the son of a prominent person in Kazakh society whom he calls a *bi*¹¹²⁴, and not only atheism, but also class war, was totally unacceptable to him. Throughout the book he emphasizes how dekulakization (*debaization* in Kazakhstan) was the main reason for the famine. According to him, poor Kazakhs did not know how to treat livestock and once the Bolsheviks confiscated livestock from *bays*, the poor only slaughtered and ate them.¹¹²⁵

¹¹²³ Zhandosay, *Shoshqanyñ Qumy*, 61-65. He uses the expression *älimsaqtan beri* in Kazakh which can be translated as from time immemorial, but it has a deep religious connotation meaning from the moment of the creation.

¹¹²⁴ Judicial and administrative authority in nomadic Kazakh society, comparable to *qadi* in other Muslim societies. Yet, it is not clear whether his father was a real *bi* or had this title thanks to his genealogy and prestige.

¹¹²⁵ *Ibid.*, 70-71. Zhandosay's disgust towards class war is even apparent in his assessment of Goloshchekin. He states that a person who massacred even the youngest daughter of the White Sultan (*aq patsha* / The Tsar) was sent to Kazakhstan for the plan of a genocide. Hence, he shows a degree of sympathy towards the Tsar against Bolsheviks which is almost absent among Kazakhs. The essence of the Bolshevik ideology of genocide was annihilating religion (pp. 66-68).

Zhandosay's account is one of the most vivid descriptions of an unhappy childhood in Kazakhstan. Throughout the book we read about how he suffered, from dekulakization to homelessness, from hunger to detdorm life. Towards the end, he writes: "Oh, my readers! My childhood from 1926 to 1936 – these ten years without bread, without a father" (*nansyz-äkesiz ötken*). He continues by emphasizing not all contemporaries believe in what millions of orphans like him lived through even though the communists'/Bolsheviks' cruelty and oppression was the same everywhere in Kazakhstan.¹¹²⁶

We know that a common story emerges from the memoirs of children of the Russian intelligentsia: an idealized happy and innocent childhood suddenly comes to an end with the arrest of their parents during the Terror.¹¹²⁷ Although this dissertation does not pay special attention to the Terror, I have briefly explored the memoirs of Kazakh child survivors of the Terror.¹¹²⁸ Unlike children of the Russian intelligentsia, only a few Kazakh memoirists describe a romantic ideal childhood, but the statement that their happy childhood ended with the arrest of their parents is common. For Azaliya Akhmetova, the arrest of her mother (her father was arrested earlier) marked this critical point: "Even more horrible, I remember the day of the arrest of my mother. It happened on November 18 in the same terrible year of 1937. My happy childhood ended so

¹¹²⁶ Ibid., 121.

¹¹²⁷ Yuri Slezkine, "Lives as Tales," in *In the Shadow of Revolution: Life Stories of Russian Women from 1917 to the Second World War*, eds. Sheila Fitzpatrick and Yuri Slezkine (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2000), 30.

Fitzpatrick calls this discourse as "a trope of nostalgia for an idyllic past". Sheila Fitzpatrick, "Happiness and *Toska*: An Essay in the History of Emotions in Pre-war Soviet Russia," *Australian Journal of Politics and History* 50, no. 3 (2004): 360.

¹¹²⁸ Even though memoirs of the children of the Terror are not totally excluded, they are neither closely integrated in this dissertation. Instead, I primarily focus on children of famine.

tragically”.¹¹²⁹ Comparable to Russian intelligentsia children’s descriptions of a nostalgic childhood are Fatima Bukeikhanova’s reminiscences. Yet, even in this one we have few details other than how much she admired her father Gabdul Bukeikhanov, who loved music and who was a professional *dombra* player.¹¹³⁰ Murat Baymakhanov recalls how happy they were when they went to parks or to their dacha with his parents.¹¹³¹ Another description of the end of a happy childhood is provided by Baghdad Zhandosay; his conception of a happy childhood is quite different from intelligentsia children’s descriptions though. In the summer of 1929, as he writes in his 1999 memoir, one day he suddenly realized that the joy and comfort, the prosperity and wealth, all the good and the bad, that were written on his forehead by Allah (an Islamic expression for one’s predestination); in other words, what he experienced in his life until the summer of 1928 came to an end.¹¹³² To conclude, the sudden ending of happy childhood that is common in Russian accounts is shared by the repressed Kazakh children; yet, the descriptions of happy childhoods prior to that moment are visibly less graphic.

“We too had happy moments in our lives...”: Mundane Happiness

The concept of happiness has not been directly studied by historians of Soviet Central Asia. Among historians who study political participation and the formation of Soviet identities in the region, there is a tendency to understand how Central Asians

¹¹²⁹ Azaliya Akhmetova, “Zhizn Sostoyalas’, Nesmotria Ni Na Chto,” in Degitaeva and Gribanova, *Stranitsy tragicheskikh sudeb*, 33.

¹¹³⁰ Fatima Bukeikhanova, “Vse Ego Lyubili i Uvazhali,” *ibid.*, 64.

¹¹³¹ Murat Baimakhanov, “Rasplata za Predannost’ Rodine – Rasstrel,” *ibid.*, 51.

Dacha life is an important part of Russian intelligentsia children’s nostalgic happy childhood and this is one of rare references to dacha in Kazakh accounts.

¹¹³² Zhandosay, *Shoshqanyñ Qumy*, 61.

understood their place or, relatedly, to define happiness in the Central Asian context in a politically motivated manner: people felt happiness because they participated in Soviet projects and succeeded in realizing their dreams (which were always connected to the regime's projects). This is at least partially due to scholars' own interests and guidance in interviews. What matters most for the scholar is state policies or how state policies were experienced and interpreted by people.¹¹³³ For example, Ali Igmen emphasizes an intense personal pride and the influence of Soviet heroism in his respondents' perceptions of themselves¹¹³⁴ In this respect, these academic works based on oral histories are very much in line with biographical accounts written during the Soviet period.

Post-Soviet memoirs in Kazakhstan, at least memoirs of Stalinist childhood, usually provide a de-ideologized picture of the Soviet past. On the one hand, these memoirs bear the stamp of the myth of happy childhood: even anti-Soviet memoirists

¹¹³³ One of Timur Dadabaev's oral history projects is designed specifically to link individuals to the state, "to use the recording of the memories of everyday life in Soviet Central Asia and relate those to the official recording of history". Timur Dadabaev, "Recollecting the Soviet Past: Challenges of Data Collection on Everyday Life Experiences and Public Memory in Post-Soviet Central Asia," in *Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, and Uzbekistan: Life and Politics during the Soviet Era*, eds. Timur Dadabaev and Hisao Komatsu (London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2017), 23. Yet in another monograph, Dadabaev suggests that he focused on everyday life in order to give an "apolitical" picture of social life. Timur Dadabaev, *Identity and Memory in Post-Soviet Central Asia: Uzbekistan's Soviet Past* (London: Routledge, 2018), 2. He successfully shows that people tend to remember their Soviet past in a de-ideologized way; everyday needs, experiences, identification and mentality shape people's memories, not political doctrines of the time (p. 10). However, at the end he presents a rather politicized memory of the Soviet past, because in individual narratives, he searches for either Soviet official discourse which promotes Soviet successes, or a post-Soviet national discourse which rejects the Soviet past. State discourse either shapes memories of people or people react to it (p. 94).

On the other hand, Adrienne Edgar's study shows how the state rarely appears in Central Asians' narratives of their Soviet lives: they tend to narrate their lives on their own terms and focus on their personal lives. Adrienne L. Edgar, "What to Name the Children? Oral Histories of Ethnically Mixed Families in Soviet Kazakhstan and Tajikistan," *Kritika: Explorations in Russian and Eurasian History* 20, no. 2 (2019).

¹¹³⁴ Ali Igmen, "Gender and National Identity in Memories of the Late 20th-Century Soviet Theatr in Kyrgyzstan," *Kritika: Explorations in Russian and Eurasian History* 20, no. 2 (2019): 301.

Personal pride, and, to some extent, the influence of Soviet heroism can also be seen in Kazakh memoirs. Yet, Igmen simplistically connects this to people's reading of books like Arkadii Gaidar's *Timur and His Squad* without discussing any other factors such as the impact of the actual War experience.

speak of happy moments in their childhood in a generic statement repeated in many accounts: “We too had happy moments in our lives”.¹¹³⁵ On the other hand, memoirs almost always associate happiness with family, daily life or simple pleasures. This is a very de-politicized understanding of happiness. Not surprisingly, childhood memories of late Stalinism refer to happiness much more frequently than memoirs of the brutal 1930s. However, the depoliticized understanding of childhood happiness remains stable. In a sense, the idea of a “happy childhood” came to dominate while remembering and discussing the 1940s and 1950s as part of the Sovietization of Central Asians. It was then possible to experience “happy childhood” in personal lives; they were not expected to be radical revolutionaries anymore or, in other words, personal lives were not occupied by revolutionary politics.¹¹³⁶ Shared experiences came to dominate the meaning of being Soviet much more than the ideals of socialism.

Most studies of childhood and youth (or Soviet society in general) in the Soviet Union see de-Stalinization as the real turning point. However, Juliane Fürst argues that Stalin’s death was less of a decisive point of change. She claims that the war should be considered the decisive turning point, the origins of the Thaw.¹¹³⁷ Post-war years witnessed the emergence of a new youth which was increasingly alienated from the ideologically committed conception of youth and the decline of youthful commitment to

¹¹³⁵ Only a few memoirists are consciously anti-Soviet. The majority of famine testimonies are oral histories whereas memoirs which include brief reminiscences of the famine do not necessarily take an anti-Soviet stance.

¹¹³⁶ The search for private happiness separate from society was strongly condemned in the revolutionary Bolshevik discourse. In diaries and personal letters of the 1930s, little private happiness is on view; personal happiness is rarely expressed. However, this started to change in the late 1930s. Fitzpatrick, “Happiness and *Toska*,” 364-365.

¹¹³⁷ Juliane Fürst, *Stalin’s Last Generation: Soviet Post-War Youth and the Emergence of Mature Socialism* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2010), 6-7.

socialist values and ideology. Politics and ideology ranked low in their lives. They did not understand Sovietness as a utopian dream and they practiced an individualistic ideology. Nevertheless, they were not opponents of the Soviet system; rather they desired to live in a depoliticized private sphere.¹¹³⁸

I argue that post-Soviet Kazakh memoirs reflect a similar trend. De-politicized spaces emerged in the periphery, as did the possibility of finding happiness in personal lives. What mattered for the new Soviet youth in the center was consumerism and a non-conformist subculture. In the periphery, on the other hand, the new spaces created by the war allowed the co-existence of previously attacked traditions, discourses and religion with Soviet patriotism. Kathryn Dooley suggests that in Central Asia, the transformation was about the strengthening of Central Asian particularism, and the rigid distinction between socialist “content” and national “form” was disappearing. The parameters of what was permissible were dramatically expanding and the meaning of being “Soviet” was expanding. Dooley concludes that “the ‘cultural worlds’ that developed in this context were both localized and peripheral relative to the Soviet Union as a whole, operating at the level of the republic or, at most, the region as a whole, and possessing little currency beyond it”.¹¹³⁹

Oral histories of the famine predominantly focus on the miserable years, hence almost none of them include any reference to happy childhood. Yet, longer famine memoirs mention, though rarely, happy moments. Nurziya Qazhybaeva states that she particularly values the happy moments in her childhood and adolescence. For her, happy

¹¹³⁸ Ibid., 2-4.

¹¹³⁹ Dooley, “Selling Socialism, Consuming Difference,” 415-416.

moments include enjoying the nature of her village and kolkhoz, and her parents' care.¹¹⁴⁰ Rafika Nurtazina, whose family was saved from the famine by her brother-in-law in Almaty, remembers happy moments of her childhood in a similar way. For her, the Irtysh river with its beautiful green shores represent childhood joys.¹¹⁴¹ She also recalls how delicious her mother's pies, sponge cakes, *chak-chak* and *baūyrsaqs* were.¹¹⁴² Even though Nurtazina was relatively safe from the horrors of the famine, her childhood was still predominantly shaped by hardships including the famine. Nonetheless, she is eager to show that there were happy moments in her childhood. However, what is important is that the sources of these happy moments are completely non-ideological. Indeed, nothing related to politics appear in her memoirs until the moment when she remembers the victory day celebrations (she was 24 in 1945).

As already mentioned, her mother occupies a central place for Nurtazina's childhood joys (her father had died before she was born). Nurtazina praises her mother as a very smart, hard-working and talented woman who raised four children on her own. In fact, this is a recurrent theme in Kazakh memoirs. Kazakh historians Saktaganova, Tursynova and Smagulov argue that wartime children's memoirs prove that many survived thanks to their mothers' everyday struggle for their lives.¹¹⁴³ A broader study of memoirs show that this was not limited to wartime survival. Family life is one of the few sources of childhood happiness for Kazakh children, but the focus is almost always on the mother. Burat Ayukhanov-Kuvatov, a child victim of Terror, states they were very

¹¹⁴⁰ Nurtazina, "Great Famine of 1931-1933 in Kazakhstan," 128.

¹¹⁴¹ Nurtazina, *Vospominaniia*, 21.

¹¹⁴² *Ibid.*, 15.

¹¹⁴³ Saktaganova, Tursynova and Smagulov, *Zhenshchiny Tsentral'nogo Kazakhstana*, 174.

lucky that her mother was not arrested and this was the greatest happiness for their lives.¹¹⁴⁴ In his memoirs published in 2000, Maülen Qudayqulov writes that the main source of his happiness was her mother whose health was weakened due to the hard work in the kolkhoz during the war years, but who nevertheless survived. Although he later mentions a few other sources of happiness in his life, his childhood happiness was completely associated with his mother's personality.¹¹⁴⁵ The second source for Qudayqulov's happy life was his success at high school: he not only graduated with a medal, but also got interested in literature. The last source for his happiness was finding a good wife.¹¹⁴⁶ Qudaykulov openly declares that he lived a happy life. Yet, once more neither the ideology of socialism, nor Soviet symbolism has any place in his happiness.

In fact, this attitude to declare oneself a happy person is common even among the children of Terror. At the end of her reminiscences, Gul'zhan Abdrakhmanova states that in her personal life she is happy with her husband, son, daughter and two grandchildren even though she could never overcome a feeling of constant loneliness.¹¹⁴⁷ Another one, Roza Dzhamanova, who eventually became an opera singer and who emphasizes her career in her happiness states that her fate was not very gentle to her, but after all it was a happy life.¹¹⁴⁸ Similar to their European counterparts, children of the Terror eventually found happiness in their personal lives: this was a shared union-wide experience that connected them to victims of other nationalities and other Soviet republics. They were

¹¹⁴⁴ Bulat Ayukhanov-Kuvatov, “‘Vragi’ – Nemy, My – Ne Raby” in Degitaeva and Gribanova, *Stranitsy tragicheskikh sudeb*, 43.

¹¹⁴⁵ Maülen Qudayqulov, *Ömir-Önege (Ghumyrnamalyq ocherkter)* (Almaty: Örkeniet, 2000), 30.

¹¹⁴⁶ *Ibid.*, 32-33.

¹¹⁴⁷ Gul'zhan Abdrakhmanova, “Ya Prozhila Zhizn' Interesno, No Odinoko” in Degitaeva and Gribanova, *Stranitsy tragicheskikh sudeb*, 11.

¹¹⁴⁸ Roza Dzhamanova, “My Boyalis' Govorit' Pravdu o Roditeliakh,” *ibid.*, 94.

“Sovietized”; they belonged to the category of victims of the Soviet Union that transcended ethnic and geographical borders.¹¹⁴⁹

Unlike the soldiers who fought in the Great Patriotic War, even Kazakh memoirists who experienced the war years on the home front as children rarely turn to the language of patriotism to describe the war years. Qudayqulov’s memoirs include almost no mention of the war. Other than the hardships he experienced, Qazyken Bazylov’s memoirs published in 2014 include no reminiscence of the war. They totally lack any ideological content, any reference to socialism or Soviet patriotism.¹¹⁵⁰ As discussed in Chapter 4, Kazakh soldiers’ accounts, both in the Soviet and post-Soviet periods, are heavily shaped by national discourse and Soviet patriotism. In contrast, children of the war years only remember scenes from their everyday lives. The theme of happy childhood is resurgent in the 2001 memoirs of Tālip Äbishev, born in 1937 in Sverdlov oblast in Russia. Yet, he does not even mention the war; the main source for his happiness was the childhood games he freely played with his friends by the river or in the forest. Just like other memoirists, he praises the nature of his birthplace at length and describes a romanticized pastoral childhood.¹¹⁵¹ He emphasizes the good relations between Kazakhs and Russians in his region, how their standard of living improved after

¹¹⁴⁹ Although it requires more research, my impression is that the fate of Kazakh children whose parents perished during the Terror resemble their Russian (or in general European) counterparts: they suffered in Gulag camps, detdoms or children’s colonies, they were marginalized in Soviet society, they learned to keep silent and hide their parents’ identities. Yet, eventually, at least some of them succeeded in reintegrating into society. Some of them were raised as Soviet patriots, some even joined Pioneer and Komsomol organizations. Most of them found happiness in their family lives and works. Many express gratitude for those persons who helped them survive (usually, but not exclusively, teachers). For the experiences of child survivors of Terror, see, Frierson, *Silence was Salvation*. For Kazakh and other Kazakhstani child survivors of Terror, see, Degitaeva and Gribanova eds., *Stranitsy tragicheskikh sudeb*; Tasybekov, *Zhan Daūysy*.

¹¹⁵⁰ Bazylov and Bazylova, *Ömir Zhalghastary*.

¹¹⁵¹ Äbishev, *Ömir Ötkelderi*, 28.

the war and how Kazakhs protected their religion and traditions within a predominantly Russian environment. Even though this might be interpreted as a reflection of the discourse of friendship of peoples, socialist ideology or state practices are never mentioned in his rendition of a happy childhood.

Äliya Beysenova's childhood memoirs do not include any moments of happiness until her older brothers return from the war. Beysenova's account is relatively critical of Soviet rule, and it is less influenced by the myth of happy childhood. However, what she finally remembers as a happy moment of her childhood is also representative of post-soviet Kazakh memoirists in general. When her three brothers all returned home, one of them brought a package of clothes. Äliya found a wonderful shirt among them and when she wore it her happiness was endless (she writes that at the time she did not think how it was indeed a German girl's shirt).¹¹⁵² This kind of happiness due to simple pleasures in life is common almost in all post-Soviet memoirs. Memoirists tend to remember this kind of anecdotes over the idealized upbringing of a Soviet child. Yet, it should be noted that very few of these accounts that lack descriptions of political socialization can be considered as anti-Soviet. Rather, these memoirs represent acceptance of depoliticized lives within the Soviet world.

The childhood years of Äzilkhan Nurshayyqov, a survivor of famine and a War hero, were a bit different. He started writing poems as a child, hence it is not surprising that he wrote poems for Lenin and Zhambyl. However, what mattered to him was literature itself, rather than the political content of his poems. In fact, his childhood

¹¹⁵² Qirabaev and Beysenova, *Akademikterdin Otbasy*, 34.

memories too lack any connection to the Stalinist myth of happiness.¹¹⁵³ As a prospective Soviet patriot and War hero (and eventually a famous Kazakh writer), literature was the defining element of his life from childhood to the end.

Although scholars of Soviet identities in Central Asia and the formation of Soviet selves in general put a high emphasis on socialization and education at state institutions and participation in Soviet projects, they rarely appear in Kazakh memoirs of Stalinist childhood. Among the memoirs covered in this chapter, the only exception is Kulakhmet Khalmenov who served as a general in the Soviet military later in his life and published his memoirs in 2001. Born in 1926, Khalmenov writes that they were raised as patriots by songs and films such as “If War Comes Tomorrow.” They placed their confidence in the Red Army. Khalmenov became a Komsomol member in 1940 at the age of 14 and he is the only memoirist who describes military training at school.¹¹⁵⁴ Children of the elite were more involved in the political discourse. Bulat Ayukhanov-Kuvatov admits that remembering childhood is a heavy test for his soul. However, before the repression of his parents, he believed in the system: “What to hide, we, children of 1930s-1940s, lived under the authority of slogans, not daring to admit that we were poorly dressed, that our mothers stood in line for bread from two o’clock at night... We accepted the life as it was in parades”.¹¹⁵⁵ Although Ayukhanov-Kuvatov generalizes his experience to all Soviet

¹¹⁵³ Nurshayyqov, *Āskerī Kūndelik*.

¹¹⁵⁴ Khalmenov, *Vospominaniia Generala Militsii*, 18. Khalmenov’s career as a Soviet military officer should be taken into account. Born in 1926, his memoirs do not include any reminiscences of the famine although he talks about a smallpox epidemic in 1928 that killed all the children in his district except him. He briefly discusses the Terror though (he was 11 years old in 1937).

¹¹⁵⁵ Bulat Ayukhanov-Kuvatov, “‘Vragi’ – Nemy, My – Ne Raby”, 39.

children, at best, it can be accepted as exemplary for children of intelligentsia and the elite.

In post-war Kazakhstan, being a Soviet child was more and more shaped by common experiences. Common experiences included school education, reading Soviet literature or participating in Soviet celebrations. However, this political socialization of a child was only one part of a shared experience of Soviet children. Being a Soviet Kazakh child and teenager also meant enjoying one's life, watching American movies and dancing in the parks.¹¹⁵⁶ Therefore, naturally, the decade a person grew up in significantly influences post-Soviet childhood memories.

Scholars have shown that official celebrations and political participation were not only central for the official discourse of happiness, but they indeed had a real impact on how citizens made sense of their lives.¹¹⁵⁷ Oral histories done by Kazakh historians on everyday life in post-War Karaganda include references to official celebrations. For example, Marat Imankulov recalls that they loved to attend celebrations of May 9, May 1 and November 7. He also remembers how everyone was out on the streets during New Year revelries; there were large fir trees and toys in parks while music was playing.¹¹⁵⁸ Raushan Kapanova too remembers that they celebrated May 1, May 9 and March 8. Yet, just before this, she recalls how they also celebrated religious festivals. Unlike official celebrations, religious festivals were celebrated silently, but Kapanova remembers how

¹¹⁵⁶ This is more apparent in Juliane Fürst's discussion of the non-conformist youth in the post-War era. Fürst, *Stalin's Last Generation*.

¹¹⁵⁷ Karen Petrone, *Life Has Become More Joyous, Comrades: Celebrations in the Time of Stalin* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2000); Fitzpatrick, *Everyday Stalinism*.

¹¹⁵⁸ "Vospominaniia Imankulova Marata Rakhimovich" (born in 1937) in Saktaganova and Abdrakhmanova, *Povsednevnaia Zhizn'*, 238.

We should be aware that the structure of an oral history is shaped by the interviewer. Thus, this is different from adding celebrations to one's memoirs.

people widely performed namaz and fasted during Ramadan in post-war Karaganda.¹¹⁵⁹

She also notes how they loved to celebrate the new year and it appears that it was the most popular celebration for children. It required a long period of preparation and children learned rhymes for Ded Moroz and danced around the New Year's tree.¹¹⁶⁰



Image 23: New Year tree for children in front of the children's theater (1953)¹¹⁶¹

Hence, even though official celebrations have a place in her childhood memories, they turn into only one type of several celebrations among which religious festivals and especially the New Year appear to be more memorable. The New Year holiday and elements associated with it such as fir tree were presented as gifts to happy children of the Soviet Union. The holiday was closely tied to the Stalin cult in the 1930s.¹¹⁶² It was also presented as an alternative to religious festivals. Hence, these celebrations were used for political purposes. However, Petrone describes the resurgence of the New Year

¹¹⁵⁹ One of the most important changes in post-War Central Asia was the relaxation of anti-religious campaigns as discussed in the Introduction. Most importantly, see, Tasar, *Soviet and Muslim*.

¹¹⁶⁰ "Vospominaniia Kapanovoi Raushan Tokenovny, 1938 g.r." in Saktaganova and Abdrakhmanova, *Povsednevnaia Zhizn'*, 223.

¹¹⁶¹ TsGAKFDZRK, 2-19972.

¹¹⁶² Petrone, *Life Has Become More Joyous*, 94-100.

holidays in the second half of the 1930s as a negotiation between the state and the citizens in which non-socialist elements of the prerevolutionary past were employed to generate support for the Soviet regime. Their entertainment value was emphasized, more than their ideological messages.¹¹⁶³ Its resurgence marked the public rejection of the radicalism and austerity of the Cultural Revolution and even though there were competing visions among Soviet cadres, the apolitical camp was usually more successful in promoting their version of the holiday; the New Year celebrations were less regimented and more diverse than November 7 or May 1 celebrations. Indeed, it revealed the ways in which Soviet cadres and citizens could resist state control.¹¹⁶⁴ Petrone's argument for the apolitical and private character of these celebrations may have been even stronger in the Soviet periphery of the post-War period where the previous ideological debates centered around its religious character did not matter to traditionally Muslim populations.



Image 24: Children watching the November 7 parade, Lenin Square – Almaty (1950)¹¹⁶⁵

¹¹⁶³ Ibid., 87-88.

¹¹⁶⁴ Ibid., 107-108

¹¹⁶⁵ TsGAKFDZRK, E-12193 (D. D. Torpikov's personal file).

Official celebrations were a part of shared experience in the late Stalinist era, but daily life and personal lives dominated more the conception of a happy childhood in Kazakhs' memoirs of the period. Having stated the standard sentence "we too had happy moments in our lives", Raushan Kapanova tells how they often went to Kazakh drama theater in Karaganda. Among the plays that they watched were "Qoblandy Batyr", "Alpamys Batyr", "Altyn Saqa", "Qyz-Zhibek" and "Enlek-Kebek", all Kazakh national stories.¹¹⁶⁶ For Erken Aybasov, a child survivor of the Terror, kind and warm memories of his childhood first and foremost include children's theater of the famous Russian director Natalya Sats who was at the time exiled to Almaty as a traitor to the motherland.¹¹⁶⁷

Marat Imankulov remembers the cinema Oktiabr' in Karaganda. It was not easy to find a ticket, there were even fights for tickets, particularly when Tarzan series were shown.¹¹⁶⁸ The salon was full when American movie series Tarzan were shown; it was possibly the most popular movie for Soviet children in post-war Kazakhstan. Later in the decade, Nelia Buketova, historian of the city of Almaty, remembers they went to the club "Smychki" where films were shown. It was the most beautiful time of Buketova's childhood when they watched Tarzan series or the Indian movie "The Vagabond" for dozens of times.¹¹⁶⁹ Anna Samokhina, who was already a young woman by 1945, also

¹¹⁶⁶ "Vospominaniia Kapanovoi Raushan Tokenovny," 222.

¹¹⁶⁷ Erken Aibasov, "Repressii v Sud'be Moei Sem'i" in Degitaeva and Gribanova, *Stranitsy tragicheskikh sudeb*, 14.

¹¹⁶⁸ "Vospominaniia Imankulova Marata Rakhimovich," 238.

¹¹⁶⁹ Subsection "Gorod Moego Detstva" in Nelia Aubakirovna Buketova, *Alma-Ata i Almatintsy* (Almaty: Elnur, 2007), 23.

confirms that she watched all the Tarzan movies at the cinema club in this period.¹¹⁷⁰

Having described how cinema was a popular activity for them in the kolkhozes of Almaty oblast in the post-War period, when asked which film she particularly remembers, Naūat Zhunusova mentioned Tarzan.¹¹⁷¹ In those years, Tarzan became so popular in the Soviet Union that it is a good example of how shared experiences and common memories united the rural with the urban, but also united citizens across the Soviet Union.¹¹⁷²

Residents of Karaganda also recall how people got together and had fun in parks. Marat Imankulov remembers there was a band playing in the park and for the youth there was a large dance floor.¹¹⁷³ As an adult, Anna Samokhina too remembers how they danced and sang and there was a band playing at the weekends in the park while people were walking around or dancing on the dance floor.¹¹⁷⁴ For, Nelia Buketova swimming in Almaty river which was close to their apartment in the city is the brightest reminiscence of her happy childhood.¹¹⁷⁵ Not all children were as lucky as the ones who were living in Almaty or Karaganda. Life in the villages was still far more difficult, yet, village children too remember the post-war years as a period of improvement in living standards.¹¹⁷⁶ For Kasym Taukenov, not regularly going to cinema, but having enough food supply was the main source for happiness. He remembers eating delicious pastries which were not in

¹¹⁷⁰ As an adult, she was also a regular audience of the city theater where artists from Moscow, Omsk and Almaty often had tours in the summer. “Vospominaniia Samokhinoi Anny Federovny” (born in 1922), in Saktaganova and Abdrakhmanova, *Povsednevnaia Zhizn*, 249.

¹¹⁷¹ Unpublished interview from the oral history project “*Uzynaghash Aūylynyñ Tarikhy*” (History of Uzynagash village/county) conducted by Aliya Bolatkhan in 2013.

¹¹⁷² In fact, the popularity of Tarzan very much disturbed the Soviet authorities who were keen to distance Soviet ideals from the unruly life displayed in the movie. Fürst, *Stalin's Last Generation*, 193.

¹¹⁷³ “Vospominaniia Imankulova Marata Rakhimovich,” 238

¹¹⁷⁴ “Vospominaniia Samokhinoi Anny Federovny,” 249.

¹¹⁷⁵ Buketova, *Alma-Ata i Almatynsy*.

¹¹⁷⁶ Kelly argues that how urban children remember their childhood significantly differ from the memoirs of children who grew up in rural areas. Kelly, “A Joyful Soviet Childhood,” 14.

short supply anymore.¹¹⁷⁷ For Tälip Äbishev, motorcycles, Moskvich cars, radios and gramophones were the symbols of the good life in the post-war years.¹¹⁷⁸

Conclusion

The year 2018 was declared as the year of the “happy child” in Aktöbe oblast.¹¹⁷⁹ Throughout the year, a series of activities were devoted to this theme. The project was part of the national initiative *Rūkhanī Zhanghyrū* (Spiritual Revival), a nationwide initiative that was defined by Nazarbayev as a package for the modernization of Kazakh culture and identity. The oblast level activities reached a national audience particularly thanks to a children’s singing contest; the winner of the contest got to sing in the world-renowned Kazakh singer Dimash Kudaibergen’s concert.¹¹⁸⁰

The range of the discourse of happy childhood is limitless in contemporary Kazakhstan. Through a search of “*baqytty balalyq shaq*” (happy childhood), “*baqytty bala*” (happy child), “*men baqytty balamyn*” (I am a happy child) and “*biz baqytty balamyz*” (we are happy children), one can find children’s TV shows, TV programs where adults discuss childhood, essay and photo contests, photo and painting exhibitions, various children’s day celebrations, parades, school lectures and seminars. The number of poems and songs with these titles is almost impossible to determine. For sure, the parallels between contemporary Kazakhstan and Stalinism are few. The meanings

¹¹⁷⁷ Taukenov, *Pamiat’ ...*, 18-19.

¹¹⁷⁸ Äbishev, *Ömir Ötkelderi*, 30-31.

¹¹⁷⁹ “V Aktyubinskoi oblasti startuet proekt ‘Baqytty Bala’”, <https://www.zakon.kz/4904870-v-aktyubinskoy-oblasti-startuet-proekt.html>.

¹¹⁸⁰ “‘Baqytty bala’ zhenimpazy Dīmashtyn kontsertinde än shyraqaydy”, Baq.kz, July 15, 2019, <https://baq.kz/news/othernews/ba-yty-bala-zhe-impazy-dimashty-kontsertinde-n-shyr-aydy/>.

attached to the myth of happy childhood have been transformed; it is so much more open to reinterpretation now. Today in Kazakhstan, coupled with the neoliberal pursuit of happiness, psychologists and other experts teach parents how to raise happy children, clothing brands sell children's clothes by claiming to provide children happiness, and private kindergartens continuously reproduce the discourse of happiness: hence, it is not possible to limit expressions of happy childhood to a national ideology and the leader cult. Nevertheless, in children's literature, journals, poems and songs, there are constant efforts to remind children that their exceptional happiness is a gift from their country and their leader Nazarbayev. It is only thanks to their country's independence and peacefulness that children can experience such happy lives (almost always family appears to be a main source of happiness together with their country).

In the Kazakh language, there are not many adjectives that are naturally tied with certain concepts: *tūghan zher* (native land / homeland) and *täüelsiz el* (independent country) are probably the most common examples today. Association of childhood with happiness is an example as powerful and common as these two examples are. Because of how strongly it is naturalized in contemporary Kazakhstan, it would shock many to hear that this myth was first created by the Stalinist regime, and in fact, association of childhood with happiness is neither natural nor universal. For example, for a native speaker of Turkish, happy childhood or childhood happiness (*mutlu çocukluk* or *çocuk(luk) mutluluğu*) does not sound familiar. In Turkey, children are primarily innocent

creatures, not happy ones. In public discourse, their innocence is frequently abused and transgressed by evil adults: innocence does not necessarily bring happiness.¹¹⁸¹

During the era of glasnost', the myth of childhood happiness provoked sarcasm and contempt in Russia. Commentators argued that the myth had been detrimental for children's lived experiences; the slogans drove out of adults' heads any concern for children in real life.¹¹⁸² Perhaps the omnipresent persistence and power of the myth of happy childhood in Kazakhstan has contributed to the lack of commemoration of tragic events in the 20th century. What is worth writing is happiness, and, as discussed in Chapter 4, heroism; not suffering. This chapter has shown that children of the 1930s have consolidated a counter discourse of the absence of childhood and particularly famine testimonies draw a grim picture of the brutal 1930s.

However, their reception in contemporary Kazakhstan is quite questionable. Most of the autobiographical famine accounts are unknown to the great majority of Kazakhs themselves. They are usually published in small circles without any national attention. Recently, Kazakh scholar Asel Kadyrkhanova provided a theoretical approach to the memory of the famine which can be seen as a first attempt. Kadyrkhanova conceptualizes Kazakhstan as a post-memory society and defines it as a "timeless space of trauma". In this approach, symptoms of trauma appear and are realized not immediately, but in the

¹¹⁸¹ Although we do not have any data to suggest that child abuse is more common in Turkey than the world average, especially in the recent years, the public has most severely reacted to cases of child abuse (these reactions are usually connected to the weakening of rule of law under the current regime). To my knowledge, the conceptions of childhood and the contemporary public discourse on children are quite understudied in Turkey. Hence, what I write here is mostly my own interpretation. However, in one study of childhood memories, we see that two different generations of Turkish citizens first and foremost associate their childhood with innocence which is commonly part of a nostalgic mindset. "Happy" is not a widely used adjective for childhood. Hasan Akbulut and Ruken Akar-Vural, "Çocukluğun Anımsanışı: Masumiyet Arayışında Uzak / Yakın Geçmiş Nostaljisi," *Milli Folklor* 95 (2012).

¹¹⁸² Quoted in Kelly, "A Joyful Soviet Childhood," 9.

next generations and the tragedy of fathers, mothers, grandparents (of not only famine, but of Stalinist repression in general) appear in the consciousness of the current Kazakh society.¹¹⁸³ However, although the author asks important questions, her approach is too subjective, based on her personal experience and no evidence is provided to show that contemporary Kazakh society can be classified as a post-memory society. That is accepted as a given in the text, but the importance of the memory of famine for the current generation is very questionable. Further research and analysis are required on this, yet, in my opinion, Kazakhstan is a case where a post-memory society never clearly emerged. In this respect, the suppression of memory was more or less successful and prevented the transmission of trauma to the next generations. Future attempts to bring the famine to the attention of the masses will not be a reflection of a post-memory society, but will rather be “reinvention”, or at least “rediscovery” of trauma.

A keen sense of the historical significance of personal suffering is dominant in post-Soviet Russian memoirs. Memoir writing was a collective project which rested on catastrophic historical experience and a tacit acceptance of authors’ status as victims.¹¹⁸⁴ In the Kazakh case, apart from famine testimonies (the great majority of which are oral histories, not memoirs), victimization is not a prevalent theme. Baghdad Zhandosay’s “genealogy-novel” is probably the most vivid expression of an unhappy childhood and an

¹¹⁸³ Asel Kadyrkhanova, “Beskonechnoe vremya ‘posle’. Iskusstvo kak instrument osmysleniia kul’turnoi pamiati i travmy v posovetskom Kazakhstane,” in *Zhivaia Pamiat’: Stalinizm v Kazakhstane - Proshloe, Pamiat’, Preodolenie*, eds. Zh. B. Abylkhozhina, M. L. Akulov and A. V. Tsai (Almaty: Izd. 2-e, 2020). The term post-memory was first introduced by Marianne Hirsch in her study of the impact of Holocaust trauma on children of Holocaust survivors and how survivors’ trauma has been reproduced among the next generations. Marianne Hirsch, “Family Pictures: *Maus*, Mourning, and Post-Memory,” *Discourse* 15, no. 2 (1992).

¹¹⁸⁴ Irina Paperno, “Personal Accounts of the Soviet Experience,” *Kritika: Explorations in Russian and Eurasian History* 3, no. 4 (2002): 593-596.

example of the “all my sorrows” genre.¹¹⁸⁵ Yet, even the National Library of Kazakhstan does not have a copy of the book and I learned about the book accidentally from Zhandosay’s daughter. Although this chapter only focuses on childhood memoirs, it can be said that consciously anti-Soviet themes are harder to find in Kazakh memoirs than post-Soviet Russian memoirs.

Even Mukhamet Shayakhmetov, whose first volume of memoirs is now treated as the ultimate testimony to Stalinist crimes in Kazakhstan, overcomes this conception of victimization in his second volume and focuses instead on improvements in living standards, frequently providing a positive picture of Soviet rule in Kazakhstan. In general, Shayakhmetov is conscious of the transformation brought by the war and not rarely compares and contrasts the policies in the 1930s to the post-war era. For example, he explains how religious practices once again became acceptable even for the self-claimed atheists of the 1930s, and how some traditional practices which were attacked in the 1930s reemerged in the post-war era such as traditional matchmaking for young Kazakhs.¹¹⁸⁶ Throughout the book, he focuses on how interethnic harmony was consolidated, while in the first volume he emphasized that Kazakhs and Russians almost never interacted with each other. He writes that “Although I was the only Kazakh among the teaching staff, I was never aware of any divisions between members of staff on ethnic grounds. We struck up respectful, good-natured, and almost familial relationships with the pupils’ parents, who were mostly Russians”.¹¹⁸⁷

¹¹⁸⁵ Many autobiographical statements from European parts of the Soviet Union, especially from peasant women, are in the “all my sorrows” mode. Fitzpatrick, “Happiness and *Toska*,” 365.

¹¹⁸⁶ Mukhamet Shayakhmetov, *A Kazakh Teacher’s Story: Surviving the Silent Steppe*, trans. Jan Butler (London: Stacey International, 2012), 12, 35.

¹¹⁸⁷ *Ibid.*, 67.

Therefore, even for the most widely known (usually the only known) victim of the Kazakh famine, victimization has its limits. We can speculate that the suppression of the memory of the famine and the subsequent rise of the heroic Kazakh national discourse during the war all contributed to the lack of a dominance of victimization in memoirs. Yet, it is also not possible to suggest that these people embraced ideological assumptions of socialism. What they tend to remember is usually a very de-ideologized life and this is certainly related to the point that this was acceptable within the boundaries of being Soviet by the 1940s. We can better understand this point when we admit the possibility of having a non-ideological Soviet childhood simultaneously with the possibility of not being critical of the regime. In this respect, memoirs help us to see Soviet childhood as a “normal” experience comparable to childhoods in other parts of the world.

CONCLUSION

Perhaps the most famous Kazakh orphan hero is the legendary sniper Äliya Moldaghulova who killed, according to some sources 78, according to others more than 200 Nazis in total. It is claimed that she killed more than 35 enemy soldiers in her last battle before she was martyred.¹¹⁸⁸ Even though anything we know about Äliya is inseparable from the myth that was constructed around her, sources agree on her patriotism and voluntarism for military service. Äliya was the quintessential Soviet Kazakh patriot. She was a symbol of Soviet internationalism: a female soldier from the “backward” Soviet East who lost her life while heroically defending Soviet homeland. She was also the symbol of Soviet regime’s will to raise young communists: growing up in Soviet detdoms and boarding schools, she enthusiastically responded to the call of Motherland. For Kazakhs though, she was, and she is, first and foremost the symbol of Kazakh heroism. So much so that, when the main Lenin monument in Almaty was removed in 1997, the statue of Äliya and Mänshuk Mämetova, another Kazakh female War heroine, replaced Lenin.

¹¹⁸⁸ Uzaqbay Qaūysov and Ghalymzhan Bayderbesov, *Äliya – Batyr qyzy, sen khalqymnyñ* (Aktöbe, 1995), 44-45.



Image 25: Stamp featuring Äliya to commemorate the fiftieth anniversary of the victory (1995)¹¹⁸⁹

Äliya was not a typical Kazakh orphan though. Having lost her mother in 1933¹¹⁹⁰, she was adopted by her maternal uncle Äübäkir Moldagulov. In 1935, Äliya moved to Moscow together with Äübäkir who was admitted to the transportation academy there. While her uncle was studying at the academy, Äliya grew up in detdoms and boarding schools in Moscow and Leningrad. She was even sent to the famous Artek pioneer camp for her success at school.¹¹⁹¹ Hence, Äliya’s detdom experience was very different from an average Kazakh orphan.

For the majority of famine orphans, life was much harder. Having lost his parents, Baghdad Zhandosay was adopted by a Russian Cossack family in Almaty. Zhandosay considered them as his new family. They welcomed Baghdad with open arms (the Russian man was fluent in Kazakh, that was how they communicated). When his Russian

¹¹⁸⁹ Available on her Wikipedia page.

¹¹⁹⁰ Sources are silent on her mother’s death which is a proof that all we know about Äliya depends on Soviet propaganda. Galymzhan Baiderbek claimed that Äliya’s mother was shot by a guard while trying to collect remains of potatoes during the famine. Kundyz Kasanova, “Novye svedeniia ob Alie Moldagulovoi govoriat, chto ee mat’ byla ubita, a mogila zateriana,” <https://rus.azattyq.org>, May 8, 2010 [accessed on October 5, 2020]. In any case, it is more than probable that she was a victim of the famine.

¹¹⁹¹ Ibid., 42-44.

We do not know for how long though. Successful students were usually sent to Artek for summer courses.

father was arrested in 1934 and his Russian mother had to leave him to a detdom, he was devastated. He writes in his memoirs: “Oh, my readers, my sorrowful life started from this bed. I did not talk to anyone for two days and just cried”. Zhandosay claims that he never smiled in this detdom and indeed very poorly remembers his life there. He knows he went to school but does not remember his class.¹¹⁹² Until the war, Baghdad lived like a half besprizornik who sometimes lived in this detdom, sometimes stayed with some relatives in Almaty, but frequently preferred to live on the street. Khlebnyi street behind Köktöbe in Almaty was where one could find the teenager Baghdad and his friends.¹¹⁹³

In fact, practically all Kazakh soldiers were famine survivors. Probably, only a very small portion of them was not directly affected by the hunger of early 1930s. The war was another blow for the surviving children. Qozhabek Zhumadildaev’s only surviving relative was his older brother. They had both been sent to detdoms in Tashkent. Qozhabek saw him for the last time when his brother came to say goodbye; having survived the famine, he died in the war.¹¹⁹⁴ Zhumazhan Aytzhanov remembers that most of the surviving children in his detdom in Aqtöbe oblast (400 of 800 perished in the winter of 1932-33) lost their lives in the war.¹¹⁹⁵

Yet, for the surviving Kazakh soldiers, the war was a completely transforming process. For Kemel Tokayev, the war experience defined the meaning of his life.¹¹⁹⁶

¹¹⁹² Zhandosay, *Shoshqanyñ Qumy*, 117.

¹¹⁹³ Private conversation with Zhandosay’s late daughter Raykhan Uzbekova. I learned about Zhandosay’s memoirs from Uzbekova. I am also grateful to her for the additional information she provided about her father’s life. Uzbekova passed away in July 2020 at the age of 72. I am also thankful to Uzbekova’s daughter Anna Russakova who introduced me to her mother.

¹¹⁹⁴ Kozhabek Zhumadildaev’s testimony in Zhüsip ed., *Asharshylyq Aqıqaty*, 238.

¹¹⁹⁵ Zhumazhan Aytzhanov, “Öli Riza Bolmai, Tiri Zharymas,” 93.

¹¹⁹⁶ How Tokayev considered war camaraderie as the most important value in his life is discussed in the introductory paragraph of the dissertation.

Haunting memories of Qadan Bekenov's childhood were replaced by heroism of the war. As he puts it: "Nothing is more valuable than a few reverent words – 'he is a War veteran!' – of my independent country."¹¹⁹⁷ Although Bekenov puts an emphasis on Kazakhstan's independence, it is clear that the war made him who he was.

In other ways too, the war made these orphans who they were. It was only after the war that many had the opportunity to enroll in higher education and took white-collar jobs. Not only Tokayev who studied relatively well before the war, but also the former half-besprizornik Zhandosay had this opportunity. Thanks to his participation in the war, Zhandosay, son of a kulak who wrote the most clearly anti-communist account of dekulakization and the famine, worked at the *Leninshil Zhas* (Young Leninist), the Kazakh Komsomol's main newspaper, for decades. After the independence, *Leninshil Zhas* became *Zhas Alash* (Young Alash) and Zhandosay continued to work in the newspaper's editorial office.¹¹⁹⁸ As his daughter told me, Zhandosay could never overcome his trauma and fear of the regime. Just like thousands of other famine survivors he kept silent and even his children knew nothing about what their father had endured.

Anyway, Zhandosay's case is emblematic to demonstrate how a radical anti-communist was integrated into the very system that was supposed to educate young generations in a communist soul primarily thanks to the war. Never a true believer, Zhandosay was definitely Sovietized in certain ways. His daughter Raykhan first joined

¹¹⁹⁷ Bekenov, "Täuelsiz elimniñ 'Soghys ardageri goi!' dep kurmettegen bir aңыз sözine eshteñe zhetpeydi".

¹¹⁹⁸ Alash refers to the legendary forefather of Kazakhs and it was the name of the nationalist and anti-Bolshevik Alash party. It is remarkable how little ideological confusion was there when these communist publications suddenly became nationalist ones. Similarly, *Sotsialistik Qazaqstan* (Socialist Kazakhstan), the main Kazakh-language newspaper of the republic, became *Egemen Qazaqstan* (Sovereign Kazakhstan).

the Pioneers and then the Komsomol. Raūshan Mombekova, Zhandosay's second daughter, studied cinematography in Moscow and became a famous artist. Soviet animation director Ivan Ivanov-Vano wrote a letter to Zhandosay to thank him for raising such a talented daughter.¹¹⁹⁹

Not only did he become a proud veteran and a Soviet patriot, Zhandosay also adapted to the frontline Soviet culture during the war. In his memoirs, he remembers a tavern near Pugasov bridge in Almaty. He writes that it was not possible to see Kazakhs among the clients of this tavern before the famine. But after 1934, Kazakhs crowded this tavern. The sight of drunken Kazakhs lying on the road is treated as a symbol of the dissolution of the traditional Kazakh society in Zhandosay's highly Islamically informed account.¹²⁰⁰ Yet, Zhandosay too started drinking during the war and he even had drinking contests with his veteran friends including Kemel Tokayev. Once, he drank 39 glasses of beer in such a contest although he lost. He also let his daughter marry a Russian.¹²⁰¹

¹¹⁹⁹ Kültöleū Muqash, "Baghdad Zhandosaydyn Izi," November 10, 2016, <https://abai.kz/post/46201?fbclid=IwAR0WwckWRmHG3CH47SiRprojk-mCXNs0VUF8Jx4daHb9YHitr05xDqup-uk>.

¹²⁰⁰ Zhandosay, *Shoshqanyñ Qumy*, 116.

¹²⁰¹ Private conversation with the late Raykhan Uzbekova. Despite his firmly anti-Bolshevik stance, Zhandosay never turns to ethnic hostility in his memoirs. However, for such a devout Muslim (as described in his memoirs) letting his daughter marry a non-Muslim is a clear indication of how he was Sovietized.



Image 26: Famine survivor and proud war veteran Baghdad Zhandosay in his old age¹²⁰²

Turganbek Kataev's case is even more striking. In his 1995 memoirs, he calls the famine a genocide against the Kazakh people and he emphasizes how Bolsheviks tricked Kazakhs and then attempted to annihilate them. Yet the tone of his memoirs takes a hundred degree turn when we start reading his War experience. Many famine survivors became proud war veterans and Soviet patriots. Kataev, on the other hand, not only turned out to be a proud Soviet patriot, but also embraced a discourse of communism. He specifically commemorates communists who died in the war and declares that he is proud that he became a party member.¹²⁰³ Hence, clearly an anti-Soviet and Kazakh nationalist author while discussing the 1930s, he appears as a Soviet patriot and a proud communist in the coming pages.

¹²⁰² Available in Muqash, "Baghdad Zhandosaydyn Izi".

¹²⁰³ Kataev, *Pamiat' o Voine*, 45.

Life stories of children of famine exemplify the fate of Kazakhs under Soviet rule. Their lives were destroyed, their families were torn apart, and their childhood was stolen. Yet, in a sense, they were the lucky ones. The great majority of Kazakh children of the same generation perished in the famine. The famine dissolved the traditional society and brought the steppe under the direct political and economic control of the Soviet regime. From then on, Kazakhstan was an indispensable part of the Soviet Union. Nonetheless, the destruction it brought to Kazakh society was so great that economic and political integration was not enough to recover from it quickly. In fact, research on Kazakhs' lives in the aftermath of the famine is quite limited. However, by equating political and economic control with Sovietization, recent studies on the famine assume that the famine Sovietized Kazakhs.

The calamity was deeper than a demographic catastrophe. Survivor testimonies allow us to understand how Kazakhs made sense of the collapse of the nomadic society. In a time of total crises, all social norms were crushed: children were abandoned to their fate on the steppe, daughters were sold by their fathers, babies were killed by their mothers. Memories of these horrible stories haunted survivors for years if not to the end of their lives. The images of little children who were just skin and bones with bloated bellies were not easy to forget. Whenever they recall the catastrophic years, they predominantly remember tragic fates of starving children: little infants trying to suck the breasts of their dead mothers, piles of corpses taken from a detdorm to a desolate place and poor children who fell prey to cannibals. These images represent the symbolic destruction of traditional social structures that could not be immediately replaced with new ones.

Adults looked for their children or other relatives for years; in many cases, only to find out that their children did not even recognize them. Tens of thousands of surviving Kazakh orphans or other abandoned children were hosted in Soviet detdoms. Yet, in contrast to popular assumptions about detdoms as institutions of Sovietization, these institutions' capacity to raise new Soviet citizens was quite limited throughout the 1930s. It was a period of scarcity for all Soviet citizens; yet in the periphery, and particularly in the post-famine Kazakhstan, Soviet rule was shaped by all kinds of administrative, economic and educational shortcomings. The image of a redeemed orphan had shaped the Bolshevik imagination of the new Soviet person. In a similar vein, authorities in Kazakhstan sometimes referred to detdom children as a child army. Nonetheless, there was a huge gap between Soviet ambitions and Soviet realities. Communist education was usually only a dream and the goals of cultural revolution were barely on the agenda of detdom personnel. It is true that a few orphans of the famine who were raised in these detdoms had successful careers later in their lives such as writers Kemel Tokayev and Ötebay Qanakhin. However, thousands of others could not be successfully integrated into society and were further marginalized in their post-detdom lives.

At the same time, Soviet authorities were continuously and publicly celebrating Soviet Kazakhstan's achievements. So much so that we are usually stuck with two almost completely separate histories of Soviet Kazakhstan in contemporary scholarship. The first one is a history of violence and destruction. The second one is a history of the linear development of Kazakh culture with its focus on arts, literature and education. The latter usually has its unique path which is not interrupted by the famine or by the war. Kazakh scholars usually perceive the latter as a history of Kazakh *national* modernization which

started in the nineteenth century with the emergence of the first “Enlighteners” and continued under Soviet rule thanks to the efforts of Kazakh intellectuals who are frequently perceived as national cadres resisting the Soviet rule. This sense of continuity and linear progression of Kazakh history was consolidated in the 1930s, while in reality, the rupture in the history of Kazakhs could not be any greater.

The sense of continuity is not only a product of nationalist imagination. It was also shaped by the nature of Soviet rule in Kazakhstan. I have argued that even though Kazakhstan was fully integrated into the Soviet system, the influence of Marxist ideology was limited due to institutional shortcomings, the reality of the famine, the consolidation of Stalinism and the war experience. The economic catastrophe required Kazakh children to read and think about livestock breeding for most of their time while their counterparts in other parts of the Soviet Union were engaged in discussions about Marxism. True, the image of poor Kazakh children, who were working as shepherds for the wealthy, saved by the Revolution was kept for decades with its emphasis on class struggle. Yet, the same Soviet regime ironically promised a life as shepherds for them. With the rise of the Stalin cult and the Stalinist conception of childhood with its emphasis on discipline and authority, class struggle became a mere detail in this discourse. The Stalin cult and the myth of happy childhood dominated the lives of children across the Soviet Union. But in Kazakhstan, there never emerged a truly revolutionary alternative discourse which can, at least partially, explain the endurance of Stalinist myth of happy childhood and the unquestioned role of patriarchal family in contemporary Kazakhstan.

The duality of Central Asian history is also strong in Western historiography. On the one hand, we have a history of violence and repression in which collectivization, anti-

Islamic destruction and the Terror occupy a central place. On the other hand, we have a history of social and cultural development in which Central Asian intellectuals, politicians, artists or women activists create a new culture and society. Repressive and productive policies went hand in hand throughout the Soviet regime; Central Asia was no exception. Thus, there is obviously some truth in this duality of historiography. In addition, in obvious contrast to Cold War historiography's assumptions, when the Soviet Union collapsed, Central Asia had been quite stable for decades. Even when it was possible, there was no burning desire in the region to break with the Union.

Searching for the sources of this curious stability in the productive cultural policies of the early Bolshevik rule has been mainstream in historiography for the last 15 years. Yet, the question is how deep the promises of cultural revolution were and how willing the masses were to embrace ideals of socialism. I have argued that the impact of the productive cultural policies of the regime was limited throughout the 1930s mainly because the regime lacked the capacity to spread its policies to the masses, and the locals were not too enthusiastic about the revolutionary zeal of the regime. On the contrary, repressive policies of the Soviet regime did change the lives of the masses in all Central Asia; even though Kazakhstan's experience of famine is unique. Consequently, the goal of creating the new Soviet person was barely achieved. Orphans of famine were perfect candidates for creating new Soviet citizens. Yet, detdoms largely failed in this project in the 1930s.

Child survivors' lives were once more transformed by the reality of the war. Having survived the famine, many more perished at the front. However, the remaining ones were this time fully integrated into the multinational Soviet body politic. The impact

of the war on Central Asia was overlooked in the past since the region was not part of the war scene. But recently, historians have emphasized how significantly life in the post-War Central Asia differed from the pre-war period. For the first time, Central Asian masses were integrated into a pan-Soviet campaign and they could claim equal citizenship. By the end of the war, they were not expected to embrace radicalism of the 1930s anymore. Contribution to the war effort shaped the definition of Soviet patriotism. It was at the intersection of wartime mobilization and the changing conception of being Soviet in Central Asia where the masses largely started to identify with the Soviet state. It was true for survivors too. They suppressed their trauma of the famine. But now they had a myth to identify with. They all became Soviet patriots and later played a significant role in the future of Kazakhstan. Nevertheless, as it is most obvious in the case of Baghdad Zhandosay, it does not mean that they were believers in the ideals of socialism. Neither were they required to be. They could claim equal citizenship while they were simultaneously adapting to the internationalist culture of the Red Army. From then on, they were war heroes and Soviet patriots, even the ones who held clearly anti-communist views. Few recognized that they were also famine survivors. Indeed, in many cases, they themselves desired to forget their horrible memories of the famine and their lives in detdoms. It is difficult to answer how far they succeeded in forgetting.

During and after the war, the internationalist character of the Soviet Union more and more shaped everyday life in Kazakhstan. The frontline experience of soldiers, evacuation of hundreds of thousands of citizens from European parts of the Soviet Union to Central Asia, together with industrial complexes and cultural institutions, and the common goal of defeating the enemy all contributed to the consolidation of

internationalism. Yet, even after the evacuated population left Kazakhstan, Kazakhs remained a minority in the republic. Particularly, Almaty and other large cities became hubs of a highly multinational society. Linguistic Russification was stronger in Kazakhstan than other Central Asian republics, because the new generations of Kazakhs grew up in this highly multinational environment, usually with little contact with fellow Kazakhs.

Internationalism was considerably strengthened in the post-war era as it can be seen in various memoirs. These memoirists also emphasize how life in the post-War Kazakhstan was more and more shaped by everyday experiences common to many Soviet citizens. Their depiction of post-War society is quite de-ideologized. While openly anti-Soviet themes are difficult to find in Kazakh memoirs (with the exception of some, not all, famine testimonies), these accounts are neither shaped by socialist ideals. The myth of happy childhood and its reception is a perfect case study to see how Soviet conceptions continue to shape minds in contemporary Kazakhstan while they are totally separated from the ideology behind. Perhaps it is not surprising that Soviet nostalgia is still strong in the country while a significant left-wing movement does not exist.

We can understand Sovietization in Kazakhstan in a few different ways. It first of all means Soviet political rule. The establishment of a socialist economic system is much more important though. In this sense, Kazakhstan's Sovietization started mainly with collectivization. Class struggle was strengthened in the campaign against bays, private ownership of land and livestock was abolished, collective farms were introduced, state monopoly over means of production was ensured. We can also understand Sovietization as a shared mindset and lifestyle of Soviet citizens that tied the rural with the urban and

the periphery with the center. This was a longer and cumulative process which was not necessarily shaped by ideology. Collectivization was a very significant step for the transformation of Kazakhs' lives. However, even though the nomadic society was destroyed, the regime's capacity to transform lives remained limited. Chaos and isolation continued to shape Kazakhs' lives. The Great Patriotic War was the most important turning point for the consolidation of a shared mindset and lifestyle. Wartime mobilization integrated Kazakhs into the multiethnic Soviet body. Yet, Sovietization in this sense was not a completed process, and continued after the war with migration to cities, the spread of Soviet institutions in rural areas and the strengthening of mass media in the post-war period. Lastly, we can understand Sovietization as the consolidation of Soviet patriotism and citizens' self-identification with Soviet state. I have argued that Sovietization in this sense had only a limited impact in Kazakhstan throughout the 1930s. If wartime mobilization is one of the main reasons why Kazakhs largely came to embrace Soviet identity, changing conceptions of being Soviet in Central Asia due to war experience was the second main reason. Radicalism of the earlier decades brought destruction and alienated many. The post-war environment allowed the integration of even the most alienated into Soviet society. The myth of war contributed to the Sovietization of Kazakhs much more than myths of revolution did.

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