

Knowledge and Power on the Kazakh Steppe, 1845-1917

by

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For Lindsey

Я помню чудное мгновенье
Передо мной явилась ты,
Как мимолетное виденье,
Как гений чистой красоты.

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Glossary

arshin – a unit of length equal to 28 inches

aryk – irrigation canal

aul – Kazakh for “village”; also an administrative subdivision of the *volost'*

baranta (Kaz. *barymta*) – driving off of livestock during a dispute

biy – Kazakh judge/orator

desiatina – a unit of area equal to 2.7 acres

guberniia – province

oblast' – province

uezd – county, an administrative subdivision of both the *guberniia* and *oblast'*

uezd nachal'nik – a Russian military-administrative commander of a country

versta – a unit of length equal to about two-thirds of a mile

volost' – township, an administrative subdivision of the *uezd*

zhut/dzhut – hard frost after an early thaw, covering steppe fodder in an impenetrable crust of ice, disastrous for the welfare of mobile pastoralists and their livestock

Abstract

This dissertation is a study of imperial epistemology – the Russian Empire’s attempts to produce useful knowledge about the Kazakh steppe, and the complex interrelationships between geographic, ethnographic, and statistical accounts of the region and imperial power. The dissertation pays particular attention to the role of intermediary figures from the Kazakh population of the steppe in producing, shaping, and re-interpreting information about themselves and their surroundings, emphasizing Kazakh agency in the construction of imperial knowledge.

Drawing on Russian- and Kazakh-language sources, this dissertation makes a series of interrelated arguments about knowledge production and Russian imperialism. It demonstrates that the corpus of information that scholars and bureaucrats gathered about the Kazakh steppe was both crucial to sustaining Russia’s colonial presence there and fragmented in unpredictable ways. Such contradictory information, in complicated feedback loops with organs of political and administrative power, produced incongruous social, economic and environmental outcomes, sometimes strikingly different from the expectations of its producers. The wide variation of imperial Russian thought concerning the steppe and its inhabitants also created opportunities for Kazakh intermediaries to make original contributions to it. As Russian imperial power shaped their views of the world, so too did these individuals shape the way the Russian Empire viewed the steppe and its inhabitants. Moreover, by focusing on Kazakhs imbricated in the discursive and institutional space of the Russian Empire, the dissertation moves beyond binaries of

colonizer and colonized. It shows, instead, that myriad positional gradations existed between these two poles, and that shared knowledge was deployed in support of a wide range of views about imperialism, identity, civilization, and progress. Kazakh intermediaries neither resisted nor unquestioningly accepted imperial rule, but, participating in the Russian Empire's knowledge-gathering project, attempted to negotiate its meaning.

Both imperial Russian scholarship concerning the steppe and Kazakhs' contributions to it were profoundly ambivalent. While Russian scholars and administrators were uncertain of the loyalty and civilizational aptitudes of their new subjects, Kazakh intermediaries strove to reconcile the opportunities they identified in Russian imperialism with the harm it caused the steppe's inhabitants. Such mutual ambivalence led, ultimately, to inconsistent policymaking, frustrated expectations, and widespread rebellion.

Introduction

Knowing a Borderland, Making a Colony

Overview and Argument

Since the formation of Kievan Rus' in the mid-ninth century, the Eurasian steppe was a constant ulcer for a succession of eastern Slavic polities usually referred to collectively, for convenience, as "Russia." Although the outcome of the contest among Russia and a succession of pastoralist confederations for control of this region was not foreordained, and Russian rulers were frequently subordinate to their steppe counterparts during, for example, the era of the Golden Horde, from the early 18th century onward, the Russian Empire gradually consolidated its suzerainty over this region.¹ Russian rule on the steppe, beginning from a defensive perimeter of self-sufficient fortifications, gradually evolved into a major undertaking, with a sizeable settler population, an administrative structure partially integrated with that of the metropole, and significant intervention in the cultural and economic worlds of the Kazakhs, a group of Turkic pastoralists who, after the flight of the Kalmyks to present-day Mongolia, constituted the numerically dominant part of the region's population.² The steady increase of the Russian Empire's intervention and influence on the steppe, in turn, was supported by a

¹ Fred Bergholz has offered a highly implausible explanation for this shift that focuses on the proliferation of firearms, which were only occasionally effective in the 18th century and available to pastoralist states as well. See Bergholz, *The Partition of the Steppe: The Struggle of the Russians, Manchus and the Zunghar Mongols for Empire in Central Asia, 1619-1758: A Study in Power Politics* (New York: Peter Lang, 1993). Much stronger is the argument offered by Peter Perdue, who emphasizes a combination of environmental factors and the personal idiosyncracies of several important figures in the enclosing of the central Eurasian steppe by the Russian and Qing Empires. See Perdue, *China Marches West: The Qing Conquest of Central Eurasia* (Cambridge, MA: The Belknap Press of Harvard UP, 2005).

² The best treatment of these events in English is Michael Khodarkovsky, *Where Two Worlds Met: The Russian State and the Kalmyk Nomads, 1600-1771* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell UP, 1992).

state-sponsored effort, over the course of several decades, to amass as much information as possible about the land and people under its putative control there. This effort, in a broad sense, is the subject of this dissertation. By understanding the contradictions of and limitations on imperial Russian scholarship pertaining to the steppe, we can better understand the successes and failures of the Russian Empire's attempts to translate knowledge about this region into effective power.

Increased Russian interventionism on the steppe necessitated the creation of low-level administrative functionaries who were difficult to draw from the metropolitan population; scribes, translators, *volost'* (township) administrators and, later, village schoolteachers had, as a practical matter, to be selected from the colonized population and provided with linguistic and vocational training. The young Kazakh men who entered colonial service in this way were, on the surface, subaltern figures, part of the imperial Russian state yet required to engage with it on its terms.³ They also played a vital role in the compilation of scholarly knowledge about the steppe for metropolitan consumption, not just as translators but, sometimes, as researchers in their own right; imperial Russian representations of the steppe were constrained not only by its physical reality (as Mark Bassin has argued for Siberia) but also by the Kazakhs who participated in this representational project.⁴ What Kazakhs contributed to imperial Russian representations of the steppe, though, is only half of the story. An equally important product of this intercultural exchange is the representations of Russian imperialism that

³ The term "subaltern," in the non-military sense, first appeared in the work of Antonio Gramsci to denote people (workers, for Gramsci) cut off from a meaningful role in a regime of power. See Gramsci, *The Modern Prince and Other Writings*, trans. Louis Marks (New York: International Publishers, 1967). My understanding here, focusing on cultural authority and imperialism, owes more to the definition expressed by Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak in Spivak, "The New Subaltern: A Silent Interview," Vinayak Chaturvedi, ed., *Mapping Subaltern Studies and the Postcolonial* (London: Verso, 2000) 325.

⁴ Mark Bassin, *Imperial Visions: Nationalist Imagination and Geographical Expansion in the Russian Far East, 1840-1865* (Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 1999).

Kazakhs developed among themselves, and that they presented to imperial Russian and Kazakh audiences alike in a wide range of formats. The story of the Russian Empire's informational encounter with the steppe cannot be told without intermediaries, and the story of those intermediaries cannot be told exclusively in terms of their contributions to metropolitan discourses about the steppe.

Prior to the 19th century, imperial Russian administrators had not been entirely uninformed about the landscape of Central Asia and the steppe, but the sources of information available to them were, in the view of later administrators, incomplete and unsystematic. Such were, for example, the travel narrative of the 15th-century Tver' merchant Afanasii Nikitin and the 17th-century *Kniga Bol'shogo Chertezha (Book of the Great Map)*.⁵ The 18th century, then, saw two major quasi-scholarly expeditions to western Siberia and the steppe; the Orenburg Expedition of 1734-44, led first by I. K. Kirilov, but subsequently by V. N. Tatishchev and I. I. Nepliuev, was ostensibly intended to create a system of protective forts against the nomadic Bashkir people, but also included geographers, ethnographers, and botanists, while the German zoologist P. S. Pallas was commissioned by Catherine II to lead an expedition that encompassed many areas later comprising the empire's steppe provinces in 1768-74.⁶ Such irregular efforts were not extended and professionalized until the 1830s, with the expansion of the Russian General Staff and the establishment by Nicholas I in 1832 of an academy for

⁵ On the former see L. S. Semenov, *Puteshestvie Afanasiia Nikitina* (Moscow: Nauka, 1980) and, for the original text, A. N. Nikitin, *Khozhenie za trimor'ia* (Moscow: n.p., 1960); on the latter see L. Bagrow, "The Book of the Great Map," *Imago Mundi* 5 (1948): 81-82.

⁶ See Iu. Smirnov, *Orenburgskaia ekspeditsiia (kommisiiia) i prisoiedinenie Zavolzh'ia k Rossii v 30-40-eg. XVIII veka* (Samara: izd-vo. Samarskogo universiteta, 1997) and V. Marakuev, *Petr Simon Pallas, ego zhizn', ucheniia trudy i puteshestviia* (Moscow: tip. A. A. Troletskago i ko., 1877). On conceptions of Russian nationhood and ethnic difference in these and other expeditions of the 18th century see Yuri Slezkine, "Naturalists versus Nations: Eighteenth-Century Russian Scholars Confront Ethnic Diversity," Daniel R. Brower and Edward J. Lazzerini, eds., *Russia's Orient: Imperial Borderlands and Peoples, 1700-1917* (Bloomington, IN: Indiana UP, 1997), 27-57.

training staff officers capable of “mapping, studying, strategically analyzing and statistically categorizing the various Asian peoples” under the administrative authority, however tenuous, of military governors in the borderlands.⁷ By that time, M. M. Speranskii, in his role as Governor-General of Siberia, had created an administrative code for Kazakhs of the Middle Horde that was roundly derided, by later observers, for the ignorance of Kazakh customs and the natural conditions of the steppe that supported it.⁸ During the reign of Nicholas I, under the influence of a group of “enlightened bureaucrats,” the natural conditions of all parts of the Russian Empire, especially those of recently-conquered borderlands (to say nothing of the behavior and customs of their inhabitants) became a “known unknown,” and from that point forward a significant effort was made to address this gap in knowledge.⁹ With increased activity on the part of the General Staff, the founding in 1845 of the Imperial Russian Geographical Society (and subsequent opening of regional branch offices), the 1857 establishment of the Central Statistical Committee, and the establishment of a department of Oriental Studies at St. Petersburg University in 1855, to name a few, the Russian Empire’s interaction with the steppe and other “unknown” borderlands came to be driven by a hunger for scholarly, yet politically applicable information about these areas.

At first glance, the achievements of these decades of organized investigation were stunning. Russia’s external line of fortifications, passing just south of Orenburg in 1824,

⁷ Alex Marshall, *The Russian General Staff and Asia* (New York: Routledge, 2006) 9.

⁸ For such criticism, see Chapter 1 of this dissertation; for an insightful treatment of Speranskii’s 1822 “Regulations on Siberian Kirgiz,” see Virginia Martin, *Law and Custom on the Steppe: The Kazakhs of the Middle Horde and Russian Colonialism in the Nineteenth Century* (Richmond: Curzon, 2001) 35-42.

⁹ W. Bruce Lincoln coined the phrase “enlightened bureaucrats” in his *In the Vanguard of Reform: Russia’s Enlightened Bureaucrats, 1825-1861* (DeKalb, IL: Northern Illinois UP, 1982), a canonical account of the pre-Alexandrine origins of the Great Reforms of the 1860s. For a similar argument, stressing the ideas of systematization and standardization that emerged under Nicholas I, see Richard Wortman, *The Development of a Russian Legal Consciousness* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1976).

advanced more than a thousand miles further south by 1854, a military movement that swallowed the steppe whole; twenty years later the Turkestani oases of Khiva, Tashkent, and Samarqand had all fallen, and the Russian Empire's external southern border nearly reached Afghanistan. A succession of revised law codes, altered on the basis of new ethnographic observations, was published, and small cities, some of them thriving trading posts, emerged where formerly there had been fortresses. Moreover, a wave of irregular Slavic peasant settlers appeared on the steppe in the 1860s, and geographic and statistical data were later instrumental in the organization of peasant settlement from "European" Russia to the steppe; in some provinces, by 1910, resettled Slavic peasants comprised almost half of the total population.¹⁰ By many of the indices according to which a colonial empire can be judged, Russian imperialism in Central Asia and the steppe was a success, and the information that Russian scholars and bureaucrats amassed about these regions, with the significant assistance of Kazakh intermediaries, played an important role in it.¹¹

Yet even before the revolutions of 1917, there were signs that all was not well with Russia's Central Asian colonial empire. Proposals for the economic development of the steppe focused mainly on its agricultural potential, despite indications from several quarters that the characteristics of its soil and hydrography made its capacity for grain cultivation low. Peasant migrants who arrived there, with or without governmental

¹⁰ Donald Treadgold, *The Great Siberian Migration: Government and Peasant in Resettlement from Emancipation to the First World War* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton UP, 1957), 174.

¹¹ Indeed, Willard Sunderland concludes his excellent study of Russian colonization of the Ponto-Caspian steppe by noting that the spatialization of this region as a core part of "Russia" was enduring precisely because of the way those who colonized it naturalized their possession of it, "so...that it seemed hard to believe that the plains could ever have belonged to anyone else" (228). See Sunderland, *Taming the Wild Field: Colonization and Empire on the Russian Steppe* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell UP, 2004). Sunderland is correct that in much of the steppe (and Central Asia), Russian cultural and economic forms proved long-enduring; however, this dissertation will also show that the Romanov dynasty's colonization of the steppe contained the seeds of serious difficulty for its particular morphology of rule there.

permission, frequently discovered that the land on which they settled would not guarantee their survival, or that Kazakh pastoralists failed to recognize their claims to it. New legal regulations were issued precisely because, in some cases, colonial administrators argued that the old ones had been based on a false understanding of Kazakh legal and cultural traditions. Despite a widespread conviction that an increased Russian presence on the steppe – both institutional, particularly in the form of schools, and human, in the form of settlers – would make it more economically productive, some imperial Russian observers (not always well-disposed towards tsarist policies) noted that many Kazakhs seemed to be growing increasingly destitute as Russian colonists occupied their land. Educated, Russophone Kazakhs were a necessity for the daily functioning of the colonial state, but their loyalty and capability was always, for some, subject to doubt. Imperial knowledge facilitated the Russian Empire's incorporation and governance of the steppe, but contradictions within this body of knowledge meant that the manner in which the steppe was governed, in the long term, produced contradictory social and economic outcomes that threatened its stability there.

Tensions and contradictions also loomed large in the lives of Kazakh intermediary figures, who grew more numerous as bilingual schools increased in number and demand for their services grew larger in an expanding colonial bureaucracy. The project on which many of them embarked, by contributing to the ethnographic, statistical, and geographic study of their native steppe, was a double-edged sword; even as it provided the opportunity of self-representation (within the limits of metropolitan discourse), it also enabled the consolidation and expansion of Russian governance there. Crucially, though, until late in the parliamentary era, none of them understood this position to be

contradictory – being Kazakh and being an imperial servitor were not, in their minds, mutually exclusive. Rather, the intermediary figures who populate this work merged visions of enlightened, well-informed imperial Russian governance (visions often, to their chagrin, remote) with a range of understandings of the local specificity of the steppe, whether economic, environmental, or cultural. These complicated views, although they were suffused with a sense of Kazakh distinctiveness, cannot be called nationalist or proto-nationalist *avant la lettre* insofar as they portrayed a continued Russian colonial presence on the steppe, in some form, as necessary and desirable. Neither, however, can such visions be called exclusively the products of “colonized minds,” as they often reflected the strikingly original re-appropriation of the colonizers’ discourses about cultural difference, economic development, and civilizational change.¹² Indeed, the very multiplicity of imperial Russian thinking about these topics implies a conscious process of selecting and winnowing the competing messages that were present in metropolitan educational and administrative institutions, journals, and learned societies. Participating in the imperial knowledge-gathering project and drawing their conclusions about Russian imperialism’s relationship to the steppe (and vice-versa), at least in part, on the basis of their observations as scholars and bureaucrats – as well as their experiences in the organizations through which they fulfilled these roles – Kazakh intermediaries sought to compromise with the colonial state as long as such compromises seemed possible. Only after a political shift towards aggressive cultural and political Russification made it clear that a “third way” between imperialism and nationalism was untenable did nationalism as such emerge.

¹² For the expression “colonized mind” see Dipesh Chakrabarty, *Nationalist Thought and the Colonial World: a Derivative Discourse?* (London: Zed Books, for the United Nations University, 1986).

Since this dissertation is equally about the Russian Empire's attempt to gather information about Central Asia and the steppe and the role that Kazakh intermediaries played in this effort, its arguments pertain to both topics. It will argue that imperial knowledge, that is, the corpus of information that scholars and bureaucrats gathered about the Kazakh steppe was, while vitally important to sustaining Russia's colonial presence there, also fragmented and contradictory in unpredictable ways, and that such tensions produced, in turn, contradictory social, economic and environmental outcomes. Moreover, because of the centralized, autocratic political structure of the Russian Empire, information ostensibly gathered to facilitate the creation of policy for the steppe provinces could be, and was, discarded in the name of political expediency, even after the creation of a legislative body in 1905; in this sense imperial scholarship functioned differently in Russia than in other European colonial empires, although the purpose for which it was intended was similar.¹³ The diversity of imperial Russian scholarly and bureaucratic discourse concerning the steppe and its inhabitants, in turn, also set the stage for Kazakh intermediaries to contribute to it in original ways. Even so, metropolitan institutions and interlocutors significantly shaped Kazakhs' views of themselves and the steppe, and the necessity of presenting their ideas to such institutions strongly militated against the influence of such views, no matter how original, in the political and administrative sphere. These figures were neither completely dependent on nor independent of a metropolitan culture in which they had personal, social, and professional

¹³ Thus the dissertation confirms, in a way, one of the oldest clichés about Russian autocracy, the tendency of observers both scholarly and non- to characterize it as “arbitrary rule.” See, for instance, Sheila Fitzpatrick's characterization of the problems of the parliamentary system under Nicholas II: “The old arbitrary habits of autocratic rule...undermined these concessions” (16). Fitzpatrick, *The Russian Revolution* (New York: Oxford UP, 2008). Despite the great store which reformist actors, in particular, set by the collection and application of precise information about the land and people of the Russian Empire, at crucial points in the narrative, such data, however flawed, were simply ignored.

stakes. Their ideas, further, should not be seen exclusively as part of a teleological process, at the end of which lies nationalism, although a nationalist movement does emerge at the end of this narrative; rather, their writings represent, equally, polemics about progress, civilization, and economic change. Identity politics were a part of such debates, in the sense that all were connected to differing understandings of the meaning of Kazakhness, but not the most important part, and not in a way that necessarily had to produce a nationalist movement. Both imperial Russian scholarship concerning the steppe and Kazakhs' contributions to it may be characterized as profoundly ambivalent.¹⁴ Russian scholars and administrators were uncertain, throughout the 19th century, whether the borderland they gradually turned into a colony was the new breadbasket of the Empire or its stockyard, whether it was populated by hostile and uncivilizable brutes or intelligent, loyal potential citizens; Kazakh intermediaries strove to reconcile the opportunity they identified in Russian imperialism with the cultural and economic threat it often seemed to pose to the steppe's inhabitants. Such mutual ambivalence led, ultimately, to ill-advised or poorly-understood policies, frustrated expectations, and rebellion.

Historiography

Each of the components of this dissertation – the study of Russian geography and ethnography, the Russian Empire's policies towards non-Russian nationalities and non-Orthodox confessions, the study of the role of such academic disciplines in colonial empires generally, the rise of a Kazakh *intelligentsia* from Kazakhs educated and

¹⁴ I am using this word in the straightforward sense of “having mixed or contradictory feelings about something,” rather than in the more obscure and specialized sense that it has been ascribed in some theoretical literature. See e.g. Homi K. Bhabha, “Of Mimicry and Man” in his *The Location of Culture* (New York: Routledge, 1994).

employed by the Russian Empire, and the theoretical implications of all of these components – has a historiographical tradition which informs the dissertation’s arguments. I will briefly discuss each of these in turn.

One tradition in the study of imperial Russian geography, ethnography, and statistics as scholarly disciplines is largely informational rather than argumentative in nature, and has ignored the role of non-Russian intermediaries in the development of these fields.¹⁵ These works are valuable sources of detailed information on the biographies of leading 19th century scholars, and the key findings of various research expeditions within and outside of the Russian Empire, but treat such research as isolated from administrative decision-making and imperial expansion. Another trend has connected the scholarly study of the steppe and other parts of the Empire with the political goals and ideologies of the institutions sponsoring it. Thus Bruce Lincoln treats the Imperial Russian Geographical Society (IRGO) as one of the most important institutions for a group of “enlightened bureaucrats” under Nicholas I who were fundamental to the implementation of the Great Reforms under Alexander II, and the importance of statistical and environmental research for the fulfillment of military and agricultural reforms under the latter is generally acknowledged.¹⁶ The military origins and purposes of imperial scholarship, indeed, have drawn substantial scholarly attention, not without reason in light of the voluminous publications produced by the Russian

¹⁵ See e.g. L. S. Berg, *Vsesoiuznoe geograficheskoe obshchestvo za sto let* (Moscow: publisher unknown, 1946); A. N. Pypin, *Istoriia russkoi etnografii*, 4 vols. (St. Petersburg: tip. M. M. Stasiulevicha, 1890-92); S. Q. Qosanbaev, *Istoriia stanovleniia i razvitiia etnografii Kazakhstana: XVIII-XX vv.* (Almaty: Daik-Press, 2005); and S. A. Tokarev, *Istoriia russkoi etnografii: dooktiabrskii period* (Moscow: Nauka, 1966)

¹⁶ John Bushnell, “Miliutin and the Balkan War: Military Reform versus Military Performance,” Ben Eklof, John Bushnell, and Larisa Zakharova, eds., *Russia’s Great Reforms, 1855-1881* (Bloomington, IN: Indiana UP, 1994), 139-160; W. Bruce Lincoln, *In the Vanguard of Reform: Russia’s Enlightened Bureaucrats, 1825-1861* (DeKalb, IL: Northern Illinois UP, 1982); Alexander Vucinich, *Science in Russian Culture, 1861-1917* (Stanford, CA: Stanford UP, 1970).

General Staff.¹⁷ This military focus, although understandable, has also led to neglect of the broader range of rhetoric and ideology available to imperial scholars, some of whom thought of governance in colonized areas in terms of economic and cultural development (in several, contradictory forms) rather than military strategy. These valuable works, moreover, have not been substantively concerned with the role of non-Russian intermediaries in the Russian Empire's informational encounter with its colonies, and their focus on institutional politics has ignored the ambivalent attitudes and contradictory outcomes that were part of it. Geography, ethnography, and other academic disciplines were closely connected to broad political trends in the Russian Empire, but the political outcomes of research concerning Russia's borderlands and colonies were rarely straightforward.

Indeed, an emphasis on the tensions and contradictions inherent in the Russian Empire's policies towards non-dominant nationality groups has characterized much recent scholarship on the imperial era. For example, in a study of conversion and apostasy in the Volga-Kama region, Paul Werth argues that, beginning in the late 1820s, the imperial model favored by the old regime began to shift from one emphasizing dynastic loyalty (and thus permitting substantial diversity) to an assimilative, nation-state model.¹⁸ Crucially, for Werth, this transition always remained incomplete, making the Russian Empire "something *between*," and hindering its ability to create a consistent confessional policy for the Muslims and animists of the region.¹⁹ Robert Geraci, in his

¹⁷ See Marshall, *Russian General Staff* and David A. Rich, *The Tsar's Colonels: Professionalism, Strategy, and Subversion in Late Imperial Russia* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1998) 21. Rich's emphasis on the conflict of interests between the twin ideals of state security and preserving the autocracy among the General Staff is, however, a useful one for this dissertation.

¹⁸ Paul Werth, *At the Margins of Orthodoxy: Mission, Governance, and Confessional Politics in Russia's Volga-Kama Region, 1827-1905* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell UP, 2002) 7.

¹⁹ *Ibid.*, italics in text.

Kazan'-centered investigation of identity politics, comes to broadly similar conclusions: there were competing models of assimilation for non-Russian subjects of the Empire (and, indeed, fundamental doubts about its desirability), reflecting mutually incompatible notions of Russian nationality. This conflict ended, he notes, with a sharp rightward turn in the last years of the Romanov dynasty, rejecting assimilative models in favor of the maintenance of difference.²⁰ In emphasizing that such tensions existed and were pernicious for the particular morphology of imperial rule that generated them, the present work has much in common with both of these monographs and differs slightly from Willard Sunderland's work on the Russian colonization of the Ponto-Caspian steppe.²¹ My study goes further than any of these, though, in emphasizing the role that contradictions in imperial epistemology – the totality of what the Russian Empire “knew” about the Kazakh steppe and its inhabitants at any given moment – was productive of policies that worked to cross-purposes, fostering a range of ideas about how best to maintain, or squelch, diversity.²² Contradiction was an inherent part of Russian imperialism at an even more fundamental level than these excellent studies have demonstrated.

²⁰ Robert Geraci, *Window on the East: National and Imperial Identities in Late Tsarist Russia* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell UP, 2001).

²¹ Sunderland, *Taming*, notes the existence of such tensions, but in his account they do not ultimately hinder what he considers most important, that a Russian population was permanently established on the Pontic steppe, under whatever morphology of rule, in a way that was made to seem natural and inherent. The conclusion of the present work strikes a different tone. However, Sunderland's axiomatic claim that peasant colonization of the steppe, contrary to historical mythmaking, was indeed “a matter of imperialism” (3) is fundamental for my study.

²² Geraci (chapters 5 and 6, 158-222) does offer an extensive treatment of ethnography, but this study contradicts his assertions in two senses. He argues that, in Kazan', little ethnographic work that was argumentative, rather than empirical, did anything but “glorify the Russians, marginalize the Muslim Tatars, and bring the smaller ethnic groups into the former while distancing them from the latter” (194). This may well be applicable to Kazan', but the participation of Kazakhs and political exiles in ethnographic studies makes it hard to apply to the steppe oblasts. Further, Geraci argues that ethnography was a means of expressing broad political agendas than of providing “objective” guidance for assimilation-minded administrators (159). The present work indicates, however, that the ideas in such politically-motivated accounts, in ethnography and other disciplines, could subsequently be put to uses substantially different from the intent of their authors. See especially the last two chapters of the dissertation on this score.

Other recent scholarship has emphasized the diversity of thought characteristic of the Russian Empire's study of its non-Russian borderlands. The work of Nathaniel Knight is particularly notable in this respect. Focusing on IRGO, Knight has argued that imperial Russian scholars quickly developed a practice of ethnography distinct from that in western Europe, centered around the concept of *narodnost'*, "endowing every nation [under study] with its unique and unmistakable identity," and doubtful that ethnographic and geographic knowledge should be practically applicable.²³ Elsewhere, Knight has strongly argued against the applicability of Orientalist critiques of the relationship between power and knowledge in the Russian Empire, contending that the constraints autocracy placed on scholars allowed them substantial independence of thought as long as they remained outside the sphere of political action.²⁴ The notion that imperial epistemology encompassed a wide range of views is also foundational for Yuri Slezkine's study of the "small peoples" of the Russian Arctic and Marina Mogil'ner's recent history of physical anthropology in Russia.²⁵ Mogil'ner's argument is based on Thomas Kuhn's use of the term "paradigm" to denote the set of practices associated with a scholarly discipline (research questions, methodologies, possible interpretations); physical anthropology in Russia, she argues, was paradigmatic but not monolithic – significant

²³ Nathaniel Knight, "Science, Empire, and Nationality: Ethnography in the Russian Geographical Society, 1845-1855," Jane Burbank and David Ransel, eds., *Imperial Russia: New Histories for the Empire* (Bloomington, IN: Indiana UP, 1998) 132-33.

²⁴ Nathaniel Knight, "Grigor'ev in Orenburg, 1851-62: Russian Orientalism in the Service of Empire?" *Slavic Review* 59.1 (Spring 2000): 74-100. Precisely what Knight views as the failure of Orientalists like Grigor'ev to convince administrators of the relevance of their work, or to incur any changes in colonial policy on its basis, is at the core of his argument about the inapplicability of Saidian Orientalism to imperial Russia. See Knight, "On Russian Orientalism: A Response to Adeeb Khalid," *Kritika: Explorations in Russian and Eurasian History* 1.4 (2000): 701-15. A similar, overly sanguine idealization of independent, apolitical Orientology appears frequently in David Schimmelpenninck van der Oye, *Russian Orientalism: Asia in the Russian Mind from Peter the Great to Emigration* (New Haven, CT: Yale UP, 2010).

²⁵ Marina Mogil'ner, *Homo imperii: istoriia fizicheskoi antropologii v Rossii* (Moscow: Novoe literaturnoe obozrenie, 2008); Yuri Slezkine, *Arctic Mirrors: Russia and the Small Peoples of the North* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell UP, 1994).

diversity of thought was possible within the physical-anthropological paradigm.²⁶ Eschewing Kuhn, Slezkine begins from the premise that “there are meaningful differences between various colonial voices,” and indeed many of his protagonists had uncertain or oppositional relationships with the tsarist state.²⁷ Slezkine, moreover, is as interested as Knight in questioning the applicability of Saidian Orientalism to the Russian Empire, arguing that it is erroneous “to assume that all colonial representations are ultimately determined by the ‘gross political fact’ of colonial domination.”²⁸ This dissertation supports such general conclusions about the diversity of imperial scholarly thinking, and fully agrees with the proposition that such difference truly mattered.²⁹ It will also demonstrate, however, that the conditions on which Knight and Slezkine’s critiques rest were, at times, inapplicable. The ideas of even politically aloof scholars could have unintended political consequences, as component parts of discourses about the colonized; while representations were indeed not determined by colonial domination, they played a role in deciding which forms it should take. Ideas about the steppe, whether produced by people estranged from the tsarist regime or ideologically and professionally interested in it, were part of an empire-wide conversation about governing the steppe and its inhabitants. Contradictions among them led to surprising and paradoxical outcomes.

²⁶ Mogil’ner 18-19; see also Thomas S. Kuhn, *The Structure of Scientific Revolutions* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1962). Though I do not employ Kuhnian terminology in this dissertation, Mogil’ner’s conceptualization is helpful for thinking about imperial Russian geography and ethnography as well.

²⁷ Slezkine x.

²⁸ *Ibid.*, 390.

²⁹ Indeed, Mogil’ner (9) emphasizes dynamism and the *lack* of a single dominant narrative as the signal characteristics of late-imperial Russian history, and considers the development of physical anthropology as a discipline to be of a piece with this lack of a dominant narrative. The present work refines this claim by showing that the multiple narratives of earlier imperial epistemology created problems for the state as certain narratives (such as cultural Russification, social evolutionism, and opposition to Islam) gained near-hegemonic status.

Vera Tolz, moreover, focusing on the late-19th century, has recently argued that some imperial Russian scholars' concerns about the relationship between the knowledge that they produced and imperial power anticipated much later debates in postcolonial scholarship – that they were Orientologists critiquing Orientalism. She further contends:

“In the early twentieth century Russian imperial scholars and their minority associates co-constructed perceptions of certain ethnic groups as distinct national communities and of Russia itself as a particular kind of political and cultural space where there was no boundary between ‘East’ and ‘West.’”³⁰

In its emphasis on the role of intermediary, minority figures in creating imperial knowledge and close interrogation of the relationship between such knowledge and political power, Tolz' work is the one closest in spirit to this dissertation. I fully agree with her reading of the political ideas of this group – a small subset of scholars, self-consciously distinct from travelers and bureaucrats, influenced by V. R. Rozen, dean of the department of Oriental Studies at St. Petersburg University – as paradoxical, promoting cultural autonomy for minority groups at the same time as they endorsed Russian imperialism.³¹ Indeed, Kazakh intermediaries arrived at similarly contradictory compromises throughout the 19th century. My project is different, though, in several ways. First, by including bureaucrats, travelers, and hobbyists within its purview (that is, the very groups from which Tolz' Orientologists were conscious of their distinctiveness), it brings in metropolitan figures much more certain of Russia's status between East and West than those Tolz discusses. For many bureaucrats within the Resettlement Administration, for example, Russia was unambiguously a European colonial empire

³⁰ Vera Tolz, *Russia's Own Orient: The Politics of Identity and Oriental Studies in the Late Imperial and Early Soviet Periods* (Oxford: Oxford UP, 2011) 5.

³¹ *Ibid.*, 5-6. For more information on Rozen's career see a posthumous *festschrift*, I. Iu. Krachkovskii, ed., *Pamiat' akademika V. R. Rozena: stat'i i materialy k sorokaletiiu so dnia ego smerti (1908-48)* (Moscow-Leningrad: izd-vo. Akademii Nauk SSSR, 1947).

with the right to seize land from primitive, uncivilized Kazakh pastoralists. Such diverse views engendered a corporate ambivalence about the steppe among metropolitan thinkers that made the application of imperial knowledge to politics even more complicated than Tolz rightly notes. Second, by investigating topics beyond academic Orientology (concerned mainly with philological questions), it brings into view other questions important for the minority interlocutors of Russian scholars and bureaucrats, especially those pertaining to economic development and land use. Finally, while I share Tolz' concern with the interaction between metropolitan scholars and intermediaries from non-dominant nationality groups, the focus of my work falls more strongly on the latter.

Tolz' inclusion of non-Russian intermediaries in a study of imperial Russian Orientology is suggestive of a broader scholarly concern, in recent years, with the ways in which minority groups shaped, participated in, and responded to colonial policies and discourses.³² Virginia Martin has argued that under colonial rule, Kazakhs exhibited a form of legal syncretism, blending the perspectives of customary law (*adat*) and the "civilizing" (from the metropole's viewpoint) prerogatives of Russian legal positions.³³ Viewing Kazakhs as "historical agents, rather than...recipients of historical change," Martin contends that the Russian state was unable to control the meaning of its laws within Kazakh culture.³⁴ Viewing Kazakhs, or other minority nationalities, as historical agents is a proposition that the present work embraces wholeheartedly. Martin, however,

³² This concern has not been universal. Slezkine (x) suggests that Russian attitudes about the Arctic and its inhabitants "may have been shaped, modified, and circumscribed by real-life northerners, both Russian and non-Russian," but the source material for his book was almost exclusively generated by outsiders. Sunderland (2) justifies the Russocentric nature of his study with the point that "middle grounds" eventually close, and the colonizers' views of the steppe ultimately prevailed; this is a fair point, but this study will demonstrate that considering non-Russian and Russian perspectives in the same frame provides a richer understanding of the conditionality and indeterminacy of nationalities policy and colonialism on the steppe.

³³ Martin, *Law and Custom*.

³⁴ *Ibid.*, 160.

is most interested in the meanings of Russian colonial legality within a separate sphere of Kazakh cultural difference; my study shows that Kazakhs, particularly elite Kazakhs, engaged creatively and for their own purposes with colonizing discourses while fully imbricated in regimes of colonial power. In this sense, the dissertation is more in agreement with the work of Robert Crews, whose study of Islam in the Russian Empire suggests that tsarist institutions served as sites of contestation of the meanings of identity and imperial rule.³⁵ Austin Jersild, similarly, has demonstrated that intellectuals in the northern Caucasus, while they shared the Orientalist rhetoric of their Russian interlocutors and contributed to the consolidation of Russian rule there, also deployed such discourses for their own purposes, distinct from metropolitan prerogatives.³⁶ The Kazakh intellectuals of this study, through their involvement with tsarist scholarly and administrative institutions, engaged in a broadly similar process. If knowledge about the steppe and its inhabitants was administratively useful, both it and the conclusions drawn from it were multiply contested in the late imperial era.

The academic study of the colonial landscape, across a variety of disciplines, was important to all 19th century empires in several senses, as many historians have recently demonstrated. For the French Empire in the Maghreb, Diana Davis has shown that the work of colonial scientists was instrumental in the creation of a narrative of environmental degradation that facilitated the expropriation of land from the pastoralists occupying it; in the same setting, George Trumbull has argued that ethnographic descriptions of indigenous Algerians were responsible for the criminalization and

³⁵ Robert Crews, *For Prophet and Tsar: Islam and Empire in Russia and Central Asia* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard UP, 2006). Crews' suggestion that Muslims, in their engagement with tsarist institutions, "captured the state" (10) is an overreach, but in general, his book is much more useful than some of its critics have allowed.

³⁶ See e.g. the treatment of Georgi Tsereteli in Austin Jersild, *Orientalism and Empire: North Caucasus Mountain Peoples and the Georgian Frontier, 1845-1917* (Montreal: McGill-Queen's UP, 2003), 10.

primitivization of colonized people in the metropolitan French public sphere.³⁷ Scholarly narratives about metropolitan superiority were not, however, exclusively the province of European colonial empires. Laura Hostetler has demonstrated that precise cartography and ethnographic reports were important to the self-conception of the Qing Empire as a strong, civilized policy, while Robert Eskildsen has identified the depictions of aboriginal “savagery” in 19th-century Japanese descriptions of Taiwan as a “mimetic imperialism,” inextricably linked with Japan’s efforts to expand and Westernize after the Meiji Restoration.³⁸ Moreover, imperial scholarship’s importance was not exclusively narrative or representational. In a classic work, Nicholas Dirks has described the importance of statistics to British administrators in India in classifying the colonized population in a way that facilitated colonial control there.³⁹ The Russian Empire’s use of imperial scholarship combined all of these functions: as “proof” of its ability to govern and equal standing with other European polities; as a narrative about the civilizational attributes of the colonized and the fertility, or lack thereof, of the colonial landscape; and as a means of securing the data necessary for day-to-day governance in all regions of the empire, however remote. Although the Russian Empire’s institutional and cultural circumstances, like those of any polity, were unique, it is revealing to consider its attempt

³⁷ Diana K. Davis, *Resurrecting the Granary of Rome: Environmental History and French Colonial Expansion in North Africa* (Athens, OH: Ohio UP, 2007); George R. Trumbull, IV, *An Empire of Facts: Colonial Power, Cultural Knowledge, and Islam in Algeria, 1870-1914* (New York: Cambridge UP, 2009).

³⁸ Laura Hostetler, *Qing Colonial Enterprise: Ethnography and Cartography in Early Modern China* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2001); Robert Eskildsen, “Of Civilization and Savages: The Mimetic Imperialism of Japan’s 1874 Expedition to Taiwan,” *The American Historical Review* 107.2 (April 2002): 388-418.

³⁹ Nicholas Dirks, *Castes of Mind: Colonialism and the Making of Modern India* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton UP, 2001).

to produce knowledge about its colonies, and build policies and civilizational narratives on its basis, as something common to all colonial empires.⁴⁰

The Kazakh intelligentsia, both the nationalists who emerged after 1905 and intermediary figures preceding them, is the subject of a nascent body of scholarship in English and an extensive one in Russian. Soviet historiography valorized a few Kazakh intermediary figures, all treated in the present work (Chokan Valikhanov, Ibrai Altynsarin, and Abai Qunanbaev), as the “democratic enlighteners” of the steppe, symbols of the “friendship of peoples” the Soviet Union would enable.⁴¹ The leaders of the nationalist Alash movement were, in the 1920s, interpreted positively insofar as they had been opposed to Russian imperialism, but derided for breaking with the Bolsheviks; after 1930 this view was replaced by a wholly negative interpretation of the Alash intellectuals as “bourgeois nationalists,” which remained in force until the 1980s.⁴² More recently, both Steven Sabol and Pete Rottier have, on the basis of the writings of this

⁴⁰ The exceptionalist trend in imperial Russian historiography is now, it seems, substantially in decline. See e.g. the work of Alexander Morrison, especially *Russian Rule in Samarkand, 1868-1910: a comparison with British India* (Oxford: Oxford UP, 2008) and a recent collection edited by Aleksei Miller, *Rossiiskaia imperiia v sravnitel'noi perspektive* (Moscow: Novoe izdatel'stvo, 2004). The “virtual historical” work of Willard Sunderland is also relevant in this connection. See Sunderland, “The Ministry of Asiatic Russia: The Colonial Office That Never Was But Might Have Been” in *Slavic Review* 69:1 (Spring 2010), 120-150.

⁴¹ See for example E. B. Bekmakhanov, *Sobranie sochinenii v 7-i tomakh, t. 4: Istoriia Kazakhstana (uchebnik i uchebnye posobiia)* (Pavlodar: “EKO,” 2005), 360-84 and K. Beisembiev, *Iz istorii obshchestvennoi mysli Kazakhstana vtoroi poloviny XIX veka* (Almaty: Alma-ata: izd-vo. Akademii nauk Kazakhskoi SSR, 1957). Lowell Tillett popularized the term “Great Friendship” in his *The Great Friendship: Soviet Historians on the Non-Russian Nationalities* (Chapel Hill, NC: University of North Carolina Press, 1969), in which Chapter 6 (“The Bekmakhanov Case”) is devoted to the historiography of Kazakhstan. He also notes (389) that positive attention to minority “enlighteners” only occurred after the 1930s; prior to that, as aristocrats, they were considered unimportant to a Marxist narrative of Kazakhstan’s history. The notion that social status needs to be considered as much as ethnicity in discussions of Russian imperialism on the steppe has recently (and convincingly) resurfaced in Anglophone historiography through Virginia Martin’s emic investigations of 19th century Kazakh political culture. See for example Martin, “Kazakh Chingghisids, Land and Political Power in the Nineteenth Century: A Case Study of Syrymbet,” *Central Asian Survey* 29.1 (March 2010): 79-102.

⁴² This historiography is summarized well in R. K. Nurmagambetova, *Dvizhenie Alash i Alash-orda: istoriografiia problem 1920-1990-e gody XX veka* (Almaty: Institut istorii i etnologii im. Ch. Ch. Valikhanova, 2003).

intelligentsia, discussed the origins of Kazakh nationalism; while both emphasize that nationalism was a strategic choice informed, in part, by Kazakh participation in Russian colonial institutions, Sabol emphasizes the intelligentsia's goals of preserving an independent Kazakh nation, while Rottier argues that a substantial part of its project was *imagining* a national community that did not hitherto exist.⁴³ Rottier contends, further, that the nationalist goals of the intelligentsia were oriented toward securing rights within the Russian Empire, rather than independence from it. Rottier's fine-grained distinction between nationalism and self-determination, and emphasis on the multiplicity of potential Kazakh intellectual responses to Russian colonialism (eliminating the nationalist teleologies characterizing some earlier works), both represent valuable contributions with which I am largely in agreement.⁴⁴ My project differs, however, by bringing more closely into view the metropolitan administrative and scholarly discourses with which, Rottier rightly notes, the nationalist intelligentsia engaged; doing so makes clear the sources of policies the Kazakh intelligentsia found threatening and helps to explain why their goal of autonomy without self-determination was received coldly by most in St. Petersburg.

Finally, both discussions of the relationship of Kazakh intermediary figures to metropolitan discourses and the fragmentary, incoherent nature of imperial Russian scholarly and bureaucratic thought about the steppe and its inhabitants have broader theoretical implications. The former is an important contribution to theoretical

⁴³ Steven Sabol, *Russian Colonization and the Genesis of Kazak National Consciousness* (New York: Palgrave MacMillan, 2003); Peter Rottier, "Creating the Kazak Nation: The Intelligentsia's Quest for Acceptance in the Russian Empire, 1905-1920," Diss. University of Wisconsin, 2005.

⁴⁴ A teleological narrative whereby Kazakh nationalism is portrayed an inevitable response to Russian colonization is particularly characteristic of primordialist accounts of the period. See e.g. Kemal Karpat, "The Roots of Kazakh Nationalism: Ethnicity, Islam or Land?" Marco Buttino, ed., *In a Collapsing Empire: Underdevelopment, Ethnic Conflicts, and Nationalisms in the Soviet Union* (Milan: Feltrinelli, 1993), 313-333.

formulations about the cultural encounter between colonizer and colonized especially characteristic of the recent historiography of South Asia, where the relationship between power and knowledge has become a central scholarly preoccupation. The preponderance of scholars, especially those of the Subaltern Studies school, have argued, in varying contexts, that colonized people are unable to escape their reliance on the categories of the colonizer, even when mobilizing opposition to colonialism.⁴⁵ Such views have been challenged by historians, most notably Eugene Irschick and C. A. Bayly, emphasizing the dialogic nature of the colonial encounter, and the ability of subalterns to originally shape and respond to ideas emerging from metropolitan institutions and agents.⁴⁶ I propose that the sophisticated arguments that both sides of this debate offer would be well-served by employing subaltern ambivalence as a category of analysis, rather than thinking in terms of derivative discourses or a dialogic process in which colonial officials and subalterns “participated equally.”⁴⁷ The first position imputes hegemonic control to the colonial state that, at least in the Russian Empire, was never real, while paying inadequate attention both to the personal subjectivity of the colonized and significant divisions in colonial thinking. The second does not sufficiently account for the ability of colonial institutions to create incentives (professional advancement, social acceptance) for subalterns to frame their views in the terms most palatable to those institutions, nor for

⁴⁵ The classic formulation of this argument with respect to nationalism is Chakrabarty, *Nationalist Thought*, as well as “Postcoloniality and the Artifice of History: Who Speaks for ‘Indian’ Pasts?” *Representations* 37 (Winter 1992), 1-26. Outside the Subaltern Studies school, see e.g. Bernard Cohn, *Colonialism and its Forms of Knowledge* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton UP, 1996) for an argument that positions the colonial state and its discourses as hegemonic. Tony Ballantyne has powerfully summarized the achievements of this historiography and criticisms of it in “Archive, Discipline, State: Power and Knowledge in South Asian Historiography,” *New Zealand Journal of Asian Studies* 3.1 (June 2001): 87-105.

⁴⁶ C. A. Bayly, *Empire and Information: Intelligence Gathering and Social Communication in India, 1780-1870* (Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 2000); Eugene Irschick, *Dialogue and History: Constructing South India, 1795-1895* (Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 1994).

⁴⁷ Irschick 6.

the frequent privileging of metropolitan interests that characterized them. The ambivalent Kazakh intermediaries in this dissertation, rather, sought to turn the presence of the Russian Empire – which had won several convincing military victories and seemed unlikely to leave – on the steppe into something beneficial for themselves and those around them. Their engagement with metropolitan institutions and discourses reflected the influence of multiple cultural traditions, selectivity among competing metropolitan views concerning the steppe’s future, and strong personal subjectivity even as the realities of colonial power compelled them to express their views in terms of their interlocutors. They contributed to a colonial state about whose significance they were unsure in an effort to preserve Kazakhs’ economic and cultural interests, as they variously understood them; the effects of such contributions, though, original as they were, were often inconsequential or disappointing.

In a field-making essay, Frederick Cooper and Ann Stoler called for research on European imperialism starting from the understanding that “contradiction [is] at the center of the colonial state’s operative mode, rather than...an episodic manifestation of its reaction to crisis.”⁴⁸ The tensions to which Cooper and Stoler refer, and which contributors to their edited volume detail in a variety of settings and time periods, center on questions of discourse and identity politics, on the contradictions “between the exclusionary practices and universalizing claims of bourgeois culture” during, and after, the age of great colonial empires.⁴⁹ The research agenda set by Cooper, Stoler and others has been inspirational for this dissertation, which highlights precisely these tensions in

⁴⁸ Ann Laura Stoler and Frederick Cooper, “Between Metropole and Colony: Rethinking a Research Agenda,” Cooper and Stoler, eds., *Tensions of Empire: Colonial Cultures in a Bourgeois World* (Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 1997) 20.

⁴⁹ *Ibid.*, 37.

Russian colonial governance, as well as other contradictions in imperial Russian thought and scholarship concerning the steppe and its inhabitants. I go further, though, by demonstrating that the “tensions of empire” were not only discursive. Different ways of thinking about the steppe environment, discussions of the civilization or primitiveness of its inhabitants, and conceptions of the potential loyalty or hostility of same all had social, economic, and environmental consequences that weakened the imperial project. Colonial schools, for example, established under a universal, civilizing ideal, produced a cohort of bilingual Kazakhs whose aspirations were blocked by discourses and practices of minority exclusion. The heavily overstated idea that the steppe could serve as a second breadbasket for the Russian Empire was less important as an idea *per se* than as the justification for a settler colonial movement that ultimately proved untenable. The world outside the texts of colonial scholarship was shaped by the world within them; by breaking the lines between cultural and social histories of imperialism, we can understand how deeply the “tensions of empire” ran in metropole and colony alike.

Sources

To address the historiographical problems cited above, this study uses a wide range of primary sources, both published and archival. Many of the published primary sources I analyze are, in some sense, scholarly, even when not written by professional scholars; they are the writings of academics, bureaucrats, and trained amateurs, the vast majority of whom were not Kazakh. Their works were published by metropolitan learned societies, provincial administrative organs, and sometimes ministerial printing presses. Although I cannot claim completeness, I attempted to read as much imperial Russian scholarship pertaining to the steppe as possible, material crossing a variety of disciplines

(geography, ethnography, statistics, and agronomy, to name a few) pertaining, in some way, to the physical world of the steppe provinces and to its inhabitants. The result of this wide-ranging search was a rich and varied portrait of the understandings that Russian scholars and administrators formed of their new colony. Documentary collections have also been assembled for many of the Kazakh subalterns I discuss in this work, and I make extensive, but critical use of this material. Some of the documents in these collections are scholarly, but others are publicistic, and still others are transcriptions of archival documents. For the Kazakh periodical press, a key phenomenon in the development of a self-consciously autonomist, and subsequently nationalist, intelligentsia, I relied on transcriptions of the two most important indigenous-language newspapers published by Kazakh intellectuals, *Qazaq* and *Ai-qap*, into modified Cyrillic script.⁵⁰ Although the interactions between Kazakh subalterns and their imperial Russian interlocutors are important for this study, work with the Kazakh-language press provides an understanding of how key concepts and arguments were framed in the reduced presence of a need to present such in terms palatable to metropolitan actors and institutions.⁵¹

Since, as I have argued, the “tensions of empire” go beyond the realm of discourse, this study also relies heavily on unpublished archival material from the Central State Archive of Kazakhstan. There, my research began in the *fondy* of provincial administrations; in so doing I found both biographical data on some crucial figures in the dissertation and examples of how geographic and ethnographic data were gathered and applied to problems of colonial administration. This interest in the application of

⁵⁰ *Qazaq* and *Ai-qap* were originally published in Kazakh, but in the Arabic script; these new editions preserve the language used in the original text, but present it in the Cyrillic orthography familiar to modern Kazakhstani readers.

⁵¹ Because of low rates of literacy on the steppe, the circulation of these newspapers was fairly limited. According to Sabol (106), *Qazaq* reached a maximum print run of 8,000 copies per issue in 1915. Their value for the small group of literate Kazakhs they served, however, is difficult to dispute.

imperial knowledge to governance led me, further, to the *fondy* of provincial statistical committees, school administrations, bureaus responsible for elections to the Duma, and local offices of the Resettlement Administration. Other sources pertaining to the practices, rather than the discourse, of Russian imperialism included, most notably, statutes pertaining to the administration of Central Asia and the steppe provinces, sometimes accessed in archival files, at other times in published sources; in the parliamentary era, I also made use of stenographic accounts of speeches made in the Duma. The point of this wide-ranging search was to trace, as often as possible, the outcomes in policy and lived experience of what imperial Russians and Kazakhs alike thought about the steppe and its inhabitants.⁵² This project is, foremost, an intellectual history of Russian imperialism in Central Asia, but also interested in the intersections among social, environmental, and intellectual histories of imperialism; as such it would not have been possible without archival work. Ambivalent discourses, as this research demonstrates, produced contradictory outcomes.

Scope

The incorporation of what became known as the Kazakh steppe into the Russian Empire began in 1730, when Khan Abulhair took an oath of allegiance to Empress Anna in exchange for military protection against the Kalmyks, a pastoralist group of Mongolian origin. By the 1820s the khans of all three Kazakh hordes had taken similar oaths; in the intervening decades a line of fortifications was constructed in the northern steppe, and M. M. Speranskii promulgated a legal code for administering Kazakhs of the Middle Horde in 1822. The 1820s, then, mark the beginning of an era when the steppe was increasingly

⁵² In this sense, the dissertation follows methodologically the promising research agenda set forth by Darius Staliunas in *Making Russians: Meaning and Practice of Russification in Lithuania and Belarus after 1863* (Moscow: Rodopi, 2007).

under factual Russian control. After a brief look back at the work of Aleksei Levshin, author of an early General Staff account (based on observations made during the 1820s) of the inhabitants and landscape of the steppe, a work regularly referenced by later authors, this study begins in 1845. In truth, the entire Nicolaevan era prior to 1845 saw increased governmental interest in the formal and systematic study of the steppe, reflected by a steadily increasing stream of publications by the Asiatic section of the General Staff, but the Imperial Russian Geographical Society (IRGO), a quasi-governmental organization vitally important to future studies of the region, was founded that year, making it an important symbolic turning point in the Russian Empire's informational engagement with the steppe. The study ends in 1917 because that year immediately follows the revolt of Kazakhs and other Central Asian Muslims against colonial rule, a rebellion that, I will demonstrate, had much to do with the epistemological failings of the Russian Empire. The revolt of 1916 was a warning, mostly ignored by colonial administrators; when the February Revolution spread, the following year, to Central Asia, the old regime found little local support there. Although some scholars have made a strong case for avoiding 1917 as a historiographical turning point, the differing ideological motivations of Soviet administrators in Central Asia – to say nothing of the much more formidable coercive force they had available to realize the projects supported by the information they gathered – mean that 1917 remains, for this study, a reasonable endpoint.⁵³ In the intervening years, four tsars in succession each

⁵³ Peter Holquist's case for the existence of a "technocratic ethos" among late-imperial and early Soviet officials is persuasive, but perhaps too dependent on the personal idiosyncracies of his subjects to be broadly applicable. See Holquist, "'In Accord with State Interests and the People's Wishes': The Technocratic Ideology of Imperial Russia's Resettlement Administration," *Slavic Review* 69.1 (Spring 2010): 151-179. Holquist's well-supported and innovative work sees continuity in informational regimes not only between imperial and Soviet Russia, but also across Europe; see also his "To Count, to Extract, and to Exterminate: Population Statistics and Population Politics in Late Imperial Russia," Ronald G. Suny

sponsored imperial scholarship, which served the causes of reform and reaction equally well. Both imperial Russian priorities in governing the steppe and Kazakh intermediaries' thinking about Russian imperialism (and Kazakhs' place within the empire) changed substantially during these seven decades as a result, in part, of studies about the region produced by scholars and bureaucrats of all ethnicities.

The area on which this study focuses is difficult to define. The borders of contemporary Kazakhstan were drawn by Soviet planners on the basis of ethnographic and statistical data, but did not enclose all of the Soviet Union's Kazakhs. Nor was the steppe, by itself, the only Central Asian biome populated by the Kazakhs of the Russian Empire – they also lived, in significant numbers, in the foothills and grasslands of Semireche and Turkestan.⁵⁴ In light of this uncertainty, I have cast a wide net, focusing mainly on the provinces thought by imperial Russian administrators to comprise, collectively, the steppe *krai* (Semipalatinsk, Akmolinsk, Ural'sk, and Turgai *oblasts*, or provinces), as well as Semireche oblast (included in the Governor-Generalship of the Steppe from 1882-99) and portions of Syr-Darya oblast and Orenburg *guberniia* (province). None of these areas were populated exclusively by Kazakhs, but Kazakhs populated all of these areas. Taken together, they contained all three Kazakh hordes (as well as the Bukei Horde, a subdivision of the Small Horde) and encompassed a wide range of environmental conditions. When discussing the activity of imperial Russian scholarly societies or, later, the influence of imperial scholarship on state policy, the

and Terry Martin, eds., *A State of Nations: Empire and Nation-Making in the Age of Lenin and Stalin* (New York: Oxford UP, 2001), 111-144. Other arguments highlighting connections and continuities in Russian rule in Central Asia and the steppe on either side of 1917 are, e.g., Marco Buttino, *Revolutsiia naoborot: Sredniaia Aziia mezhdur padeniem tsarskoi imperii i obrazovaniem SSSR*, trans. Nikolai Okhotin (Moscow: Zven'ia, 2007) and Francine Hirsch, *Empire of Nations: Ethnographic Knowledge and the Making of the Soviet Union* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell UP, 2005).

⁵⁴ See the summary of the 1897 imperial census in S. N. Abashin, D. Iu. Arapov, and N. E. Bekmakhanova, *Tsentral'naia Aziia v sostave Rossiiskoi imperii* (Moscow: Novoe literaturnoe obozrenie, 2008), 386-89.

focus of the dissertation moves to St. Petersburg, in connection with geographic and ethnographic studies pertaining to the regions named above.

Chapter One analyzes attitudes about the steppe among imperial Russian scholars and bureaucrats during the last years of the Nicolaevan, and first of the Alexandrine, era. Special attention is paid to publications of the Imperial Russian Geographic Society and the Asiatic section of the Russian General Staff. I discuss the images of the land and people of the steppe occurring in these publications, and the various conceptions of the imperial project they promoted; although the authors of these works shared assumptions about the statist purpose of their work, and the positivist framework through which they apprehended their objects of study, they also disagreed substantially in their assessments of the steppe landscape and the moral and intellectual character of the empire's new Kazakh subjects. Rather than highlighting a bifurcation between civilian and military views of the empire, as some have done, I argue that the incoherence of imperial Russian scholarly discourses about the steppe was the result of scholarly disagreement and personal idiosyncracies.⁵⁵ Moreover, such ambivalence militated against the formation of a coherent administrative policy for the steppe, which would produce contradictory social, economic, and environmental outcomes there. Finally, by highlighting the ambivalence of metropolitan discussions of the steppe, I emphasize an important point for the rest of the dissertation – subalterns who participated in these discussions were not responding to a unified discourse but a diverse set of ideas among which they could choose, and to which they could contribute originally.

Chapter Two introduces the life and work of two Kazakh geographers of the mid-19th century, Chokan Valikhanov and Mukhammed-Salikh Babadzhanov. Both were

⁵⁵ Daniel Brower, *Turkestan and the Fate of the Russian Empire* (New York: RoutledgeCurzon, 2003).

educated in imperial Russian schools in the steppe, served the Russian state in several capacities, and participated in the intellectual life of the metropole as both authors and readers. Babadzhanov, despite being arguably better-known and -recognized during his lifetime, has attracted vanishingly little comment from historians; only recently has historiographical comment on Valikhanov begun to move beyond arguments classifying him as either a proto-nationalist or an agent of empire. I align myself with recent scholarship that has noted the multiple layers of meaning and self-representation in Valikhanov's biography, arguing further that there was no contradiction, for Valikhanov and Babadzhanov, between their status as imperial servitors and as Kazakhs. Rather, they occupied a multivalent position, representing an idealized version of metropolitan culture to Kazakhs and Kazakh (Middle and Inner Horde) culture to Russian scholars. Ethnographic and geographic study of the steppe and its inhabitants, for them, both fostered the improvement of colonial governance and provided an opportunity to advocate for the distinctiveness and value of their kinsmen's cultural and economic achievements.

Subsequently, Chapter Three discusses the administrative and scholarly activity of a Kazakh subaltern who had a more substantial influence on colonial policies, the pedagogue and linguist Ibrai Altynsarin. A close colleague of the influential Orientalist and native-language educator Nikolai Il'minskii, and a product of one of the first Russian schools on the steppe, Altynsarin, over the course of an almost thirty-year career, compiled ethnographies of the steppe for a metropolitan audience and school primers for a new generation of Kazakh pupils. In both scholarly writings and proposals for educational reform, Altynsarin blended principle and pragmatism, developing a vision of

Kazakh progress and modernization (which, he agreed with his metropolitan interlocutors, they desperately needed) based on his understanding of the environmental distinctiveness of the steppe and the cultural distinctiveness of the Kazakhs who populated it. Critical of plans to resettle Slavic peasants to the steppe, and of abusive behavior on the part of colonial officials, he was fiercely independent from those of his imperial Russian colleagues, regardless of rank. At the same time, his sense of Kazakh identity, and ideas about civilizational progress, were both compatible with and depended on an idealized version of colonial governance. Such original ideas, however, were constrained by a colonial administration that, by the end of his life, came to prioritize the Russification and colonization of the steppe over the compromises Altynsarin endorsed. Altynsarin represented Kazakhs, in his ethnographies, as rational and fully civilizable, while making an effort in his school curricula to create a synthesis between what he considered the best fruits of Kazakh culture and the pragmatic benefits of imperial Russian governance. His ambivalent view of the relationship between Kazakhs and the Russian Empire found, for a time, resonance in other geographic and ethnographic accounts of the steppe; the administrators who would come to privilege the interests of the Empire's Slavic subjects there also grounded their views in similar accounts, but ones that expressed different views of the steppe biome and Kazakhs' capacity to be civilized.

Chapter Four moves away from Kazakh imperial servitors to discuss the interactions between the *aqyn* (bard) Abai Qunanbaev and a group of liberal and radical *kraevedy* (amateur students of a region's flora, fauna, history and culture), many of them political exiles, in Semipalatinsk oblast'. The main institutions through which these *kraevedy* accomplished this study, the Semipalatinsk Statistical Committee and

Semipalatinsk *pod'otdel* (sub-division) of IRGO, counted Kazakhs among their contributing members, with Abai prominent among them. I also analyze the work of some contemporaries of Abai, known collectively as the *zar zaman* poets, who took a dimmer view of the possibilities that Russian expansion offered Kazakhs; their incorporation allows me to extend my investigation to a section of Kazakh society less connected to Russian intellectual culture. Both Abai and the *zar zaman* bards employed similar poetic forms, and sharply critiqued the abuses of Russian imperialism, but Abai also exhorted Kazakhs to use imperial Russian institutions to better themselves while preserving their religious and ethnic identity. In the eyes of exiled *kraevedy*, the rhetoric of Kazakh primitiveness could serve as a critique of Russian imperialism; in Abai's, it was a device to exhort Kazakhs to make common cause with the reformist, developmentally-minded imperialism these *kraevedy* represented. Such interactions emphasize the myriad small gradations that characterized the categories of "subaltern" and "colonizer" in the late-19th century Russian Empire, and the ability of members of both category to exert their own subjectivity in combining a range of ideas about identity and imperialism.

Chapter Five shows that contradiction and uncertainty were a part of the Russian Empire's informational encounter with the steppe during the era of organized peasant resettlement there, even among those responsible for collecting the statistical and agronomic data needed to sustain it. It focuses on the Expedition for Research of the Steppe Oblasts, a seven-year (1896-1903) research expedition led by the statistician F. A. Shcherbina and tasked with creating statistical norms for Kazakh land use. These norms would subsequently be used to calculate the amount of land in the steppe provinces that,

being “surplus” to Kazakhs’ requirements, could be taken from their use and allotted for the resettlement of Slavic peasants from the Empire’s inner provinces. Both imperial Russians and Kazakhs participated in this expedition, the latter mostly as counters and translators, but sometimes as authors, too; the Russian statisticians who made up its editorial committee were, in some cases, members of oppositional political parties, entirely opposed to peasant settlement or convinced that should be implemented differently than the Resettlement Administration planned. Consensus about the utility of precise measurement for implementing and regulating peasant resettlement to the steppe only temporarily concealed doubts about such the utility and practicability of such settlement, which also emerged in the Expedition’s materials. In the Expedition’s immediate aftermath, the “objective” norms of Kazakh land use it calculated were used to advance the claims of Kazakh pastoralists and Slavic peasants alike to steppe land, and their meanings were contested in the provincial chanceries of the steppe oblasts. Kazakh intellectuals who participated in the Expedition, further, accepted the premise that a detailed survey and careful regulation would render peasant settlement benign, but later used its principles to argue against what they deemed the illegal activities of the Resettlement Administration. An enterprise explicitly intended to promote peasant settlement and the expropriation of land from Kazakh pastoralists proved equally suited, in the long run, to criticism of such measures; seemingly objective information proved incoherent in practice.

The ambivalence about settlement barely concealed by the Shcherbina expedition’s rhetoric of positivism exploded into political controversy early in the 20th century. At the same time, in the Duma era, debates about Kazakhs’ status as subjects or

citizens of the Russian Empire also raged. In Chapter Six, I argue that the incoherence of the corpus of knowledge the Russian Empire had developed about the steppe and its inhabitants played a role in the violent outcomes of both of these controversies. At both the local and national levels, there were Russians who took seriously Kazakhs' various claims about settlement and its effect on the steppe and its inhabitants, and who championed their arguments for increased political representation. Yet the priority given to resettlement at the highest levels of government, and the disenfranchisement of Central Asian provinces under the 3rd of June system, meant that this erstwhile coalition's ideas never had much influence in the sense of changing government policy. Rather, what the Russian Empire knew – or thought it knew – about Kazakhs and the Central Asian landscape was productive of contradictory outcomes. Disenfranchised Kazakhs who had been trained in colonial schools were able to claim, in Russian and Kazakh, that they deserved a voice in imperial politics. Agronomic and statistical data unfavorable to settlement were simply discarded, in St. Petersburg, in favor of other claims arguing for its viability, engendering the hasty and unceremonious expropriation of land Kazakhs considered to belong to them. During the Central Asian Revolt of 1916, triggered by an attempt to draft Kazakhs for the imperial army and fueled by smoldering discontent about the loss of land and economic decline produced by Russian imperialism, the problems that this latter sort of discursive ambivalence produced became clear. In its aftermath, as ambivalent Kazakh intellectuals who had sought to make common cause with the colonial state realized that they were unlikely to be granted a representative or consultative role in it, the problems produced by the Russian Empire's inability to decide

whether its Kazakh subjects were loyal and civilizable or inherently dangerous were also revealed to be intractable.

The collective ambivalence of imperial Russian scholars and bureaucrats about the Empire's new possessions on the steppe was matched by the personal ambivalence of a series of Kazakh subalterns in the late imperial era. Ironically, these Kazakhs' personal ambivalence about Russian imperialism led them to seek compromises with the colonial state even as the Russian Empire's collective uncertainty about the steppe and its inhabitants facilitated their political and material expropriation.

Chapter 1

Ambivalence and Imperial Knowledge: Scholarly and Bureaucratic Views of the Kazakh Steppe, ca. 1845-1873

Introduction

In 1832, when the General Staff officer Aleksei Iraklievich Levshin published his *Opisanie kirgiz-kazach'ikh ord i stepei* (Description of the Kirgiz-Kazakh Hordes and Steppes), compiled on the basis of observations made while posted to Orenburg province in 1820 and 1822, the factual presence of the Russian Empire in the Kazakh steppe was minimal.¹ A line of defensive, largely self-sufficient fortifications, populated by Cossacks, stretched across the northern part of this region. Ten years had passed since the ratification of M. M. Speranskii's statutes concerning the administration of the Small and Middle Horde Kazakhs who continued to predominate in these areas in the wake of Russian military colonization, which created the West- and East-Siberian Governor-Generalships and abolished the title of "khan."² While some have argued that these statutes demonstrate an intent, on the part of imperial administrators, to "strengthen [their] political influence among the nomads," in 1832 this desire remained largely unfulfilled.³ Lower-level organs of the colonial administration were chronically understaffed and overwhelmed; in northern and central parts of the Kazakh steppe, the decade-long

¹ S. A. Tokarev, *Istoriia russkoi etnografii* (Moscow: izd.-vo. "Nauka," 1966).

² For more on Speranskii's reforms, see A. V. Remnev and A. P. Tolochko, *Samoderzhavie i Sibir'. Administrativnaia politika v pervoi polovine XIX v.* (Omsk: izd.-vo. Omskogo universiteta, 1995) and L. M. Dameshek, *M. M. Speranskii: Sibirskii variant imperskogo regionalizma (k 180-letiiu sibirskikh reform M. M. Speranskogo)* (Irkutsk: Ottisk, 2003).

³ M. K. Kozybaev, glav. red., *Istoriia Kazakhstana s drevneishikh vremen do nashikh dnei v piati tomakh*, v. 3 (Almaty: izd.-vo. "Atamura," 2000) 300.

rebellion of sultan Sarzhan Kasymov was ongoing, and two other major rebellions, led by Isatai Taimanov in the Bukei Horde and Kenesary Kasymov in the Middle Horde, were soon to follow (in 1833 and 1837, respectively).⁴ The steppe was, in short, a borderland, little known to administrators, difficult to control, and enjoying, in practice, a substantial degree of independence.

By 1873, when N. A. Severtsov, a scholarly explorer with close military connections, published an account of his travels around Central Asia in the retinue of Gen. M. G. Cherniaev, the “Lion of Tashkent,” the position of the Russian Empire in the Kazakh steppe had significantly changed. Russia’s strategic border, with the taking of Tashkent and Samarqand and the decline of Khiva, Bukhara, and Kokand, moved more than a thousand miles to the south, encompassing hundreds of thousands of new Kazakh subjects. Administrative and judicial capacity on the steppe were significantly increased; a new set of governing statutes, approved by Alexander II in 1868, was intended to re-organize and streamline local administration, collect taxes more efficiently, declare steppe land to be officially state property, and extend the civil and criminal law codes that obtained throughout the empire to an area known generally, after the promulgation of these statutes, as the “steppe oblasts.” This “Provisional Statute” was the result of a concerted information-gathering effort on the part of colonial administrators, following on a series of successful military campaigns, about the successes and failures of

⁴ The tendency in Kazakhstani historiography to classify such rebellions as “national liberation” movements is problematic, since they occurred significantly before the emergence of anything resembling national consciousness among the Kazakhs, but the frequent upheavals in all Russian-administered parts of the steppe during the 1830s point to the weakness and ineffectiveness of the colonial administration. For application of the “national liberation” framework to the Taimanov rebellion, see A. A. Bisembaev (ed.), *Batys Qazaqstan tarikhy*, v. 2 (Aktobe: “PrintA,” 2006) 8.

Speranskii's 1822 code.⁵ Urban settlements grew more numerous, and their Russian population rose with each passing year. Russia's political and financial interest in the steppe, the territorial area it controlled, and the extent to which this control was factual and meaningful (if somewhat reliant on Kazakh intermediaries) all massively increased during the four decades separating Levshin and Severtsov's accounts.

It is widely accepted that geographic, ethnographic, and statistical research were vital to colonial empires both practically, as a means of providing information applicable to administration or conquest, and ideologically, as a means of framing their self-conception. Geography, an attempt to move unfamiliar regions "from myth to map" during the early modern era, evolved into a discipline, in Europe during the long 19th century, concerned with practical matters of warfare, conquest, and population management.⁶ The ability to carry out geographic and ethnographic research, further, became part of an argument about civilizational difference between the practitioners and subjects of that research. Matthew Edney, for example, has argued that while Great Trigonometrical Survey of British India created a corpus of useful, if flawed, data for colonial administrators, its most important contribution was to Britain's identity as a modern empire: "The British self-image rested on a perceived difference between how they and Indians saw, and so mapped, the world itself."⁷ Laura Hostetler has advanced a

⁵ On the development of legal codes for the steppe region, see Virginia Martin, *Law and Custom in the Steppe: The Kazakhs of the Middle Horde and Russian Colonialism in the Nineteenth Century* (Richmond: Curzon, 2001).

⁶ The "myth to map" language is drawn from David N. Livingstone, *The Geographical Tradition: Episodes in the History of a Contested Enterprise* (Malden, MA: Wiley-Blackwell, 1992) 34. For disciplinary histories of geography see also several essays in John M. MacKenzie, ed., *Imperialism and the Natural World* (Manchester: Manchester UP, 1990); Geoffrey J. Martin, *All Possible Worlds: A History of Geographical Ideas*, 4th ed. (New York: Oxford UP, 2005); J. H. Parry, *The Age of Reconnaissance: Discovery, Exploration and Settlement 1450 to 1650* (Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 1981).

⁷ Matthew H. Edney, *Mapping an Empire: The Geographical Construction of British India, 1765-1843*. (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1997) 34.

similar argument for China under the Qing dynasty, contending that in the early modern era, this polity “engaged cutting-edge [cartographic] technology...to position itself as a major world power.”⁸ Despite the numerous problems that efforts to map, survey and classify new lands and peoples encountered, it was an article of faith among imperial administrators that such efforts were essential to the proper regulation of a colony and its inhabitants.⁹

In the Russian Empire, two closely related organizations carried out the majority of this research during the 19th century. Alex Marshall has noted the enormous role played by officers of the Russian General Staff (RGS) in collecting and systematizing data about Central Asia and the steppe from the early 19th century on.¹⁰ Many of these officers were also members of the Imperial Russian Geographical Society (IRGO), chartered in 1845, a scholarly organization enjoying significant government patronage (its formal leader, initially, was the Grand Duke Konstantin Nikolaevich). The texts that these scholars, soldiers, and administrators – the lines dividing these categories were blurred – produced were a vital source of information about the Russian Empire, both its core provinces and imperial borderlands, for policymakers and the reading public alike. A selection of these texts, concentrating on the Kazakh steppe, is the focus of this chapter.

It has become common to challenge Edward Said’s critique of the ideological and cultural underpinnings of European imperialism on the grounds that he imputes to the

⁸ Laura Hostetler, *Qing Colonial Enterprise: Ethnography and Cartography in Early Modern China* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2001) 25.

⁹ Bruce Lincoln emphasizes the importance of statistics for a generation of bureaucrats serving under Nicholas I in improving governance in the inner provinces of the empire. See W. Bruce Lincoln, *In the Vanguard of Reform: Russia’s Enlightened Bureaucrats, 1825-1861* (DeKalb, IL: Northern Illinois UP, 1982). Daniel Brower has noted the importance of ethnographic knowledge to the visions of governance of K. P. fon-Kaufman, first Governor-General of Turkestan (46-49), and the first Governor-General of the Steppe, G. A. Kolpakovskii, was known as a patron of ethnographic and geographic research. See Daniel Brower, *Turkestan and the Fate of the Russian Empire* (New York: Routledge/Curzon, 2003).

¹⁰ Alex Marshall, *The Russian General Staff and Asia, 1800-1917* (New York: Routledge, 2006).

scholarly discourse of modern empires a unanimity that never existed.¹¹ Historians of the Russian Empire, a polity outside the purview of Said's original argument, but very interested in fashioning itself as a Western-style colonial empire, have highlighted several intellectual ruptures among Russian scholar-administrators. Daniel Brower has drawn a distinction between the ideologies of empire of civil and military administrators in Central Asia, while Nathaniel Knight has detailed a clash between practically-minded "enlightened bureaucrats" and theoretically-oriented academicians during IRGO's early years.¹² Elsewhere, Knight has gone further in criticizing Orientalism, which he understands to include both Said's thesis and the totality of academic writing inspired by it, arguing that the constraints that autocracy placed on individual scholars and administrators, ironically, allowed idiosyncratic views of the imperial mission, of colonized land and people, to flourish, as long as those views remained outside the realm of independent political action.¹³ The work of Brower, Knight, and other scholars usefully directs our attention to the panoply of conversations emerging in the context of colonial expansion.

The present chapter represents a variation on, and a response to, the argument Knight makes in his treatment of V. V. Grigor'ev's career. The authors discussed here had in common the categories through which they apprehended the land and people of the

¹¹ See Said, *Orientalism* (New York: Vintage Books, 1979), as well as *Culture and Imperialism* (New York: Vintage Books, 1994). In the latter work, Said himself accepts this criticism to some extent. Daniel Varisco summarizes such criticism (citing Basim Musallam and Peter van der Veer) in *Reading Orientalism: Said and the Unsaid* (Seattle: University of Washington Press, 2007) 133.

¹² Brower (2003); Nathaniel Knight, "Science, Empire, and Nationality: Ethnography in the Russian Geographical Society, 1845-1855," Jane Burbank and David L. Ransel, eds., *Imperial Russia: New Histories for the Empire* (Bloomington, IN: Indiana UP, 1998), 108-141. The term "enlightened bureaucrats," though Knight also employs it, is originally from Lincoln (1982).

¹³ See Knight, "Grigor'ev in Orenburg, 1851-62: Russian Orientalism in the Service of Empire?" *Slavic Review* 59.1 (Spring 2000): 74-100.

steppe – latitude, longitude, *verstas*, *arshins*, Linnaean classification, and many more.¹⁴

They also shared a fundamentally statist view of their projects, considering them valuable insofar as they provided useful data to governmental institutions desperate for it. (The conflict between “pure scholars” and pragmatists that Knight has described had, by the mid-1850s, been settled decisively in favor of the latter.) However, these shared analytical tools and research priorities did not produce unanimous assessments of the Russian Empire’s purpose in the steppe, nor of the place of Kazakhs and steppe land within the empire. Further, these disputes cut across lines of political affiliation and professional association; they depended more on scholarly disagreement and personal idiosyncrasies than any kind of easily identifiable communal belonging. During the mid-19th century, both the purposes of the Russian Empire on the steppe and the geographic and ethnographic information that informed their implementation were shifting and internally contested.

A. I. Levshin and the Anarchic Steppe

Levshin’s description of the Kazakh steppe and its inhabitants, focused on the Small and Middle Hordes, was not the first General Staff survey of the region, but by far the most comprehensive, part of a larger trend of increased organization and depth of this group’s research efforts dating to the 1820s.¹⁵ His work quickly became the standard reference for a generation of geographers and staff officers interested in Central Asia and

¹⁴ The *versta* and *arshin* were imperial Russian measurements of length equal to 3500 feet (1.07 km) and approximately 2.3 feet (71 cm) respectively. It has been argued that relentless classification and codification in these terms, which differed significantly from colonized ways of knowing, was itself a form of cultural domination, “an act of geographical violence.” See Edward Said, “Yeats and Decolonization,” Terry Eagleton et. al., *Nationalism, Colonialism, and Literature* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1990) 69-95.

¹⁵ Marshall identifies this trend, while also noting that General Staff officers conducted field research on the Kazakh steppe as early as 1803-4 (19-20).

the steppe.¹⁶ As such, the assumptions and arguments within it, influential for subsequent scholars, are worth exploring. While Levshin viewed possession of the steppe as beneficial to the Russian Empire in several respects, and attached significant value to indigenous knowledge and forms of economic organization, he saw the steppe as a fundamentally chaotic and anarchic region inhabited by rough and essentially uncivilized nomads, improving themselves at a glacial pace. These assumptions informed, in turn, his vision of Russian imperialism, meant to pacify and extract wealth, not civilize. The steppe *krai*, in Levshin's description, was distinct from the empire's Slavic and agricultural heartland, and forever destined to remain so.

For Levshin, the pastoral nomadism by which the Kazakhs lived suggested a range of historical and contemporary associations, none of them flattering. While romantics, he argued, might see innocence and simplicity in their bucolic idylls, "the cold-blooded traveler sees in them only half-wild people and compares them with... the present-day Bedouins, Kurds, residents of the banks of the Enisei, Hottentots, and other rough tribes of Africa and Asia like them."¹⁷ Levshin began his study from the assumption that a people's lifeways, whether sedentary and agricultural or mobile and stock-rearing, were determinative of its character, contending that "we will find the source of the majority of [the Kazakh's] moral and physical activities in his eagerness for and accustomedness to animal husbandry."¹⁸ Nomadism was linked directly, in his mind, to what he described as Kazakhs' "frivolity" and "laziness," since "not doing anything

¹⁶ All of the statisticians and geographers in this chapter cite Levshin frequently; Chokan Valikhanov, one of the subjects of Chapter 2, also engaged critically with his ideas.

¹⁷ A. I. Levshin, *Opisanie ord i stepei kazakhov* (1832; Pavlodar: "EKO," 2005) 15.

¹⁸ Levshin 17

besides animal husbandry, [they] never see any need to work a great deal.”¹⁹ In Levshin’s description, every aspect of Kazakh life – morality, culture, clothing, food – was depicted as simple and rough, representing a low stage of development and unlikely to change as long as they remained nomads.²⁰ The otherness of the steppe was a matter of economic forms and civilizational underdevelopment alike; for Levshin, the two were inseparable from one another.²¹

Human development, in Levshin’s view, was both universal and teleological, moving through a series of clearly defined phases. The era that he considered the steppe to be passing through was common, he argued, to “all peoples during their youth.”²² Describing Kazakh legal customs in lurid terms, emphasizing their purportedly retributive and bloodthirsty character, he also contended that such laws had been in force “among the Jews, Greeks, Romans, Arabs, Germans, Scandinavians, and finally, among our ancestors, the Slavs”; payment of fines for injuring others reminded him of “the same legal positions of the Franks, Allemani, Lombards and others.”²³ While this scheme left open the possibility that Kazakhs might someday approach the level of what Levshin considered mature, civilized (not necessarily European) peoples, it also, considering the

¹⁹ Levshin 51-52

²⁰ Lisa Malkki has developed the concept of a “sedentary metaphysic,” the notion that authentic national identity is (unconsciously) conferred only to people staying permanently in one place. Extending this concept beyond questions of identity *per se* to broader questions of the perception of order and regulation seems helpful for understanding the argument Levshin articulated, a line of thinking recapitulated by many later Russian scholars. See Malkki, “National Geographic: The Rooting of Peoples and the Territorialization of National Identity among Scholars and Refugees,” *Cultural Anthropology* 7.1 (Feb. 1992): 22-44.

²¹ Levshin echoes here the doctrine of social evolutionism, a concept that became popular in European scholarly thought during and after the Enlightenment, espoused by figures as diverse as G. W. F. Hegel and Adam Smith. Contemporary scholars have noted and criticized the linkages between anthropology as a discipline and this now-discredited idea. See, for example, Daniel A. Segal and Sylvia J. Yanagisako, “Introduction,” *Unwrapping the Sacred Bundle: Reflections on the Disciplining of Anthropology* (Durham, NC: Duke UP, 2005) 7-9.

²² Levshin 123.

²³ *Ibid.*

remoteness of his examples, left this possibility a millennium or more in the future. For the time being, Kazakh life consisted in bloody raids for livestock (known under the general name of *baranta*), brutality, and the rule of the strong over the weak not by right, but by virtue of the region's lawlessness.²⁴ It was, in short, anarchy, if not in its literal meaning, then in the sense of "instability of authorities existing among the Kazakhs, their indefiniteness...the absence of laws, crimes committed without punishment."²⁵ If Kazakhs might eventually pass through this developmental phase, for Levshin, the most important matter was its implications for the imperial Russian state as he was writing.

These implications can be divided into two categories, reflecting a sense of uncertainty about the extent to which the Small and Middle Hordes were actually a part of the Russian Empire in the early 1830s. The axiomatically anarchic nature of the steppe and its inhabitants was important for Levshin with respect to both colonial administration and foreign relations. With little understanding of fixed and permanent laws, and an inherent desire to seek out the strongest protector possible, Kazakh leaders, Levshin argued, did not intend to permanently remain under the authority of Russia or any other foreign government, "nor to introduce peace and order among themselves."²⁶ Rather, they would soon attempt, if permitted, to seek a more advantageous situation for themselves, since "no diligent Muslim considers holy a treaty concluded with a Christian, and a Kazakh, not having laws above his own personal profit, respects it still less."²⁷ By dint of ethnicity and religion alike, then, Kazakhs were not to be taken at their word; new administrative measures would be required to prevent them from fleeing (a common

²⁴ On Russian administrative misunderstandings of this term (Kaz. *barymta*), see Martin, *Law and Custom in the Steppe*, especially Chapter Six.

²⁵ Levshin 107.

²⁶ Levshin 108-109.

²⁷ Levshin 109

concern of sedentary states coming to terms with nomadic subjects) or coming under the influence of other regional powers, the waxing of whose prestige on the steppe, in Levshin's zero-sum view, could only augur poorly for Russian interests. The first priority of imperial administration, to his mind, was to prevent this from occurring.

Indeed, Levshin's conception of Kazakh "civilization" as a matter of the distant future led him to reject or be skeptical of the projects of "enlightened" colonial administration dating to the Catherinian era – the building of schools, mosques, homes for political leaders, and other such permanent institutions. Although the Kazakhs had been Russian subjects for almost a century, and during that time the imperial treasury had borne significant expenses for the sake of establishing "some kind of order" among them, "all this has been in vain (*tshchetno*). These measures have hardly moved the Kazakhs to education. The schools and mosques are empty, the houses prepared for living have collapsed, not inhabited by anyone."²⁸ For Levshin, this curious phenomenon required explanation; he concluded that the reason for the anarchy prevailing on the steppe related to the particularities of its environmental conditions and the lifeways they supported. While all peoples surrounding the Kazakhs lived under a caricatured Asiatic despotism, Levshin argued, the Kazakhs themselves had scarcely any concept of subjecthood or hierarchy, owing, he claimed, "to the nomadic way of life of this people and the infertility of the land."²⁹ No external force had seen value in conquering the steppe sufficient to cover the losses this would have incurred, nor was possession of the land enough to secure control of its highly mobile and willful inhabitants. Under the circumstances, he advances a case for *more* despotism as the best guarantee of Kazakhs' internal security

²⁸ Levshin 125

²⁹ Levshin 127

and utility to external powers. (This is an unusual argument in the context of European imperial travel writing, which most often used the allegedly rigid hierarchy of Asian societies to explain what these authors viewed as economic and cultural stagnation and justify European intervention.)³⁰ He used the rule of Iunus-khodzha (1756-1805), ruler of Tashkent at the beginning of the 19th century, as an example of the benefits that vigorous, extractive administration, not troubling initially about the artificial establishment of new social and legal orders, could bring to a colonial power. The Great Horde Kazakhs of Turkestan, he noted, at this time “not only paid precisely the tax levied from them – one sheep per hundred – but, fearing a repeat of the strict punishments they had already experienced once from [Iunus-khodzha], fulfilled all his demands.”³¹ Levshin thus repeated the common imperialist argument that the colonized understand only force, even as he asserted that any sort of ordering principle to steppe life, even if not applied by the Russian government, would be an improvement over current conditions. The forceful introduction of hierarchy and authority, he argued, was the most necessary condition for any kind of further reform, stabilizing the international situation while preparing the ground for moral education and social order. While a people’s government depended on its morals, in his view,

Still greater is the influence of the form of administration on the spirit and character of the people. The anarchy, robbery, murder of the Kazakhs, of course come from their ignorance, roughness, avarice, predatory nature and vengefulness, but these defects exist, are spread and bring them various misfortunes only because there is no force causing their cessation, there is no power that would subdue them and concern itself only with good. And without laws, without order and subordination which people at any time has prospered?³²

³⁰ In the context of the Russian Empire, see N. M. Przhevalskii’s descriptions of Mongolia and China; despotism is also a theme of Ch. Ch. Valikhanov’s writings, discussed at length in Chapter Two of the present work.

³¹ Levshin 112-13

³² Levshin 127

Thus while Levshin did not see the Kazakhs as inherently and permanently “rough and ignorant,” he linked these traits to what he considered the anarchic nature of their social and political world, as well as of their pastoralist lifeways. He was convinced that the Kazakhs were unlikely to ever sedentarize, and argued that in a purely economic sense Kazakh nomadism made the most sense for Russia, contending that the Kazakhs were more useful to the Empire as “wealthy shepherds” than as poor farmers, and not envisioning any other outcome as likely.³³ This left the forceful introduction of order from without as the only potential means, in his mind, of securing the moral quietude that would bring profit to the steppe, its inhabitants, and the Empire as a whole.

Mobile pastoralism and the character traits Levshin associated with it presented a range of problems in administration and trade.³⁴ Despite the presence of sub-groups (clans and tribes) within the broader category of Kazakh or Horde, the nomads’ mobility, Levshin argued, made the construction of any permanent boundaries among them impossible, since they would cross any such boundaries freely.³⁵ Still worse, in his depiction, were the effects the “half-wild *ordyntsy*” had on the lucrative caravan trade between southern Russia and the khanates of Central Asia. Kazakhs, impelled by greed and lawlessness, he claimed, raided these caravans frequently and without provocation. In the past century, as he interpreted matters,

The sultan of the Small Horde, Kaip, who was for a short period of time the Khivan khan, in 1752 delayed a large caravan, going from Orenburg to Khiva or

³³ Levshin 23-4

³⁴ In most situations, when it is not inconvenient to do so, I will follow David Sneath and Caroline Humphrey in employing “mobile pastoralism” rather than “nomadism” to avoid the tropes of primitivism commonly associated with the latter. See Sneath and Humphrey, *The End of Nomadism? Society, State, and the Environment in Inner Asia* (Durham, NC: Duke UP, 1999).

³⁵ Levshin 20

Bukhara without any other reason than that the Russian government presented the title of khan in the Small Horde predominantly to the heirs of Abulkhair.³⁶

This and other examples created the impression for Levshin's readers that the steppe was an inherently dangerous place not only for its permanent inhabitants, but for imperial agents passing through it as well. Such a formulation, in turn, laid the groundwork for a potentially radical solution to problems that, he argued, urgently required attention.

A last, vital component of Levshin's argument for increased Russian intervention on the steppe, though not in the form of permanent, "civilizing" institutions such as schools and mosques, was persuading his readership that the violent and chaotic region and people he described were worth the trouble. He put the question directly: "Is the benefit that Russia has received from the establishment of connections with the Kazakh hordes subject to any doubt?"³⁷ Answering his question with another, he concluded, "What other people would have delivered us so many products, which we now trade for with them? And who would have taken from us all those goods which we now send off to them?"³⁸ Despite the raids, the disloyalty, the thousands of rubles expended in vain on the building of permanent institutional centers, Levshin argued that the benefits that connections with the Kazakhs provided to Treasury and merchantry alike were obvious, significantly outweighing all costs undertaken, providing a wealth of raw animal products and a market for manufactured goods. With significant reform, he claimed, business could develop still further.

³⁶ Levshin 164

³⁷ Levshin 157

³⁸ Levshin 157-8

The nature of this reform in imperial policy is ambiguous for much of Levshin's account. Agriculture, he argued, was "a certain (*vernnyi*) step towards sedentarism and civil life (*grazhdanskaia zhizn'*)," noting that "all people from the state of hunters or fishermen transitioned to being herders and, finally, became farmers."³⁹ However, he noted in the same breath and elsewhere in his account that the steppe's topography and hydrology made it an unlikely region for the widespread and successful development of grain cultivation. Thus in Levshin's mind a primary route to the civil order he claimed the Kazakhs desperately required, a method later central to the claims of advocates of settler colonization, was permanently closed. In its absence, he recommended a less subtle method. The Russian government's "half-measures" (*korotkie mery*) towards the cessation of raids and robbery, he argued, had proven ineffective, claiming that Russia's trade with Central Asia would not flourish "until the Kazakhs will change their national character or will be roused by force of arms."⁴⁰ Since the former would not have seemed likely in the Schellingian intellectual milieu, imbuing all peoples with an immutable and essential national spirit, in which Levshin wrote, this amounted to an argument in favor of the forcible pacification of the steppe for the sake of improving the trade balance of the Russian Empire.⁴¹ There was no pretense of a civilizing mission in this argument; expansion into the steppe was, for Levshin, above all a matter of profit (and of security, to the extent that its absence threatened profit). Force, he argued – though it is unclear how extensive the military intervention he envisioned was – was the only means of

³⁹ Levshin 136-7

⁴⁰ Levshin 164

⁴¹ On Schelling's influence on debates about national identity in the Russian Empire during the early 19th century, see Nathaniel Knight, "Ethnicity, Nationality and the Masses: *Narodnost'* and Modernity in Imperial Russia," David L. Hoffmann and Gianni Kotsonis, eds., *Russian Modernity: Politics, Knowledge, Practices* (New York: St. Martin's Press, 2000), 41-64.

securing this goal when dealing with a people both nomadic and Asiatic. While it is tempting to attribute the source of this argument to Levshin's professional affiliation with the General Staff, we will later see that other military geographers had dramatically different views of the respective roles of force and institution-building in the governance of the steppe.

Levshin's understanding of the steppe as an anarchic and fundamentally alien region inspired a particularly muscular view of Russian governance there. However, his views also reflected ambivalence about the imperial enterprise. He attributed to the purportedly simple-minded, uncivilized people he observed a deep understanding of medicine and astronomy, while showing unusual respect for their art and music, "new proof that man is born a poet and musician."⁴² While these positive qualities were attributed to Kazakhs' closeness to nature, and the poetry excused for "not [being] subordinated to the rules of science," Levshin thus indicated that there was some implicit value to their culture.⁴³ He further noted that, despite their nomadism and poverty, Kazakhs were deeply connected to the land they occupied:

"The most well-reasoned of them very much feel that anarchy (*beznachalie*) and discord will long yet not permit them to enjoy general well-being, but all want to wait for better days, rather than leave behind those places on which they were born and raised, that way of life to which they are accustomed."⁴⁴

Large-scale settlement of Slavic peasants for the establishment of civil order and economic productivity was not mentioned as a possible solution to the anarchy Levshin claimed was omnipresent in the steppe. This was a biome unsuited to agriculture, with deleterious consequences for civil order and morality, but valued emotionally and used to

⁴² Levshin 94-5

⁴³ Ibid.

⁴⁴ Levshin 64.

good economic effect by its inhabitants. Thus while Levshin argued that further Russian intervention on the steppe was necessary, he did not envision large-scale colonial expansion in the region. Culturally and environmentally distinct, inhabited by people at once hostile and useful, the steppe was to be pacified, rather than colonized; expropriated, rather than civilized.

Managing and Imagining Colonial Space

Levshin's arguments and observations proved foundational for a subsequent generation of imperial scholars, but a multitude of questions remained, in their minds, unresolved. Primary among these was the issue of where, precisely, the steppe was located; inconveniently corporeal when the subject of physical observation, its limits could be endlessly remade and re-imagined by the same observers. Its borders, both administrative and continental, internal and external, had not necessarily been fixed in nature, and competing ideas about where to place the boundaries between oblasts, between metropole and colony, and between Europe and Asia reveal divergent views of colonized land and people with respect to the empire. I refer here both to the fixed borders that colonial administrators created in an effort to regulate movement and settlement and imagined divisions between Europe and Asia, civilization and its absence, that only loosely corresponded to geographical markers. While state interests remained paramount in all of these considerations, the bases on which regions were conceived and ethnic groups and sub-groups separated from one another varied. Ethnicity, race, religion, lifeways, and perceived civilizational difference all played their roles in the creation of physical and conceptual maps of the Empire.

Responsible for designating locations for fortifications and observation posts after Russia's advance into the Syr-Darya basin, the military statistician and geographer A. I. Maksheev also gave his opinions about how best to manage colonial space some years later (when Russia's position in Central Asia seemed somewhat more secure) for the Turkestan Governor-Generalship, a region diverse ethnically, climactically, and in lifeways. An oblast boundary had been laid between the provinces of Semirech'e and Syr-Darya, but serious questions remained as to how best to subdivide these provinces.⁴⁵ In addition to the vastly divergent conditions, along every possible line of analysis, the two provinces presented, Maksheev emphasized the difficulty that their substantial nomadic (mostly Kazakh, with a few Turkmen) populations created for internal bordering:

“The fastening (*priurochenie*) of nomads to fixed local areas is impossible, first because in the Turkestan krai not all areas present equal comforts for summer and winter nomadism, and second, because each of the numerous groups of nomads has its own defined places of summer and winter camps, to which they have the right, established by time, of property and which are often located in different, significantly far from one another, areas.”⁴⁶

Since these nomads engaged in more agriculture than their compatriots in the northern steppe, Maksheev argued, policies advanced for that region (*viz.*, tying them administratively to their winter camps for the sake of simplicity) would be unsuccessful. Rather, he employed a hodgepodge of criteria in creating *uezd* (county) boundaries. Kazalinsk uezd was defined by a combination of ethnographic and economic criteria, its borders corresponding to “the western border of nomadic lands, of one of the numerous and rich clans of the Small Horde Kazakhs, namely the Chukeis,” while Chimkent uezd

⁴⁵ Indeed, at the time of writing, there was still some uncertainty about the precise course of this boundary, owing to uncertainty about the naming of one of the rivers (Kara-su) that was supposed to form it. See A. I. Maksheev, “Geograficheskie, etnograficheskie i statisticheskie materialy o Turkestanskom krae” in *Zapiski IRGO po otdeleniiu statistiki*, t. 2 (St. Petersburg: n.p., 1871) 6.

⁴⁶ *Ibid.*, 7.

was simply defined by a meridional line measured from Pulkovo observatory, with no explanation given.⁴⁷ Significantly, Maksheev's scheme does not evince any sort of master plan, nor a larger goal than finding justifiable border lines, the latter necessary for the sake of administrative convenience. His management of colonial space was pragmatic above all.

The Provisional Statute of 1868, as Virginia Martin has noted, "erected an administrative framework for bureaucratic control of the steppe lands," subordinating areas populated by Kazakhs and other Central Asian Muslims to the Governor-Generalships of Orenburg, Western Siberia, and Turkestan.⁴⁸ The new territorial divisions created by the Provisional Statute, with the exception of the Governor-Generalships, were analogous to those in other areas (including Slavic regions) of the empire, with *uezd*, *volost* and village (*aul* or *derevnia*) level administration subordinated to a provincial (*oblast* or *guberniia*) governor. The statute both satisfied the impulse towards administrative standardization that characterized the era of the Great Reforms and, as Andreas Kappeler has argued, "pursued the goal of introducing backward nomads to the 'higher stage' of a sedentary lifestyle."⁴⁹ Beyond that, though, the territorial divisions ensuing from it reflected an uneasy compromise among those responsible for drafting it. While some lawmakers, especially the reformist F. K. Girs, argued that uniting Kazakhs administratively was a necessary step towards their merger with the rest of the empire, others, particularly the Governor-General of Orenburg, N. A.

⁴⁷ Ibid., 8-9.

⁴⁸ Martin 68. The Governor-Generalship of Western Siberia was renamed to the Steppe Governor-Generalship in 1882. It consisted of Akmolinsk and Semipalatinsk oblasts, with its capital at Omsk. Originally Semirech'e oblast (more southerly, with its capital at Vernyi) was included in this larger political unit, but it was reclassified to the Turkestan Governor-Generalship in 1899; uncertainty about where the steppe ended administratively thus prevailed for the entire period of Russian rule in Central Asia.

⁴⁹ Andreas Kappeler, *The Russian Empire: A Multiethnic History*, trans. Alfred Clayton (Harlow, England: Pearson Education, 2001) 189.

Kryzhanovskii, feared that territorial unity would heighten the threat posed by the separate Kazakh hordes, considered to be potentially disloyal.⁵⁰ The provincial borders that ensued maintained a rough territorial division among the Small, Middle, and Great Hordes while providing, by the letter of the law, administrative unity; the institution of Governor-Generalships, uniting military and civilian governance in a single person, throughout the region implied that the problems of governance they posed were fundamentally similar.

The celebrated geographer and General Staff member M. I. Veniukov, shortly after the promulgation of the Provisional Statute, took to print disagreeing with it, taking issue with the same lack of direction and alignment with colonizing goals that characterized Maksheev's plan. He began the piece by launching a broadside against the problems created by previous administrative divisions of "Asiatic Russia," namely:

"1. the extreme vastness of some of them; 2. excessively long state boundaries; 3. inequality of population distribution around the governor-generalships and guberniias; 4. the diversity of this population, by its tribal composition, political reliability, rights and governance; 5. the inequality of distribution of military forces and means, which is very important in countries, the administration of which, for the sake of preserving unity of power, is entrusted to people directly commanding troops and 6. the non-correspondence of large administrative groupings with those general political and economic interests, which they should have satisfied."⁵¹

Colonial space, in other words, had not been divided in a way that ensured proper administration, internal security, external security, and (only incidentally) civilizational and economic development. What was necessary, he claimed, was recognition that not all borderlands were created alike; whereas Turkestan exhibited staggering ethnic diversity and, as a recent military conquest, could not be relied upon politically, Russians

⁵⁰ Martin 55

⁵¹ M. I. Veniukov, "O novom razdelenii Aziatskoi Rossii," *Izvestiia IRGO* 8 (St. Petersburg: tip. V. Bezobrazova, 1873) 312.

already predominated in Western Siberia, and the Kazakhs there had been accustomed to Russian rule for more than a century.⁵² Therefore, the military rule embodied by the Governor-Generalship could be safely abolished “without any harm and even with profit for the *krai*.”⁵³ The region encompassed by Western Siberia, he further claimed, was economically incoherent: “The interests of the West Siberian gubernias have little in common with the interests of the oblasts (steppes), and even the gubernias, Tomsk, the mining-industrial, and Tobol’sk, the agricultural, are not like one another.”⁵⁴ Ultimately, Veniukov proposed splitting Western Siberia into two parts, with one, remaining under a military governor, reserved for all “non-border Kazakh steppes.”⁵⁵ The goal of this re-division was, explicitly, to increase border security (by keeping valuable strategic points under military administration) and expedite the Russification and colonization of all areas; he expressed a wish to “give all means to the expansion of Russian colonization in the steppes, and to as multilateral as possible penetration of Russian ways of life into the Kazakhs’ lifeways within the boundaries of the new Governor-Generalship.”⁵⁶ While Maksheev was only concerned with expediency, Veniukov hoped, by essentially gerrymandering the boundaries of administrative regions along ethnic lines (themselves corresponding to ideas of civility and political reliability, in his mind) to engineer the steppe’s transformation into a region “merging into one continuous ethnographic, economic and social whole with the rest of Russia,” as had already happened in Tomsk and Tobol’sk, and might in the distant future in Turkestan and Eastern Siberia as well.⁵⁷

⁵² Ibid., 314.

⁵³ Ibid., 315.

⁵⁴ Ibid., 316.

⁵⁵ Ibid., 323.

⁵⁶ Ibid.

⁵⁷ Ibid., 315.

Veniukov's very use of the term "Asiatic Russia" for the division he proposed implies a further relevant division in the colonial landscape, more imagined than real. The Ural Mountains are popularly identified as dividing Europe and Asia on historic and administrative grounds.⁵⁸ This characterization, indeed, was also present in imperial Russian discourse, but proved contestable and malleable in practice.⁵⁹ Such ambiguity dated in scholarly writing at least to Levshin, who began his *Description* with "the Small Horde, as the closest to Europe"; the Small Horde's lands were located almost entirely west of the Urals, implying that for Levshin not physical geography, but occupation by non-Slavic nomads made these places distinct from Europe.⁶⁰ This ethnographic, rather than physical, definition of Asian space was reinforced by the application of the broad category "Asiatic" (and the unflattering associations it came with) to all non-Russian subjects of travelogues and statistical manuals. "Asiatics" were variously described as "conditionally honest," cowardly, and greedy, and Kazakhs only as a slightly different subtype of this general grouping.⁶¹ Any space occupied by Asiatics was, by this definition, Asia, and a significant step down the hierarchy of civilizations from the metropole. Such descriptions fostered a sense that the steppe and its inhabitants, whatever measures might be taken by the state, were and would remain fundamentally different from (and, in the main, inferior to) the Slavic metropole. Creating a boundary

⁵⁸ Empirically, however, the notion of a physical or geographical division between Europe and Asia is now considered untenable. See Martin Lewis and Karen Wigen, *The Myth of Continents: A Critique of Metageography* (Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 1997).

⁵⁹ P. P. Semenov-Tian-Shanskii mentions a marker in the Urals with "Europe" written on one side and "Asia" on the other, but comments on the naivety of such an "artificial division" in his memoirs. See Semenov-Tian-Shanskii, *Puteshestvie v Tian'-Shan' v 1856-7 gg.* (Moscow: OGIZ, 1946) 39-40.

⁶⁰ Levshin 7-8.

⁶¹ L. Meier, *Materialy dlia geografiki i statistiki Rossii, sobrannye ofitserami general'nogo shtaba: Kirgizskaia step' orenburgskogo vedomstva.* (St. Petersburg: tip. E. Veimar i F. Person, 1865) 259; A. K. Geins, "Dnevnik 1865-go g. – puteshestvie po kirgizskim stepiam," *Sobranie literaturnykh trudov A. K. Geinsa, t. 1* (SPb: tip. M. M. Stasiulevicha, 1897) 380; A. I. Maksheev, *Puteshestviia po kirgizskim stepiam i Turkestanskomu kraiu* (St. Petersburg: Voennaia tipografiia, 1896) 247.

between Europe and Asia was not the same as defining the steppe precisely, but commentators who emphasized the presence of “Asiatic Russia” in the empire created a space of difference within the imperium to which the steppe was often relegated.

This discourse, however, was undercut by an opposing view (sometimes held by the same authors who expressed fixed and certain conclusions about the “Asiatic” character) that racial difference was not immutable, and the boundary between Europe and Asia difficult to determine. The racial theorizing of the era, attempting to determine the lineage of modern nations, led to some potentially awkward conclusions. The meteorologist and member of the General Staff (at the rank of captain) A. Golubev, in his travel notebook, mused about Semireche and the steppe:

“The *krai* we are speaking of divides High Asia from the steppe lands stretching from here to the north and west over a huge area, across the Kazakh steppes to the Arctic Ocean and plains of Europe. Across it passed tribes emigrating from Asia, and long remained on it, not wishing to change its abundant pastures for the naked steppe that spread before them, had not yet been forced out anew by surging (*nakhlynuvshymi*) crowds. From here departed, perhaps, our forefathers – the Indo-Germanic tribes.”⁶²

Asia, according to this line of thinking, had not always been distinct from Europe, nor was it clearly separate even in the 19th century, if it lay at the roots of European genealogies; the steppe was figured here not as separate, but a transitional zone, neither wholly European nor wholly Asian. This tension was present in questions of physical geography, as well. The editors of the collection *Russkii Turkestan* described the steppe of southern Russia as “a physically transitional form from Asia to Europe”; if this formulation implied some certainty that distinct places called “Asia” and “Europe”

⁶² A. Golubev, “Otryvok iz puteshestviia v Sredniuiu Aziiu – Zailiiskii krai,” *Zapiski IRGO* (1861) (publisher unknown) 120. For Golubev’s rank and more on the relationship of his scholarly career to the conquest of Semireche, see his “Iz vlecheniia iz otcheta, predstavlennoho v voenno-topograficheskoe delo, o rezul’tatakh astronomicheskikh i fizicheskikh nabludenii v Semirechenskom i Zailiiskom kraia kh, proizvedennykh v 1859 g. General’nogo Shtaba Kapitanom Golubevym” (n.p., 1861).

existed, it also admitted the possibility that even Slavic-populated areas west of the Urals could be considered Asian in some sense.⁶³ The Russian intellectual culture of the 1850s and '60s was much occupied with the question of Russia's place between Europe and Asia, and the answer was not always firmly in favor of Europe.⁶⁴ Even this relatively select group of technocrats, though, in the main strongly supporting the rationalist principles of the Westernizer movement and viewing Russia as a European colonial empire, could not prevent doubts from creeping in about just how European the Russian Empire was in relation to its steppe colonies.

The multiple potential administrative and intellectual divisions of Eurasian space reveal clearly the ambivalence the steppe engendered among those charged with describing it. Internal and external borders could be laid so as to serve a number of purposes ranging from security to economic development, and the choice of one (with the priorities it embodied) necessarily excluded or de-emphasized other views of the ends to which colonial space should have been organized; sometimes these choices were not even made consciously, but ensued from the perceived need to place a definable boundary, any boundary, on the map. Nor were the generally Western-minded observers of the steppe certain about the nature of the boundary between Europe and Asia. Both physical and ethnographic characterizations supported a vague sense that the steppe was Asian and the metropole European (even if the location of the dividing line varied between the Urals or the boundaries of Small Horde Kazakh pastures), but this sense coexisted uneasily with

⁶³ N. A. Maev, ed., *Russkii Turkestan, vyp. 1: geografika i statistika* (Moscow: Universitetskaia tipografiia, 1872) 9-10.

⁶⁴ See, e.g., Dostoevsky's *Zimnye zametki o letnykh vpechatleniakh* (*Winter Notes on Summer Impressions*) for a classic example of the anti-Western current in Russian thought at this time. On notions of "betweenness" during the Muscovite era, see Valerie Kivelson, "'Between All Parts of the Universe': Russian Cosmographies and Imperial Strategies in Early Modern Siberia and Ukraine," *Imago Mundi* 60.2 (June 2008): 166-181.

views of the steppe as a transitional zone, and Russia itself as not quite European culturally or physically. Beyond uncertainty about how best to demarcate colonial space for statist purposes, in short, there were larger questions that remained, despite appearances, unresolved, questions of national identity and imperial mission.

Economic Development and the Physical Environment

Despite uncertainty about where the steppe was properly situated administratively and culturally, for most scholarly observers, one of the chief points of interest it held for the metropole was its capacity for economic growth. Governmental and civil organizations alike shared this interest, expending vast sums in support of research expeditions to the region in the hope that, over time, the return on this investment would be substantial. In this sense, research about steppe lands, despite claims of disinterested scholarship, was inherently an enterprise meant to serve metropolitan interests. The form that such economic development might take, however, was open to contestation in several respects. If profit was an incentive almost universally agreed upon, it was unclear whose profit was to be prioritized – Russians in the metropole, Russian settlers, sedentarized Kazakhs, all Kazakhs, or some combination of these groups. Further, the means by which such prosperity was to be achieved was the subject of a host of interpretations; visions of the steppe and Turkestan as a new granary for the empire, a lucrative crossroads for trade, a pastoral heartland supplying other regions with animal products, and a vital component of industrial development were all mooted during the mid-19th century. These competing views, in turn, were rooted in scholarly disagreements about the physical environment of the steppe biome, its climate, flora, hydrology, geological structure and other questions superficially distant from policy.

Stimulating public and administrative interest in the new Central Asian territories, presenting masses of information about what had hitherto been *terra incognita*, imperial scholars disputed both their physical characteristics and the implications of the latter.⁶⁵ Having gathered volumes of data, the people and institutions comprising the Russian Empire's information-gathering apparatus were profoundly ambivalent about their meaning.

Observations of the flora, climate, and hydrography of Turkestan and the steppe engendered disagreements about the region's suitability for agriculture. While some observers concluded that at least some parts of it could become, with time, a new granary for the Russian Empire, supplementing or replacing the production of the "black earth" region of central Russia, others were unconvinced. In a laconic and highly technical (more than 75% consisting exclusively of Linnaean classifications) volume about the botany of the Aralo-Caspian basin, I. Borshchov correlated the absence of characteristic European flora there with an argument for its poor agricultural potential. Describing harsh climactic conditions and the absence of the succulent grasses of the southern Russian steppe, he concluded, "In the whole Aralo-Caspian *krai* there is not a scrap of land, the soil of which would approach that soil, abundant in the central and southern parts of Russia, which gives luxurious harvests of grain and hay."⁶⁶ P. P. Semenov-Tian-Shanskii, who became famous in intellectual and public circles for his exploration of the

⁶⁵ In the case of eastern Siberia (especially the Amur River basin), Mark Bassin has noted that these seemingly objective observations were connected to diverse and imaginative views of the imperial project in metropolitan literary and philosophical circles. See his *Imperial Visions: Nationalist Imagination and Geographical Expansion in the Russian Far East, 1840-1865* (Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 1999), especially Chapter Five, "Dreams of a Siberian Mississippi." Not disputing his claim, I focus on "scientific" accounts (rather than commentaries about and inspired by them) as sites of contestation (often implicit, at this stage) with respect to questions of economic development.

⁶⁶ I. Borshchov, *Materialy dlia botanicheskoi geografii Aralo-Kaspiiskogo kraia* (St. Petersburg: tip. Imperatorskoi Akademii Nauk, 1865) 24-26.

Tian-Shan and Alatau mountain ranges and their surrounding steppes, and subsequently took up a leadership role within IRGO, applied similar logic but, observing a different region, drew the opposite conclusion. In his notes on the foothills of the Zailiisk-Alatau mountain chain, the territory of the Great Horde Kazakhs, he argued that the high (56%) percentage of “Russo-European” flora in one valley served as proof that it “[represented] a locality suitable in its climactic conditions for culture and settled colonization.”⁶⁷ The enumeration and classification of Central Asian flora, then, had significance on a level both purely scientific – identifying and describing new species for a scholarly European audience, for instance – and applied.

Hydrographic and climactic data served similar purposes. Golubev applied long-term meteorological data to the surroundings of Fort Vernoe, the same area Semenov deemed promising for agriculture, and drew drastically different conclusions. Although many considered it to have a bright future, especially for the establishment of orchards and vineyards, Golubev argued that as its average annual temperature was less than eight degrees Reaumur (50 degrees Fahrenheit), “it is hard to expect successes in the cultivation of grapes.”⁶⁸ Although Golubev was more systematic than most in his meteorological observations, positive or disparaging comments about the climate of whichever region was under study and its implications for agriculture were frequent in scholarly descriptions of Central Asia and the steppe.⁶⁹ The identification of sources of

⁶⁷ Semenov 220.

⁶⁸ A. Golubev, “O srednei godichnoi temperature i sostoyanii barometra v ukrepleni Vernom” (St. Petersburg: n.p., 1860) 120. He operates under the assumption, borrowed from the German geographer Humboldt (itself based on observation of European wine-producing regions), that an average temperature of 8.4 degrees Reaumur is necessary for successful viniculture. On the Reaumur scale, the freezing and boiling points of water at sea level are set to zero and 80 degrees respectively.

⁶⁹ Krasovskii, for example, argues that the Erementau mountain group, lacking sharp transitions from hot to cold, is one of the best places in the oblast of the Siberian Kazakhs for the establishment of a sedentary population. See Krasovskii, *Materialy dlia geografiki i statistiki Rossii, sobrannye ofitserami general'nogo*

fresh water was also important to such assessments since, as Semenov noted, “to live between rivers is impossible because of a lack of water, and thus it is only possible to settle on the banks of rivers and freshwater lakes.”⁷⁰ Evaluations on this score were generally pessimistic; Borshchov, for one, evaluated the Syr-Dar’ya basin as “no more than a huge sandy desert, in which soil is suitable for agricultural development is found only in the form of poor oases.”⁷¹ More sanguine viewpoints, where they existed, were confined to small regions and particular bodies of water claimed or demonstrated to be suitable for cultivation and human consumption, such as the basin of the Tobol’ river.⁷² On one level then, the diversity of scholarly views about the relationship between the physical characteristics of the steppe biome and agricultural development was grounded in a sincere attempt at acquaintance with the specificities of that biome’s many sub-regions. Put more simply, at this time no vision of the Russian Empire’s purpose on the northern steppe (as opposed to the foothills of the Alatau mountains in the south) that was at all dependent on the measurable characteristics of its water, air and soil was strong enough to avoid foundering on the rocks of this objective reality.⁷³

shtaba: Oblast’ sibirskikh kirgizov, vyp. 1 (St. Petersburg: tip. Transhel’; tip. Rotger and Shneider, 1868) 142.

⁷⁰ Semenov 64.

⁷¹ Borshchov 19. L. Meier, among others, shared his view that the steppe was poor in fresh water; further, such sources as existed, he argued, were too unevenly distributed to be of much use (13).

⁷² I. Kazantsev, *Opisanie kirgiz-kaisak* (St. Petersburg: tip. Tovarishchestva “Obshchestvennaia pol’za,” 1867) 61.

⁷³ Some observers did attempt to promote projects aimed at transforming the Central Asian biome into a more climactically and hydrographically propitious region, but such projects were too fanciful to gain much traction and generally shunned in scholarly circles. See Ia. Demchenko, *O navodnenii Aralo-Kaspiiskoi nizmennosti dlia uluchsheniia klimata prilozhashchikh stran* (Kiev: Kievskaiia gubernskaia tipografiia, 1871) for a proposal to divert the course of the Ob’ and Irtysh rivers to turn the Aralo-Caspian basin, over the course of more than 100 years, into a vast inland sea, and the region’s climate from continental to maritime. The author complains that IRGO refused to take his proposal seriously. The fate of this project emphasizes the tendency of most imperial scholars to reckon above all with the natural characteristics (purportedly objectively measurable) of the steppe; it is also a useful reminder that projects aimed at large-scale changes in the Central Asian landscape were not exclusively a Soviet innovation. On this latter point, see Maya Peterson, “Cultures of Cotton: Russian Development Schemes in Central Asia, 1905-1941.”

Even among observers agreeing that some areas were suitable for agriculture (and the economic and civil development that many considered to come with it), differing interpretations existed as to how this was to be brought about, themselves linked to competing understandings of climactic data. Although the era of organized Russian peasant settlement to the region was still years away, the fate of Cossacks and irregular migrants was of interest to many as an index for the possibility of larger-scale settler colonization. Semenov-Tian-Shanskii and L. Meier both argued that settlement had enjoyed some success in its early years, and that its problems could be overcome by investment and careful administration. Meier (a General Staff officer and the author of a gargantuan statistical handbook on the “Orenburg Kazakhs,” roughly corresponding to the Small Horde), in particular, cited the orchards and vegetable gardens at fort Alexandrovskoe, “on the high plateau Ust-Urt, known for its infertility, and surrounded on all sides by naked, stony steppe and cliffs,” as evidence that climate and hydrography need not limit the steppe’s long-term agricultural productivity.⁷⁴ Severtsov, traveling in Cherniaev’s retinue, took time to identify areas suitable for Russian colonization in a note he presented to the Turkestan Governor-General, implying both support for such a policy and optimism about its prospects.⁷⁵ Others, however, were much more hesitant. I. Kazantsev, for example, argued that “For permanent and sedentary resettlement by Russians the Syr-Darya line does not present the profits and comforts that many suppose.”⁷⁶ Rather, he claimed that Russian settlers would be too unfamiliar with the

Paper presented at the Workshop for the History of the Environment, Agriculture, Technology and Society (WHEATS), Madison, WI, October 9, 2010. Cited with the author’s permission.

⁷⁴ Meier 121-122; also see Semenov 81-82 and 236-237 for optimistic descriptions of the Russian settlements at Kopal’ and Lepsinsk.

⁷⁵ N. A. Severtsov, *Puteshestviiia po Turkestanskomu kraiiu i issledovanie gornoj strany Tian’-Shania* (St. Petersburg: tip. K. V. Trubnikova, 1873) 93.

⁷⁶ Kazantsev 126.

techniques of artificial irrigation (without which steppe soil would produce nothing beneficial) to feed themselves and others, and unable to tolerate the extremes of temperature that characterized the Syr-Darya basin. Kazakhs and Karakalpaks, on the other hand, “[could] still live in such inhospitable conditions – they are accustomed to the work and deprivations.”⁷⁷ Kazantsev, then, envisioned sedentarization and the rise of an agricultural economy on what had previously been a mobile pastoralist heartland, but with only minimal Russian settlement. If there was not consensus on the possibility of developing agriculture on the steppe, nor on the logic for doing so, at least a substantial majority of observers agreed that its encouragement was necessary in the areas most favorable for it. At this stage, however, doubts remained about the prospects of peasant settlement, and such ambivalence militated against the rise of an organized settler colonization movement.⁷⁸

Further, consciousness of the real physical limitations the steppe presented to cultivation over the majority of its area meant that most observers saw a continuing role for mobile pastoralism in the region, although there was little agreement about how prominent it should remain, nor about what its survival would mean. It was commonplace in military-statistical manuals and narratives of exploration alike to note the waterless, treeless monotony of large swaths of steppe land; for most pundits, the logical conclusion was that much of the new imperial borderland could never be cultivated. Meier, otherwise a vocal proponent of economic development through the administrative sponsorship of agriculture, stated this point most clearly with the caveat, “It is not subject to any doubt that a part of [the Kazakhs] will always lead a nomadic or

⁷⁷ Ibid.

⁷⁸ Such ambivalence, linked mostly to further study of the steppe biome, continued even after settler colonization of the steppe oblasts became state policy. See Chapter Five for more on this issue.

semi-nomadic life, because only under this condition is it possible to extract some use from the many parts of its vast territory.”⁷⁹ Despite the frequently negative associations that pastoral nomadism, perceived as a clear step down on the hierarchy of civilizations and an obstacle to regular administration, had in scholarly and bureaucratic circles, the continuing presence of pastoralists on the steppe was not universally seen as a bad thing. Rather, for some observers, notably Semenov, it resolved the dilemmas of land usage that an expanded program of colonization would present. Dividing the foothills of the Zailiisk-Alatau by elevation, he noted that the lowest zone (300-600 m), characterized by steppe flora and fauna, “understandably...could not attract Russian colonization,” whereas the zone immediately above it (600-1400 m), with a temperate climate, abundant streams, and vegetation also found in Russia and Ukraine, “has become important for Russian colonization.”⁸⁰ The existence of such ecologically distinct zones, suitable for vastly different lifeways, in close proximity to one another meant for Semenov and others that land seizures engendered by settlement would not lead to conflict; further, he argued, it gave the nomads the opportunity to receive ample compensation for their losses, since Russian settlers “gave [Kazakhs] such profits in the sale of the livestock they produce, that they could easily buy from the Russians the small quantity of grain that they usually use for food.”⁸¹ Pastoralism, a hindrance to the civil and economic development that many argued widespread agriculture would bring to the Kazakhs, was also in some sense environmentally determined and resolved an obvious problem that peasant settlement would necessarily engender. Uncertainty about its proper position with respect to administrative priorities plagued the Russian Empire until its collapse.

⁷⁹ Meier 240.

⁸⁰ Semenov 139-140

⁸¹ Ibid.

Exploration also revealed, for some, the region's potential as a source of raw mineral products and in the long term, accordingly, as a center of heavy industry and metallurgy (at a time when this branch of the economy was little developed in the cities of the metropole). While Meier believed that "The Kazakh steppe...is very poor in mineral wealth, with the exception of salt," and argued that no profit could be obtained from mining, most of the other observers concerned with this problem (for many ignored it as outside the ken of immediately possible development and utility) saw in this field the promise of limitless profit.⁸² In a journal article published by IRGO, A. Gabriel' described the steppes of western Siberia as rich in coal, copper, iron, and gold.⁸³ To his mind, this presented opportunities for economic development that would quickly reward locals regardless of ethnicity: "Then there will appear new activity, new and reliable work methods for all estates of the Russian population near the city of Sergiopol', not excluding the nomadic Kazakhs closest to the Irtysh."⁸⁴ Other visions of Central Asia's metallurgical future were far less inclusive, and served state goals more concretely. Of the gold, lead, copper and iron deposits of Turkestan, A. S. Tatarinov wrote that although Turkic locals had developed many of them, "not a single development took on a broad scale and not a single production reached the level of an industry."⁸⁵ Rather, significant capital outlays and survey efforts on the part of the colonial administration had been

⁸² This was not always exclusively state profit, incidentally; individual explorers often attempted to turn mineral finds to their own advantage. Severtsov, for example, staked a claim to coal deposits from an early journey to the steppe in 1859, years before accompanying Cherniaev's army to Turkestan. See TsGA RK f. 4, op. 1, d. 3791, sv. 509, "Delo o dozvolanii magistru zoologii Severtsovu N. A. proizvodit' razvedku mestorozhdenii kamennogo uglia v Kazakhskoi stepi." In a pragmatic decision, the Border Commission responsible for governing the Bukei Horde Kazakhs permitted Severtsov to develop this deposit (for which higher permission would ordinarily have been required) because of the lack of wood fuel in the region and his willingness to assume all expenses himself (l. 4ob.).

⁸³ A. Gabriel', "Svedeniia ob otkrytii v raznykh mestakh Kirgizskoi stepi mednykh i zheleznykh rud, a takzhe kamennogo uglia," *Izvestiia IRGO* 5 (St. Petersburg: tip. V. Bezobrazova, 1869) 68-69.

⁸⁴ *Ibid.*

⁸⁵ A. S. Tatarinov, "O mineralnykh bogatstvakh Turkestanskogo kraia," V. N. Troitskii, ed., *Russkii Turkestan: sbornik, vyp. 2* (Moscow: Universitetskaia tipografiia, 1872) 153.

required to stimulate the development of mining and heavy industry, although Tatarinov conceded that these expenditures of time and money had not yet achieved their desired results. In the future, though, he expressed certainty that the coal available in Turkestan was more than sufficient to support a huge number of factories, and lead plentiful enough (if in the hands of Russian entrepreneurs and not natives, who “produce it unprofitably”) to supply the Turkestan military *okrug* (district) with bullets.⁸⁶ Thus for Tatarinov the question of Central Asia’s suitability for industrial development was already decided, and depended more on the presence of fitting investor-operators than the vagaries of the physical environment, which he was certain presented boundless possibilities for growth.⁸⁷ A footnote for some civilian and military observers alike, mining and metallurgy lay at the core of others’ visions of the steppe’s long-term future, a future inseparable from urbanization and an expanded Russian presence in the region.

All of these visions were consonant with, indeed depended upon, visions of the flat and boundless steppe as a crossroads for internal and external trade. With no way of getting grain, animal products, and minerals to centers of production, and subsequently to market, dreams of economic development were a dead letter. Further, the widely-acknowledged limits of much of the steppe biome for agriculture made other profitable enterprises necessary for the attraction of a sedentary population, as the editorial committee of *Russkii Turkestan* noted: “Because of the scantiness of nature’s gifts,

⁸⁶ Tatarinov 159-160, 188.

⁸⁷ Faith in this principle was widespread enough that mines and factories in Turkestan and the steppe regularly found investors, but for most of the 19th century, Meier’s pessimism was more than justified by the fate of these enterprises. See TsGA RK f. 15, op. 1, d. 1958, sv. 103, “Vedomost’ o kamenougolnykh priiskakh gornopromyshlennika Stepana Aleksandrovicha Popova 1885-7 gg.” for an example of this, recording the Semipalatinsk Oblast Administration’s displeasure with one such speculator for failing to develop or invest in his coal claims in Karkaralinsk uezd and, instead, using scarce wood fuel for the smelters in his factory. This displeasure was only slightly mollified by the finding that there was very little coal available at Popov’s sites and “it [was] of such poor quality that it almost didn’t burn” (l. 20ob.).

settlers may be attracted here [to the region around Lake Balkhash] only by the profits of trade.”⁸⁸ Fortunately, from this perspective, the new territories appeared ideally suited to such endeavors. Listing and describing postal and caravan roads, Krasovskii, editor of the General Staff’s three-volume treatment of the Siberian (i.e., Middle Horde) Kazakhs, noted “the absence [on the steppe] of natural obstacles for the extension of roads” and the “shortness and ease of passage” of internal trade routes.⁸⁹ Meier argued similarly that on the lands of the Small Horde, “nature built the roads,” although he was pessimistic about the development of water routes.⁹⁰ Presenting systematic and user-friendly lists of the main roads of the region, including point-to-point distances, availability of horses at stopping places, and brief explications of their significance, both authors provided a guide to the development of trade and an argument that the very landscape of the steppe encouraged it. Such topographical observations were not, of course, limited to questions of economic utility; for Maksheev they were tied to strategic considerations of troop movement and garrison supply. But the idea of landscape was inseparable from visions of the commercial future of the steppe, whether this future was intertwined with or separate from other forms of economic development.

While almost all scholarly observers agreed that increasing the productivity of the Kazakh steppe was possible and, for a variety of reasons, desirable, the very physical characteristics they were tasked with measuring and reporting shaped and limited the projects they proposed towards this end. While in a certain sense it is possible to speak

⁸⁸ *Russkii Turkestan*, vyp. 1, 55.

⁸⁹ Krasovskii, v. 1, 217-218.

⁹⁰ Meier 51. Other observers of steppe potamology and limnology believed that steamship trade between Central Asia and surrounding territories was possible and advantageous, with or without the construction of dams in some areas.. See Maev 55 and Severtsov, “Ob uchrezhdenii Sredne-Aziatskogo obshchestva parokhodstva i torgovli” (St. Petersburg: tip. “Obshchestvennaia pol’za,” 1870).

of a unified imperial gaze running the rule over all attributes of the steppe environment, insofar as all these scholars and bureaucrats were writing on behalf of and for the benefit of an expansionist empire, limiting our interpretation of these materials to this is overly reductionist. To policymakers, merchants, peasants and pastoralists alike, these competing evaluations of the steppe's economic future, restricted by measurable physical realities, mattered tremendously. On the basis of such scholarship, serious determinations about the course the Russian Empire was to chart on the steppe – a series of self-sufficient trading posts and forts or a fully-fledged colonial empire – were made.⁹¹ Geographic and statistical observation shaped a range of views of the steppe's economic development, but lent themselves to no definitive conclusions; the authors cited above wrote past one another, unaware of the extent to which their views would later prove contradictory when applied in policy. The certainty of the meticulous tables and charts that dotted their narratives fit uneasily with a larger uncertainty about what it all might mean.

Loyal Subjects and Half-Wild Brutes

Observations of the population of the steppe were as important to the imperial Russian knowledge-gathering project as those of its physical characteristics. As Russian forces swept gradually south across the steppe to the khanates of Turkestan, millions of Kazakhs formally became subjects of the Russian Empire. Imperial scholars, however, were not certain that such official subordination carried over into real life. The Empire's Caucasian ulcer had demonstrated to many that the drawing of a border on a map, or the presence of a Russian fortification in a region, did not mean that the region's inhabitants

⁹¹ See Chapter Five for more on the use of statistical manuals and explorers' narratives by the Resettlement Administration (*Pereselencheskoe upravlenie*) in the 1890s and 1900s.

were imperial subjects in any practical sense.⁹² Questions of loyalty aside, anthropological sketches diverged wildly on the topic of Kazakhs' developmental potential, on their essential personality traits and intellectual capabilities. For an audience of intellectuals and policymakers alike, these authors presented a muddled picture of the newest inhabitants of the empire – some depicting the Kazakhs as noble savages, some as half-wild children, and some as potentially ideal subjects. These competing depictions, in turn, engendered a wide range of arguments about the Russian Empire's purpose in the steppe. While the fixation on Kazakhs' essential national character in these works reveals a fundamental and common set of assumptions (the discreteness of ethnic groups, the immutability of same, and the otherness of Kazakhs in comparison to the imperial core), the diverse interpretations that emerged demonstrate the extent to which Russian conceptions of the imperial mission were themselves uncertain and internally contested.

For P. P. Semenov-Tian-Shanskii, the question of loyalty or disloyalty was easily resolved.⁹³ During his stay at fort Vernoe (present-day Almaty), Semenov was charged by the military commander Khomentovskii with helping to pacify the neighboring Kyrgyz people of the Sarybagish tribe, who “continued their predatory raids on the new Russian Ili krai, which was not yet strongly enough organized.”⁹⁴ In his narrative of the

⁹² For a good summary of the military history of this campaign, though overly reliant on secondary sources, see Moshe Gammer, *Muslim Resistance to the Tsar: Shamil and the Conquest of Chechnia and Dagestan* (London: Frank Cass, 1994).

⁹³ A competent English-language summary of Semenov-Tian-Shanskii's career is W. Bruce Lincoln, *Petr Petrovich Tian-Shanskii: The Life of a Russian Geographer* (Newtonville, MA: Oriental Research Partners, 1980).

⁹⁴ Semenov 112. The Kyrgyz were another pastoralist ethnic group of Turkic origin, principally inhabiting, by the 19th century, the Alatau and Tian-Shan mountains and speaking a language similar to Kazakh; they also accepted Russian subjecthood later than did any of the Kazakh hordes. Confusingly for the modern reader, during the imperial era, Kazakhs were referred to as *kirgiz* and Kyrgyz as *kara-kirgiz* (Black Kirgiz)

campaign, Semenov explained that not only had these Kyrgyz plundered Russian trade caravans, but they had also committed *baranta* “directed against our faithful tributaries, the Kazakhs of the Great Horde.”⁹⁵ Reporting his conversation with the Sarybagish *manap* (chief) in his memoirs, he recalled saying

“that Russians never attacked first and never will attack the Kyrgyz, but that if on the part of the latter any sort of *baranta* is carried out, not just against Russians themselves but against their subjects, the Great Horde Kazakhs, then retribution will be swift, as already happened.”⁹⁶

While this episode is a useful reminder that scholarly travelers in the employ of European empires regularly functioned as imperial agents more tangibly than by imposing a new epistemological framework on colonial space, it also indicates that, for Semenov, borders and treaty agreements quickly took on a concrete reality. Indeed, being on the correct side of the Russian border was discursively correlated not only with loyalty, but a range of positive character traits as well; being outside the physical boundaries of the Russian state meant to be wild and uncivilized as well. From the beginning of the 19th century, Semenov argued, the Great Horde Kazakhs, nominal Russian subjects, had been in a struggle for their very existence against the mountain Kyrgyz, nominal subjects of Qing China and Kokand. The enemy here, for Semenov, was the Kyrgyz, a group of “wild and predatory mountaineers”; the Kazakhs, on the other hand, pressed by their “independent struggle for existence,” developed among themselves

or *dikokamennyi kirgiz* (Wild-Stone Kirgiz). I use the contemporary English ethnonyms in an effort to avoid this confusion.

⁹⁵ Ibid. *Baranta* (Kaz. *barymta*) refers to a method of dispute resolution whereby an offended party drove off another’s livestock temporarily, in an effort to force the other litigant to come before a judge (*biy*) and resolve their conflict. Virginia Martin has rightly argued, however, that in Russian administrative discourse the word came to denote any sort of theft or raiding among pastoralists, and Semenov’s use here is a good example of this tendency. See Martin, “*Barimta*: Nomadic Custom, Imperial Crime,” Daniel R. Brower and Edward J. Lazzerini, eds., *Russia’s Orient: Imperial Borderlands and Peoples, 1700-1917* (Bloomington, IN: Indiana UP, 2001), 249-270.

⁹⁶ Semenov 112.

“manly and heroic types,” such as his companions Tezek and Atankul.⁹⁷ Thus, in Semenov’s telling, the furthest reach of Russian imperial expansion represented the boundary of Russian state responsibilities, of the loyalty of non-Russians to the empire, and of the character traits that good subjects exhibited.

Other observers had a much more ambivalent view of Kazakhs’ essential personal qualities, and of their relationship to the empire that had incorporated them. D. I. Romanovskii, a high-ranking military official (serving first as *ataman* of the Ural Cossack Host, then as the military governor of the new Turkestan oblast), recounting his geographical research of Turkestan and the Kazakh steppe in 1865, seemed caught in two minds. On one hand he noted, as Levshin before him, that a substantial proportion of Kazakhs “live exclusively by brigandage (*razboi*) and robbery.”⁹⁸ On the other, he observed that the sedentary agriculturalists and mobile pastoralists of Central Asia alike were far better suited to life under imperial governance than the *betes noires* of Russian expansionism, the mountaineers of the Caucasus:

“The majority of Central Asia’s population – that is all the sedentary and a significant part of the nomads – are visibly disposed to make use of the gifts of peaceful life...the inhabitants of Central Asia, despite their eternal separation from educated peoples, despite continuous suffering both from the arbitrariness of their half-wild rulers and the attacks of martial nomads have been able to themselves, by their own means, develop among themselves the conveniences of life, as well as several trades.”⁹⁹

Romanovskii depicted the Kazakhs not as inherently and permanently wild and threatening, but temporarily so, linking their performance in this regard to their proximity

⁹⁷ Ibid., 154-5. Tezek and Atankul were a sultan and a biy of the Great Horde, respectively, indicating a potential role for social status in Semenov’s analysis, but the dichotomy he draws between Kazakh and Kyrgyz, subject and outsider, is remarkably consistent.

⁹⁸ D. Romanovskii, “O geograficheskikh issledovaniakh v Kirgizskoi stepi i Turkestanskoi oblasti v 1865 g. i neskol’ko slov o torgovom znachenii Tashkenta,” *Izvestiia IRGO* 2 (St. Petersburg: tip. V. Bezobrazova, 1866), 14. Romanovskii suggested, in the same paragraph, that many Turkmen lived by robbery, and connected the criminal behavior of Kazakhs and Turkmen alike to their nomadic lifeways.

⁹⁹ Romanovskii 18.

to established points of Russian influence. Kazakhs, he argued, were naturally inclined to want peace and development, and had only failed to evince greater demand for it because of the insecurity that surrounded them. As evidence of this, he claimed that “Kazakhs near the Line, that is, living nearer our old Orenburg and Ural lines, are more secured from any type of disorder (*neuriadits*)...whereas other clans, further off, are even at present in an almost primitive condition.”¹⁰⁰ This line of argument was distinct from Semenov’s; Romanovskii was still deeply concerned about the problems internecine strife would cause among the Kazakhs, and thought it likely to occur if they were not closely supervised. But he considered the Kazakhs only temporarily threatening, requiring only the armed surveillance of the imperial state to resolve their disputes and develop peacefully, even while maintaining their nomadic lifestyle.

This state-centered view of the steppe was relatively common in scholarly and military milieux in the 1860s, juxtaposing the allegedly low level of civilization observed there at the time against a brighter future. Such was the line of argument in the gargantuan manuals compiled by officers of the General Staff to describe the oblasts of the Orenburg and Siberian Kazakhs (roughly corresponding to the Small and Middle Hordes, respectively) during the mid-1860s.¹⁰¹ The editors of both volumes, L. Meier and Krasovskii, emphasized that the inhabitants of the lands they surveyed were disloyal, mentally undeveloped and brutish, sometimes in lurid terms. Meier’s history of the Small and Bukei Hordes is essentially a tale of the unreliability and dishonesty of Kazakh khans from the point of view of the colonial administration. He complained that these

¹⁰⁰ Romanovskii 19-20.

¹⁰¹ This series of handbooks compiled by military scholars, which also covered many areas other than the Kazakh steppe, had the general title *Materialy dlia geografii i statistiki Rossii* (Materials for the geography and statistics of Russia).

leaders continued to raid and pillage both other Kazakhs and Russian settlements despite provisions made for their economic wellbeing and external security, sardonically noting, “Apparently [our efforts] were not strong enough to bear the oppression of Asiatic rulers, clothed (*oblechennykh*) by the power of Russian bureaucrats.”¹⁰² The entire 18th century (and much of the 19th) represented, for Meier, an era of double-dealing by Kazakh khans, unwittingly abetted by incompetent Russian bureaucrats, and he had little confidence in their loyalty even by the 1860s. While he did not equally attribute such traits to Kazakhs *en masse*, noting that the Middle Horde had produced far fewer destructive raids on Russian property than the Small, Meier ascribed the difference he observed to variance in external circumstances, both the non-interference of “bureaucrats” in Middle Horde affairs and the relative shortness of the Middle Horde’s border with Russia.¹⁰³

Krasovskii stated his own doubts succinctly: “The Kazakhs only remain under Russian power because they do not have the ability to go off to another power.”¹⁰⁴ 150 years after the Russian advance into the steppe had begun, these military observers were deeply uncertain that the conquest had taken root.¹⁰⁵

Beyond near-axiomatic unreliability as colonial subjects, Meier and Krasovskii attributed to the Kazakhs of the Small and Middle Horde a variety of unsavory traits, practically demanding that some external force intervene to civilize them. Repeating Levshin’s observation that Kazakhs, although they professed to be Muslim, knew practically nothing of the religion, Meier concluded, “It can be seen that in mental

¹⁰² Meier, 24-25.

¹⁰³ Meier 13.

¹⁰⁴ Krasovskii, *vyp.* 3, 5.

¹⁰⁵ This sense of paranoia about the disloyalty of Kazakhs and other Muslims of Central Asia was not limited to the era of initial military expansion to the region and rivalry with Great Britain; rather, it was a theme that emerged in some quarters whenever the international situation was tense. See Chapter 6 for a discussion of claims about a potential Muslim third column during the Russo-Japanese War and World War I.

education the Kazakhs stand at a very low point of development.”¹⁰⁶ Their child-rearing practices served Meier as a further example of their wildness:

“The raising of children on the steppe is rough and ignorant. Neither the father or mother particularly troubles about them; usually children up to age 12 or 13 go around in the summer naked or almost naked, in some sort of rags; in winter from the cold they often hide among sheep allowed into the tent, and only their half-shaved, half-trimmed heads stick out among the sheep and look with surprised, but quick eyes at the visitor who has entered. In this regard is especially outrageous the custom of the Kazakhs to not be ashamed in expressions (*vyrazheniakh*) in front of children... It is understandable what sort of influence this should have on morality in general.”¹⁰⁷

If Kazakh leaders were unreliable, for Meier, the immorality of their followers represented a distinct and equally important set of challenges. Krasovskii, for the Middle Horde, closely corroborated Meier’s account, implying that the idea of Kazakh underdevelopment had acquired near-hegemonic status among General Staff officers at the time. He linked his various critical observations to the Kazakhs’ nomadic way of life, describing the latter as the underlying reason for their purported laziness and neglect of children alike. “The Kazakh,” he claimed, “does not know hard work (*trud*). Under the nomadic way of life, he does not have any activities.”¹⁰⁸ Women, perhaps, were more likely to work, but the all-encompassing laziness of Kazakh men cancelled this out for Krasovskii, with severe consequences: “under the nomadic way of life, and with the mother constantly working, good rearing of the children, of course, is not possible. Poorly dressed, without any care in the freezing winters, young children die by the thousands.”¹⁰⁹ While the Kazakhs remained nomads, in short, Krasovskii offered little hope that they were likely to improve themselves. He further added to Meier’s

¹⁰⁶ Meier 231.

¹⁰⁷ Meier 255.

¹⁰⁸ Krasovskii, v. 1, 390.

¹⁰⁹ Krasovskii, v. 1, 396.

allegations descriptions of what he considered the extreme patriarchy and sexual licentiousness inherent in Kazakh society. Debauchery, he argued, was “omnipresent” in the Middle Horde, while the Kazakh man was a “tyrant” over the female occupants of his household:

“Calmly smoking a pipe (a custom taken from the Chinese) or from boredom chewing wax in his mouth, the Kazakh does not move from his place so as to help his family, bustling over the packing of this and that and the loading of camels, but only, sitting at the dying hearth, shouts at the people doing less than others. All the work in the household lies on the woman.”¹¹⁰

For Meier, Krasovskii, and many other observers during the 1860s, the Kazakh steppe was the site of depravity, immorality, and ignorance.¹¹¹ Although some of these critiques parallel contemporaneous commentaries on the life of poor peasants in rural Russia, the insistence that Kazakhs’ deficiencies were particularly tied to their nomadic lifeways marks these two arguments as distinct from one another.¹¹²

At the same time, both Meier and Krasovskii agreed that the host of problems they diagnosed in Kazakh society were not permanent and inherent to it. Writing in an era of significant administrative reform, both for the empire as a whole (the passage of Alexander II’s “Great Reforms”) and the steppe in particular (leading up to the promulgation of the Provisional Statute of 1868), both argued that correct administrative measures could save the Kazakhs from the horrid fate to which they were evidently subject at the time. The meddling of incompetent Russian bureaucrats, Meier argued, had played a significant role in abetting earlier Kazakh rebellions, since they did not

¹¹⁰ Krasovskii v. 1, 395 and 393.

¹¹¹ Meier and Krasovskii’s accounts were far from the most lurid available. I. Kazantsev, for example, describes poor Kazakhs selling their children into slavery and refusing governmental aid that would have spared them such extremes. See Kazantsev 44-45.

¹¹² For more on the intellectual discourse surrounding rural people in the inner provinces of the Russian Empire, see Cathy Frierson, *Peasant Icons: Representations of Rural People in Late 19th Century Russia* (New York: Oxford UP, 1993).

“acknowledge rulers named by the Kazakhs themselves.”¹¹³ If bad leadership on all levels had led the Kazakhs astray, as Meier argued, this created space for him to argue that the perpetrators of the frequent raids he described were salvageable, and this he did. The Kazakhs, he believed, were, despite their deficiencies, talented in a way that he argued belied both their apparent underdevelopment and “Asiatic” racial stock; because of this, they were ultimately civilizable: “These characteristics permit one to suppose that the Kazakh nationality has the possibility to become completely civilized, and not disappear upon colliding with Russians, like its northern neighbors the Bashkirs did.”¹¹⁴ The precise agent of such change in the Kazakhs’ national character, beyond a vague sense that Russian imperialism will have a role to play, remains unclear in Meier’s text. Excoriating previous administrators, especially M. M. Speranskii, Krasovskii made a more explicit argument about agency and responsibility in “civilizing” the Kazakhs. To leave pre-existing Kazakh institutions untouched would have been unconscionable, for him, since it “would have meant to leave for judges, unknown to us, ruling by laws unknown to us, although based in national customs, the right to manage the peace of the steppe, the right to influence the people’s morals in a way unknown to our government.”¹¹⁵ But this first imposition of Russian laws on the steppe had been carried out so poorly that it exacerbated all the ills it was meant to solve, engendering abuse, corruption, and the concealment of crimes.¹¹⁶ Expressing certainty that things would improve in the aftermath of a thorough investigation of the state of the colonial legal system, carried out in 1863, Krasovskii reinforced the impression that all outcomes in the

¹¹³ Meier 13.

¹¹⁴ Meier 259.

¹¹⁵ Krasovskii, v. 3, 97.

¹¹⁶ Krasovskii, v. 3, 84-92.

steppe, whether good or ill, depended exclusively on Russian administration.¹¹⁷ The Kazakhs' civilizational status and loyalty, for Krasovskii, were whatever imperial institutions made them.

While all observers agreed that the Kazakhs under their study and participating in their expeditions were different from themselves, as well as from other Russians in the region, such perceptions did not have exclusively negative connotations. Rather, some explorers, with both Kazakhs and Cossacks (the most numerically significant colonizers of the steppe until the 1890s) assisting them, praised the character of the former at the expense of the latter. A. Golubev, for example, claimed that Kazakhs' greater familiarity with their surroundings and intellectual capabilities made them imperial agents superior to the Cossacks he was burdened with: "Kazakhs are completely necessary for the brigade. They, beyond serving as guides, see and learn everything incomparably easier and faster than Cossacks."¹¹⁸ His argument for Kazakhs' greater utility was connected directly to what he perceived as their almost childlike loyalty to the colonial state:

"The Kazakhs are very eager to accompany Russian brigades. The Kazakh boasts that the Russians give him predominance before others: he gives his obligations under the brigades special importance, even in his own eyes, and is happy at any instance to say that he bears *kiuzemet*, that is, service."¹¹⁹

The claims in this short travel narrative dovetail oddly with one another. Golubev considered the Kazakhs he observed, and with whom he worked, to be in some sense unquestionably on a lower level of civilization than that represented by Russian expansion; in addition to his depiction of overly-trusting natives eager for any distinction

¹¹⁷ Krasovskii, v. 3, 149. For more on the work of this commission, particularly the role played in it by Ch. Ch. Valikhanov, see Chapter 2.

¹¹⁸ A. Golubev, "Otryvok," 80.

¹¹⁹ Golubev, "Otryvok," 80. *Kiuzemet* is a corruption of the Kazakh word *qyzmet*, although Golubev translates it correctly.

from a representative of the metropole, he portrayed Kazakh men as lazy, lecherous, and brutish towards their wives.¹²⁰ This might be seen as an argument for rapid expansion – not only do Kazakhs need civilizing, Golubev seems to claim, but Russian governance will find a warm welcome in the steppe. Yet he simultaneously undermines such claims by highlighting the deficiencies of Cossack colonists with respect to the nomads already occupying the land. Depicting the Kazakhs he encountered as quiescent and conditionally superior to the most numerous agents of the Russian Empire (although, notably, not to Golubev himself), Golubev downplayed the threat that other observers considered Kazakhs to present to Russian administrative and fiscal interests.¹²¹ Ambivalent about colonizer and colonized, he offered neither definitive policy recommendations, nor firm conclusions beyond Kazakh loyalty to new imperial institutions and agents.

The visit of a delegation, organized by the Ministry of Internal Affairs (MVD), of high-ranking Small and Bukei Horde Kazakhs to St. Petersburg in 1859 occasioned a venomous exchange in the pages of the Westernizing, cautiously reformist “thick journal” *Russkii vestnik* (*Russian Courier*).¹²² The opponents in this debate, the ethnographer and bureaucrat of the MVD Pavel Nebol’sin and the Ural Cossack historian I. Zheleznov, treated the occasion as a referendum on both Kazakhs’ place within the

¹²⁰ Golubev, “Otryvok,” 83-4.

¹²¹ Concern about Cossacks’ role in Russian imperial expansion was not limited to Central Asia and the Kazakh steppe. See Thomas Barrett, *At the Edge of Empire: The Terek Cossacks and the North Caucasian Frontier, 1700-1860* (Boulder, CO: Westview Press, 1999), for a fascinating exploration of this theme as it relates to the Caucasian campaign.

¹²² Gary Hamburg, *Boris Chicherin and Early Russian Liberalism, 1828-1866* (Stanford, CA: Stanford UP, 1992) 152. For more on the Kazakh participants in this delegation, see Chapter 2.

Russian Empire and the duties of the latter to the former.¹²³ Nebol'sin's glowing description of the traveling group left little doubt as to their loyalties:

“All these travelers, mostly honored and prosperous, and more important, serving and bearing Russian officers' and staff-officers' ranks, by ancestry and inclinations belong to the Kazakh clans...long known for the unwavering nature (*nepokolebimost'iu*) of their truly-devoted feelings to Russia.”¹²⁴

Nebol'sin portrayed a group of Kazakhs not only completely devoted to the Empire (attributing to them the aphorism, “Do not say simply – Russian; say – our happiness”), but deeply invested in using its resources to better themselves and their people.¹²⁵ In a set of biographical sketches, he described one young Kazakh, Mukhammed-Salikh Babadzhanov, as interested only in Russian (*nasha*) justice and combating the Tatar “fanaticism” infiltrating traditional schools; another, wealthier traveler, Isenbaev, had shown still greater commitment to the rapprochement of colonizer and colonized with one another.¹²⁶ An ardent supporter of educational institutions, he had established a Western-style primary school for Kazakh children, to which, “conscious of the necessity to spread among the Kazakhs Russian literacy...[he] hired to his school, it seems, two Russian teachers.”¹²⁷ Further, according to Nebol'sin, he had donated a thousand rubles to the treasury of the Ural Cossack Host for the support of a school among that population of Orenburg province, despite what the author claimed was their horrific treatment of the local Kazakh population:

“The Kazakhs' neighbors, the Ural Cossacks, in general look inhumanely and not in a Christian manner on the Muslims, and on the Kazakhs in particular. They constrain and swindle the Kazakhs for no reason; the Ural Cossack (*uralets*) for a

¹²³ Short biographical data on Nebol'sin is at Knight, “Science,” 129.

¹²⁴ P. Nebol'sin, “Puteshestvuiushchie kirgizy,” *Russkii vestnik – Sovremennaiia letopis'* 29 (Sept. 1860), 42.

¹²⁵ Nebol'sin 42. He does not provide the original Kazakh, but this is probably a rhyme using the words *orys* (“Russian”) and *yrys* (“blessing”).

¹²⁶ Nebol'sin 44. Babadzhanov is discussed extensively in Chapter 2 of the present work.

¹²⁷ Nebol'sin 45. Isenbaev's school, according to Nebol'sin, had 130 students, which if true would have made it a comparatively large undertaking.

long time has looked at the Kazakh like a subject, from which it is possible to profit in every way; the Ural Cossack has never acknowledged his human rights.”¹²⁸

The Kazakhs of Nebol’sin’s description, though he described them as exceptional in wealth and ability, were loyal, scholarly, and doing a fine job of governing themselves with some support from colonial authorities. Two months later, Zheleznov responded angrily to such claims, undercutting Nebol’sin’s claims about the motives of Kazakh charity as part of a larger argument in defense of what he asserted were unjust accusations made against the Ural Cossacks. Flatly denying that any exploitation of the sort Nebol’sin described occurred, he also cast aspersions on Isenbaev’s motivations, noting that the latter had accrued wealth only by using Cossack land for his livestock: “If a Kazakh, never formerly having given money for Cossack schools, always used Cossack lands unopposed, then how, having given a thousand rubles, will he use them? It is simple to answer this question.”¹²⁹ Isenbaev, he claimed, did not have any particular interest in helping his own people or the Ural Cossacks, but only in doing what was necessary to preserve his own wealth, and no loyalty beyond his own self-interest. Misinterpreting his actions could have deleterious consequences. He disclaimed any potential accusations of Cossack particularism, arguing, “The Ural Cossack is a Russian man, like the merchant, bourgeois, peasants and etc., they live an identical spiritual and moral life,” and thus that the harm Nebol’sin’s purportedly erroneous claims wrought was not to the Cossacks specifically, but the Russian Empire as a whole.¹³⁰ Against Nebol’sin’s depiction, a view of fundamental Kazakh disloyalty underlay Zheleznov’s

¹²⁸ Ibid.

¹²⁹ I. I. Zheleznov, *Ural'tsy*, v. 2 (n.p., 1888) 417-18. Original article in *Russkii vestnik – sovremennaiia letopis'*, 30 (Nov. 1860).

¹³⁰ Zheleznov 407.

argument, while he refused the inversion of the colonizer-colonized binary that Nebol'sin put forth. To think otherwise, he claimed, was to be caught in the unthinking throes of “Kirgizomania” brought on by the excitement of the delegation's visit.

Finally, although this was less common in writing with any scholarly valence, some authors hewed close to Levshin's view that the steppe and its inhabitants were permanently wild, threatening, and uncivilized. The most vocal exponent of this viewpoint was Lieut.-Col. A. I. Maksheev, a key participant in the 1853 seizure of the Kokandian fortress of Ak-mechet (present-day Qyzylorda, Kazakhstan) and later lecturer on strategy, foreign relations, and military statistics at the General Staff Academy in St. Petersburg.¹³¹ Maksheev's published accounts of Turkestan and the steppe, a scholarly “description” (*opisanie*) of the lower reaches of the Syr-Darya and a retrospective travelogue of his experiences in the Ak-mechet campaign, are muscular narratives of the superiority of Russian arms and dubious character of the nomads he encounters en route. The nomads of Turkestan, he argued, were the cause of the majority of its violent disorders. Whereas sedentary agriculturalists, tied to the land, worried more about defending and consolidating their holdings, “Nomadic people are another matter: they have nothing to worry about concerning the defense of some area – today here, tomorrow there, for them everyplace is home,” and this mobility gave them the freedom to raid as they chose.¹³² Indeed, recalling the Ak-mechet campaign, Maksheev described the mutual raiding carried out by Kazakhs subject to Kokand and Russia as the chief impetus compelling Russian forces under Gen. Perovskii to intervene there.¹³³ He saw the

¹³¹ Marshall 22-28.

¹³² A. I. Maksheev, *Opisanie nizov'ev Syr-Dar'i* (St. Petersburg: tip. Imperatorskoi Akademii Nauk, 1856) 53.

¹³³ A. I. Maksheev, *Puteshestviia*, 155.

Kazakhs' propensity for raiding as only slightly soluble over time, describing the conflict between nomads (chiefly Kazakhs) and agriculturalists (Uzbeks and Karakalpaks) along the lower Syr-Darya as a "permanent battle" conditioned by traits inherent to all mobile pastoralists.¹³⁴ The solution he envisioned to this involved some Russian intervention, but was closer to Levshin's strategy of military pacification than other observers' proposals of legal and administrative reform. Occupying the lower Syr-Darya and building a chain of fortifications along it, Maksheev argued, would prevent incursions from Kokandian subjects while providing a base of support for quelling disorder and *baranta* among Kazakhs subject to Russia.¹³⁵ This was to be almost entirely a military enterprise; if Maksheev suggested that it might be useful to establish some institutions (courts and mosques) for Kazakh use at these fortifications, all of this depended on the constant presence and threat of Russian arms, and his dim view of Kazakhs' "Asiatic" character meant that he was not optimistic that they would be other than predatory and immoral without superior firepower restraining them.¹³⁶ The limited role he envisioned for Kazakhs in the future, under Russian administration, was restricted to providing military reconnaissance, and even this was dependent on the pacification of the steppe.¹³⁷ For Maksheev, the steppe was a threatening place populated by dangerous people; these problems, he argued, could only be resolved at gunpoint.

During and immediately following the Russian Empire's southward advance through the steppe, the question of its new imperial subjects' character – loyalty, intellect,

¹³⁴ Maksheev, *Opisanie*, 53.

¹³⁵ Maksheev, *Puteshestviia*, 168.

¹³⁶ Maksheev, *Puteshestviia*, 176-77 (on possible institution-building). Disparaging references to the "Asiatic" character, applied to Kazakhs and "Kokandians" (not marked by ethnicity in the text) are *passim*, with some examples on pp. 193, 206 and 247.

¹³⁷ Maksheev, *Puteshestviia*, 177.

and morality – took on fundamental importance for scholarly observers regardless of institutional affiliation. The conclusions they drew, however, cannot easily be correlated with membership in a single political or professional group. While some continued to operate under Levshin’s assumption that the steppe was fundamentally anarchic, suitable only for conquest, and its inhabitants essentially amoral, others saw these as temporary problems, to be laid at the feet of careless Russian administration in the past. Still others viewed the Kazakhs as talented and loyal subjects ready to play an important role in the political, economic, and cultural life of the empire. The difficulty of connecting these views to any specific interest group is reflective of the blurred lines among such groups; military officers published in scholarly journals, scholars often held administrative posts or personal connections in political circles, and learned societies like IRGO functioned as intellectual exchanges for interested parties of all political stripes.¹³⁸ This uncertainty about the nature of the steppe’s inhabitants, in turn, engendered a wide range of interpretations of the Russian Empire’s purpose there, themselves correlated imperfectly with understandings of nomadic loyalty and morality.

The Purposes of Empire

Indeed, throughout the mid-19th century, the Russian Empire’s purpose in Turkestan and the steppe was ambivalent and internally contested. Despite widely accepted views of the steppe’s anarchy, and the wildness of its inhabitants, “civilizing” the Kazakhs was not important to all observers at this juncture; those who held this principle at the core of their imperial vision were unsure of both the means by which and timeline along which it was to be brought to fruition. For others, the axiomatic chaos of

¹³⁸ The concept of a learned society as an informational exchange, rather than a unified body of thought, comes from Felix Driver, *Geography Militant: Cultures of Exploration and Empire* (Malden, MA: Blackwell, 2001).

the steppe necessitated its separation, either permanently or for the foreseeable future, from the agricultural, Slavic core of the empire. A sense of the civilizing mission, of the duty to eventually raise the new colony from a borderland to a province (and, hence, a more or less equal constituent part of the empire) was in these cases replaced by visions that emphasized the neutralization of internal or external threats. In the former case, this meant that the steppe was a region to be militarily pacified, then transformed economically, in the sense either of straightforward expropriation of resources from the colony to the metropole, or of (purportedly) mutually-beneficial development; in the latter case, it was primarily of interest as a strategic buffer against the military threat posed by China under the Qing dynasty, the British in South Asia, and, until their conquest, the khanates of Bukhara, Khiva, and Kokand. These varying interpretations were not always seen as mutually exclusive, and their proponents cannot be directly linked to any group of professional, political, or intellectual interests. But the incoherence of the assumptions and long-term goals espoused by the people most responsible for supplying the tsarist state with practical information as it first expanded, then attempted to consolidate its gains, lent itself to vacillation when the time came to translate data into policy.¹³⁹

¹³⁹ It is now generally accepted that one cannot speak of a primordial drive to Russify non-Russian areas within the Russian Empire, nor of a single “nationalities policy” for the empire at any given time. See Kappeler 248 and Edward C. Thaden, *Russia’s Western Borderlands, 1710-1870* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton UP, 1984). Kappeler’s alternative, whereby an emphasis on the maintenance of empire as an end in itself under Nicholas I is replaced by cultural and linguistic Russification of varying degrees thereafter, is stronger, but its emphasis on language politics and religion glosses over issues of land tenure and mobility that were of paramount importance for the steppe, a pastoralist region incorporated into a mostly agriculturalist empire. More successful is the emphasis in Daniel Brower, *Turkestan*, on the policies, often diametrically opposed, pursued by civil and military administrators in Turkestan after its conquest. I emphasize in this section, though, that differences of opinion about the purposes of Russian imperialism were even more fraught and complex than Brower’s bifurcation allows.

The idea of completely or partially sedentarizing the Kazakh nomads was at the heart of many proposals to civilize them, which came, in turn, from all quarters. The reasons for this were based both on essentialist notions of nomadic character dating, in the canon of imperial Russian ethnography, at least to Levshin, and more pragmatic considerations. For L. Meier, describing the Orenburg steppe populated mostly by Kazakhs of the Small Horde, sedentarism, when paired with the cultivation of grain (rather than trade, fishing, or other trades not requiring pastoral movement), took on a moral character. The Kazakh nomads, “standing at a lower stage of development” than new arrivals from the inner provinces of the empire, “[did] not take up the hardest and least reliable occupation, like agriculture in the steppe,” and such laziness, he argued brought the military colonists populating Russian forts down to their level.¹⁴⁰ The few Russians on the steppe who continued to grow grain, he claimed, did so largely because of their “moral impulse” to do so.¹⁴¹ Yet cultivation, he argued, despite climactic conditions that were not everywhere propitious for it, would quickly develop in the future; temporarily, however, it was opposed by the clan-based structure of nomadic society (*rodovoe nachalo*), forbidding individual land ownership.¹⁴² That the steppe was chaotic and dangerous was a widely-held sentiment in the 1860s, and this sense of chaos was not always, and for all observers, connected to the predominance of pastoralists on it.¹⁴³ In Meier’s case, though, it is worthwhile to invert his argument. That is, if sedentarism and expanded cultivation – of which he was unquestionably a strong proponent – were

¹⁴⁰ Meier 114-115.

¹⁴¹ Ibid.

¹⁴² Meier 99.

¹⁴³ See Romanovskii, e.g., for an argument that connects the cessation of disorder on the northern steppe with increased space for nomadism, justifying the occupation of some pastures by Cossack pickets: “Meadows along the left bank of the Ural are in many places incomparably vaster and richer than the Cossack meadows...It is impossible to doubt that with the complete cessation of disorder in the steppe...there will turn out to be an abundance of lands [on the left bank] very suitable for nomadism” (16).

opposed by moral turpitude and the structural disorder of Kazakh society, then in promoting such a policy, he presented it implicitly as a means of eradicating both problems. The Russian population trickling into the Orenburg steppe had a “more practical spirit” than the Kazakhs, he argued, and the ever-present oppositions in his text of Russian and sedentary, Kazakh and pastoralist made the source of this alleged practicality clear.¹⁴⁴ Levshin’s depiction of nomadic anarchy in this case supported a vision based on a change in economic lifeways, rather than the naked exertion of force.

For other observers, the question of the steppe’s disorder was more a concern of administration than national character, although sedentarism remained a common answer to it. Semenov lamented the difficulty of ruling the nomadic population of Semireche from Omsk, more than a thousand miles distant, when there were few fixed and stable Russian fortifications among the Kazakhs.¹⁴⁵ Linking nomadism and administrative difficulty, he cited examples of both military (“Lepsinsk and Urudzharsk stations in Semireche”) and civilian (“the wonderful and blooming [settlement of] Kopal”) agricultural settlement as “doing Russia a great service” by ameliorating this difficulty.¹⁴⁶ Pastoralism was not only an administrative headache in the abstract, though. Meier explicitly connected what he viewed as the nomads’ low level of intellectual development with their lifestyle, arguing that “the Kazakhs’ means to give their children primary education are very restricted, but under the nomadic way of life it is impossible to expect more.”¹⁴⁷ Further, according to Krasovskii, the Kazakhs, instinctively mistrusting the colonial administration, concealed the true figures of both their livestock and

¹⁴⁴ Meier 172.

¹⁴⁵ Semenov 128-129.

¹⁴⁶ Ibid.

¹⁴⁷ Meier 233.

population.¹⁴⁸ Impossible to pin down, the Kazakhs could not be completely pulled into the orbit of imperial administration; constantly in motion, they were inherently resistant (with only a few exceptions), for these observers, to any permanent institutions which might civilize them.¹⁴⁹ If few authors, despite their construction of Kazakh civilizational difference, actively espoused a civilizing mission on the steppe, this was at least in part because sedentarization, a vital prerequisite for such a project, seemed a phenomenon exclusively of the distant future.

Ultimately, for some, Russian settlement and Kazakh sedentarism comprised a panacea, a means of simultaneously achieving both civil order and the economic prosperity presumed to ensue from it on the steppe. Two models of Russian colonization, which, it was assumed, would eventually cause the Kazakhs to take up agriculture and hence at least partially sedentarize, were current in the scholarly-bureaucratic discourse of the 1850s and '60s.¹⁵⁰ One, settlement by civilian peasants, at the time lacked state sponsorship, and was carried out exclusively by irregular migrants, the so-called *samovol'tsy*.¹⁵¹ The other, voluntary or involuntary settlement of military colonists (Cossacks) around border fortifications intended to be self-sufficient, was the primary means by which the steppe was peopled by an agricultural Slavic population during this era. These differing, yet complementary models of settlement corresponded with complementary facets of the imperial mission. The chief of staff of Western Siberia, Gen. I. F. Babkov, argued in a journal article for IRGO that the purpose of colonization was

¹⁴⁸ Krasovskii, vol. 1, 309-310.

¹⁴⁹ Examples of early Kazakh products of permanent Russian schools can be found in Chapters Two (Chokan Valikhanov, Mukhammed-Salikh Babadzhanov) and Three (Ibrai Altynsarin).

¹⁵⁰ For this assumption see, e.g. volume two of Krasovskii's *Materialy*, where he notes that the changing conditions of steppe life (meaning, mainly, the expanded Russian colonial presence) "have disposed the majority of the population of the steppe now to think about [sedentarism] in a completely different light [i.e., more favorably]" (70).

¹⁵¹ An official policy of *pereselenie* (peasant settlement) was not supported and funded until 1881.

ideally to “establish our power on the newly-attached krai, to distribute the Russian people on it and develop the material well-being of the native nomadic population.”¹⁵² With this point stipulated, and identifying a variety of locales suitable for settlement of any kind, he addressed the question of which form of colonization, military or civilian, best suited the interests he described and the natural conditions of the steppe.¹⁵³ Some areas for settlement ideal from a strategic perspective, he argued, “could not develop in the economic sense...owing to the special conditions of grain cultivation in the Kazakh steppe and the sporadic distribution of suitable lands for it,” while Cossacks’ service obligations made them unlikely to commit to large-scale cultivation at all.¹⁵⁴ However, while Babkov conceded that the Cossacks were not ideal colonizers, he was unwilling to countenance “free settlement” along the empire’s border with western China (areas falling in Semipalatinsk oblast).¹⁵⁵ Rather, he contended that for reasons of security, “free” civilian colonization could only be permitted to occur within the steppe; border areas unambiguously required military personnel. Thus for Babkov, while the goals of economic development and security from external threats were not mutually exclusive, and both achievable by one sort of Russian settlement or another, strategic questions took precedence when a choice had to be made between the two.

Other observers, not immediately concerned with questions of cultural change or (Kazakhs’) economic development, viewed the new borderland as a base for the achievement of foreign policy priorities in trade and military affairs alike. The case of

¹⁵² I. F. Babkov, “Obshchii vzgliad na ustroistvo russkikh poselenii v severo-vostochnoi chasti kirgizskoi stepi,” *Izvestiia IRGO* 5 (St. Petersburg: tip. V. Bezobrazova, 1869) 51-52. Brief biographical data on Babkov is at Marshall 70.

¹⁵³ Regions suitable for colonization are at Babkov 55-56.

¹⁵⁴ Babkov 51-52. Criticism of Cossacks as colonizers was common in many quarters throughout the imperial era.

¹⁵⁵ *Ibid.*

Babkov suggests that such perspectives did not inherently come into conflict, but reflecting on the circumstances surrounding his journey to the Tian-Shan, Semenov hinted that in the bureaucratic world of the 1850s, they did so frequently. An obstacle to the route he initially proposed, he noted, was “the MID, jealously guarding the Asiatic countries lying beyond Russian borders from the interference of Russian geographical science,” forcing him to appeal instead to IRGO for sponsorship.¹⁵⁶ Thus, while civil and military information-gathering organizations were linked to one another, neither their priorities nor the regions they considered to be at the heart of their work coincided. Strategic priorities dictated, for some, that the steppe be used permanently as a buffer and a crossroads for trade, outside the imperial core; any civilizational change, or economic change benefiting the steppe in particular rather than the empire in general, under this logic would be purely incidental.

Such views were most prevalent among military statisticians and topographers, whose studies of the landscape and inhabitants of the steppe were grounded in questions of immediate and practical utility. Asking not how best to develop the new territories, but rather how best to secure them, such authors presented a picture of the steppe somewhat distinct from their geologically- and botanically-oriented counterparts. Maksheev, for example, described the topography of the region around Ak-mechet in detail, using these data to draw conclusions about the best location of fortified points to keep the newly-conquered population quiescent. For him, the most important question to address about the steppes surrounding the Syr-Darya was not their agricultural potential, but their suitability for supporting fortifications in a region whose securing “[consisted]

¹⁵⁶ Semenov 36. MID (*Ministerstvo inostrannykh del*) is an acronym for the Russian Ministry of Foreign Affairs.

in attack rather than defense.”¹⁵⁷ The proposed placement of these fortifications was conditioned mainly by the lack of natural obstacles to the movement of opposing forces; some infertile wastes by virtue of their impassability “served as the defense of the area.”¹⁵⁸ This vision was not exclusively strategic – Maksheev also argued that the building of certain forts would “strengthen grain cultivation” – but his proposals were disconnected from the botanical and geological calculations of his contemporaries.¹⁵⁹ Where a fort had to be placed, some cultivation would surely follow; further, cultivation was not to be done for the sake of economic development, but simply for supplying the new fortifications with the commodities they needed to thrive and carry out their mission. For at least one observer, then, the rigorous observation of the steppe landscape fueled a vision that was primarily strategic, rather than developmental.

Security broadly considered (from both foreign and domestic threats) and trade, though, were considered in some ways to be inseparable from one another. A well-chosen location for a fort would not only pacify a region, it was argued, but also provide a convenient location for the exchange of flour and finished goods from the metropole for raw animal products from the pastoralists living nearby.¹⁶⁰ Further, a lucrative external trade was depicted in some quarters as the primary motivating factor for Russian expansion into the southern steppe and Turkestan. Maksheev described one of the goals of occupying the Syr-Darya basin (along with securing the southern frontier from Khivan raids) as “bringing us closer with the Central Asian dominions, [which] gives a hopeful

¹⁵⁷ Maksheev, *Puteshestviia*, 169.

¹⁵⁸ *Ibid.*, 170.

¹⁵⁹ *Ibid.*, 169.

¹⁶⁰ *Ibid.*, 176. Maksheev lists a bazaar as one of the components of his ideal Russian city-fort, alongside a Kazakh court, mosque, and administrative offices.

and profitable basis for political and commercial intercourse with them.”¹⁶¹ The importance of external trade, in the minds of some official observers, to the Russian imperial mission in Central Asia, and its relationship to secure borders and quiescent neighbors, was particularly reflected in their comments on the Dungan rebellion (and subsequent rise of Yaqub Beg’s independent Kashgarian khanate) in Western China.¹⁶² Reflecting years later on his service in the region, I. F. Babkov complained, “The cessation of trade in Chuguchak and Kul’ja due to the Dungan troubles created stagnation in our commercial relations with the parts of China bordering on Western Siberia: Western Mongolia and Dzhungaria.”^{163,164} Severtsov, not involved directly in Sino-Russian border affairs as was Babkov, clarified the reasoning behind such statements; he noted that, with Yaqub Beg in power and Russia’s “fragile” position in a single, unsupported fort at Naryn (in present-day Kyrgyzstan, near the Chinese border), the success or failure of international commerce depended exclusively on “the good will of the ruler of Kashgar,” able to withdraw support for it or even attack the isolated Russian forward point on a whim.¹⁶⁵ Trade was unambiguously a priority for some scholarly and administrative commentators, but depended, for some, on the continued stability that only a substantial military commitment and the fortification of key strategic points could provide. What was perceived as the endemic disorder of the steppe and surrounding

¹⁶¹ Maksheev, *Puteshestviia*, 168.

¹⁶² The most authoritative English source on these events is Hodong Kim, *Holy War in China: The Muslim Rebellion and State in Chinese Central Asia, 1864-1877* (Stanford, CA: Stanford UP, 2004). Also see my “Our Friendly Rivals: Yaqub Beg and the Limitations of the Great Game Paradigm” (unpublished seminar paper, 2007) for an argument that, despite their diplomatic rivalry, Russian and British observers understood these events in fundamentally similar terms.

¹⁶³ I. F. Babkov, *Vospominaniia o moei sluzhbe v Zapadnoi Sibiri, 1859-1875 gg. Razgranichenie s Zapadnym Kitaem, 1869 g.* (St. Petersburg: Tip. V. F. Kirshbauma, 1912) 386.

¹⁶⁴ Chuguchak (also referred to as Tarbagatai, presently known as the Chinese city of Tacheng) and Kul’ja were cities in which Russian consulates were established, and trade privileges granted to them, by the Treaty of Kul’ja (1851). For more on Sino-Russian relations during the 19th century, see Sarah C. M. Paine, *Imperial Rivals: China, Russia, and their Disputed Frontier*. Armonk, NY: M. E. Sharpe, 1996.

¹⁶⁵ Severtsov, *Puteshestviia*, 331-332.

countries alike meant that constant military surveillance was necessary for the success of Russian commerce.^{166,167}

Strategic considerations also fit logically into a developmental perspective for observers who were more interested in a Russian military presence as a means to the end of increased prosperity, rather than an end in itself. In the mid-1860s, a certain Gel'mersen extolled the virtues of the Syr-Darya river valley both for sedentary life and as a means of expediently connecting the oasis cities of Turkestan to established Russian fortifications in the northern steppe (Omsk and Semipalatinsk). However, he described the road as temporarily unsafe and unusable; for the sake of solving this problem, important to ensuring the quick movement of goods around the steppe, he argued, "It is necessary to temporarily establish pickets, which in two or three years, when the route is sufficiently established, can be removed," and to permanently settle several hundred Cossacks along the road in observation points.¹⁶⁸ It is unclear with what, if anything, Gel'mersen proposed to replace these temporary pickets, but apparent enough that he considered garrison-based imperialism only a brief stage necessary for the development of trade. Kazantsev, too, pessimistic about agriculture, saw a Russian trade and military presence on the steppe as vital to securing peace and prosperity there:

"It is possible to hope, that with bringing to the steppes of a new position on the Kazakhs, with resettlement south of the line, peace will be established there, and the way of life of the Horde will improve, our trade with Asia will expand to such

¹⁶⁶ For example, the military administrator A. K. Geins, in the aftermath of the Dungan rebellion, fretted that the continuing instability of Xinjiang under Qing rule threatened the entirety of China with collapse, with potentially deleterious consequences for Russian interests as well as, he claimed, the economic productivity and civilizational level of the residents of western China regardless of ethnicity. See A. K. Geins, especially pp. 565-567.

¹⁶⁷ The most obvious and famous instance of an imperial Russian scholar of Central Asia carrying out reconnaissance oriented towards the advancement of the state's goals in trade and security is Chokan Valikhanov's incognito journey to Kashgar. For more on his travels, see Chapter Two.

¹⁶⁸ Gel'mersen, "O mutiakh vedushchikh iz Zapadnoi Sibiri v Turkestanskiu oblast'," *Izvestiia IRGO* 2 (St. Petersburg: tip. V. Bezobrazova, 1866) 145-146.

a flourishing state, as in antiquity under the Bulgars, and will excite in the Kazakhs the desire to extract profits from it, by means of personal cooperation in the guiding of caravans, and also by means of the sale of their livestock and produce, to the improvement and increase of which the Russian government will diligently assist the Kazakhs.”¹⁶⁹

Since Kazantsev dismissed the possibility that Russian peasants unused to the extreme climate and irrigation-based agriculture could prosper in Turkestan and the steppe, the “resettlement” to which he refers must refer instead to the establishment of forts and trading posts. Unlike Maksheev, though, Kazantsev indicates that such institutions should exist not for their own sake, but because of the profit they would bring to metropole and colony alike. It is possible to doubt the sincerity of such arguments, but unavoidable that Kazantsev shared a rhetorical line with advocates of agricultural colonization – namely, that the rising economic tide generated by an increased imperial presence would lift Russians and Kazakhs alike. The models they proposed for achieving this, though, were either distinct from one another or, as in Gel’mersen’s case, left so unclear as to resist any argument.

Scholarly and bureaucratic observers of the Kazakh steppe and its environs evinced a range of distinct, yet connected views of its purpose within the Russian Empire. If there was consensus that the newly-conquered region would serve Russian interests *somehow*, disagreement ruled both about what those interests were and how best to secure them. A focus on sedentarizing the Kazakhs, encouraging them to till the land, and drawing them into schools, envisioned a fundamentally different future for the steppe than plans to establish forts, attract trade, and secure external borders, even if a statist and utilitarian calculus underlay each and an expanded Russian presence of some sort would result from either. The wildness and otherness of the steppe and its inhabitants were

¹⁶⁹ Kazantsev 93-94.

practically axiomatic, but no single coherent vision emerged of how best to approach these issues; divergent views about the physical characteristics of the steppe as a biome engendered further uncertainty about its purpose within the Empire.

Positivism and Administrative Reform

Their many disagreements aside, the researchers and administrators discussed in the present chapter were part of a small and select group in the broader context of Russian intellectual culture during the 1850s and '60s, sharing several assumptions about the purpose of empire, the future of Russia, and their own professional mission. They were committed to serving state interests and, whatever their opinions on the Great Reforms of the early 1860s, were part of a larger movement of “enlightened bureaucrats” hoping to make administrative organs run more efficiently and effectively. (I have generally been unable to find primary evidence of what many of the authors treated here thought of the Great Reforms. Semenov, though, wrote approvingly of a small group of Barnaul officials who supported them, and Veniukov would later mock members of the provincial gentry opposed to them.)¹⁷⁰ Further, travelers were often traveling not through “unknown” (to Europeans) lands but through regions that had, either recently or long before, become part of the Russian Empire, and all at least had to travel through such areas to reach their ultimate destination. Consequently, they could not plausibly claim to be observing any kind of pristine or unspoiled landscape; rather, what they viewed was, at least in part, the consequence of Russia’s influence on the Kazakhs and the steppe. What they saw, most frequently, disturbed them, and they wrote with the idea that the information they gathered could be used to improve the function of weak and

¹⁷⁰ Semenov 247-248; M. I. Veniukov, “Kavkazskii vospominaniia (1861-1863),” *Russkii arkhiv* 18.1 (1880), 400-448; for more on Veniukov’s liberal politics see V. A. Esakov and A. V. Postnikov, *Mikhail Ivanovich Veniukov, 1832-1901* (Moscow: Nauka, 2002).

arbitrary administrative organs, even if they were unsure of those organs' proper function and of what would constitute improvement in this regard.

Travelers' observations were not restricted to ethnographic accounts of the Kazakhs, but also described imperial agents at all levels, and the latter were often described in unflattering terms. Semenov could be particularly venomous in this regard. He complained that staying in the new city of Vernyi "was useless, for the city was already sunk in its usual alcoholism on the third day after my return"; Barnaul and Omsk were both presented as dirty and relatively uncultured places inhabited by venal and dissolute people.¹⁷¹ Geins' critique was similar but went further. While he excoriated officials who, he claimed, "[intrigued] against the late Valikhanov, that most honorable and purest personage, only because the Sovereign gave him an audience and kissed him," thus placing their personal interests over duty, his harshest words were reserved for those he considered willfully ignorant of their surroundings and the requirements of their position.¹⁷² This was the main thrust of his criticism of a low-level official, Shalashnikov, encountered during his journey around the steppe:

"Shalashnikov relates to the Kazakhs despotically. He (poor guy!) looks at them as at people of a lower category and, likely, for this reason holds himself far from them. This would have been very good, if his duty had not compelled him to consider carefully Kazakh life in all its minute details. Under the latter condition, such manners can only seem funny and completely fail to compel anyone to respect authority, as Shalashnikov somehow supposes."¹⁷³

This unflattering portrait looked still worse by its juxtaposition against Geins' description of his meeting with G. A. Kolpakovskii, portrayed as experienced, humane,

¹⁷¹ Semenov 228; 56-57

¹⁷² Geins 209

¹⁷³ Ibid., 370.

and above all thoroughly knowledgeable about his duties.¹⁷⁴ Russian colonial officials were far, as the example of Kolpakovskii indicates, from being universally negatively depicted by scholarly and bureaucratic travelers, but these observers were alive to the problems that even a single corrupt or degenerate administrator could create.¹⁷⁵ Solutions might have been difficult to find on the individual level, but a general sense existed that diagnosing such problems was among their responsibilities.

Writing in the era of Great Reforms, and leading up to the passage of the Provisional Statute, travelers with administrative responsibilities were deeply concerned with assessing the effects of previous Russian rule on the steppe, especially Speranskii's statutes of 1822. General agreement existed that these left much to be desired. Geins observed that Speranskii

“had the good of the Kazakhs in mind, of course, but his intention remained but intention, because the laws written by him were created *a priori* and only slightly drawn from the people's (*narodnoi*) life. Because of this, they bear on themselves the impression of the most honorable intentions and bad fulfillment of those intentions.”¹⁷⁶

Centralizing, “interfering” too much, attempting to civilize the Kazakhs and replace their traditional institutions, the regulations of 1822, Geins argued, was well before its time and ill-suited to actual conditions on the steppe. Further, many argued, it was based on fundamental misunderstandings of authority and leadership among the Kazakhs; attempting to force these into a Russocentric bureaucratic framework by supporting elected senior sultans (a system of indirect rule), Speranskii and his colleagues

¹⁷⁴ Ibid., 374.

¹⁷⁵ For further examples see the panegyrics to the former governor of Astrakhan province, Andreevskii (Kazantsev 213) and the administrator/Orientalist O. Ia. Bonch-Osmolovskii (Maksheev, *Puteshestviia*, 247).

¹⁷⁶ Geins 209

had instead created a group of unaccountable petty tyrants.¹⁷⁷ Introducing Russian laws prematurely and removing the court of biys (though Krasovskii, at least, argued that this was the best among a bad set of alternatives), they had removed the only Kazakh institution enjoying the universal trust of the people.¹⁷⁸ At core, these observers criticized previous administrators for their ignorance and Russian institutions more broadly for their continuing weakness; in so erring they had harmed both, it was claimed, millions of Kazakhs and a state whose goals minimally depended on the contentment and prosperity of colonial subjects.

The personal failings of colonial administrators, of course, could be chalked up to idiosyncrasy, but scholars and bureaucrats alike identified the root cause of larger administrative failings as the lack of reliable information on the basis of which to create new policies. Some information had, of course, existed about Central Asia and the steppe prior to the flurry of publications about them that ensued in the 1850s and '60s, even about “hitherto inaccessible” regions like the Tian-Shan, but this was considered *incorrect* knowledge – not systematized, expressed in imprecise units of measurement, or simply known by untrained locals instead of Europeans.¹⁷⁹ Complaints about the parlous state of available data were common to all scholarly disciplines. Krasovskii, introducing a gazetteer of steppe lakes and rivers, noted the “misunderstandings” about hydrography frequently encountered in other topographical works to which he referred, while Maksheev alleged that reconnaissance works compiled before 1864 were riddled with defects: “the tables (*planshetnye listy*) are hard to connect to one another; in many places there remain gaps; in others, where the work was repeated by several surveyors, there

¹⁷⁷ Krasovskii, vol. 3, 69; Meier 46-47.

¹⁷⁸ Geins 145; Krasovskii, vol. 3, 77.

¹⁷⁹ For the “inaccessible” language see, e.g., Semenov 138.

appear several gaps (*klapanov*) and it is unknown which of them is closer to the truth.”¹⁸⁰

The message of these authors, collectively, was clear – it was folly to anticipate effective rule in a borderland where, questions of personnel aside, uncertainty reigned about questions as basic as its population, the behavior and distribution of same, and the location of important features of its landscape (let alone their character).

Conversely, improved information was believed to be a panacea for the solution of these various woes; committed positivists all, mid-19th century Russian scholars and bureaucrats firmly believed that the steppe could be ruled correctly if only they knew enough about it. Having detailed a litany of problems ranging from leadership to taxation (the subject of almost his entire third volume), Krasovskii ended on a note both positive and positivist:

“Having become acquainted with the social life of [the steppe’s] inhabitants down to the smallest details, for which much time will not be required, these matters will be decided quickly, and the unfavorable conditions which the steppe was put into by the former administration will likely not be repeated.”¹⁸¹

Kazantsev argued similarly. Thanking Alexander II for his sponsorship of Kazantsev’s and other studies of Central Asia and the steppe, he linked the detailed surveys then appearing in print to improved administration and, in turn, “to the renewal of peace, freedom, calm and well-being, to the profit and general use of all humanity.”¹⁸² Such statements could have been written by any of the authors discussed in this chapter. If previous attempts to draw the steppe and its inhabitants into a cohesive and effective administrative framework had, they agreed, been crowned with failure, then they were at

¹⁸⁰ Krasovskii, vol. 1, 164; Maksheev, “Geograficheskie,” 15. Maksheev continues that a better map would do wonders for administration, industry and science.

¹⁸¹ Krasovskii, vol. 3, 149.

¹⁸² Kazantsev 231. This statement may be boilerplate, but the prevalence of such language, especially in the 1860s, is significant in and of itself.

the forefront of the measures necessary to remedy it. In this era, when ethnography, geography and statistics replaced history as the “principle colonial modalities of knowledge and rule,” their practitioners saw themselves as accumulating and systematizing the objective facts necessary to govern well.¹⁸³

Almost all of the creators of statistical and geographical accounts of the Kazakh steppe during the mid-19th century had some connection to the tsarist state, whether directly (by holding posts in the civil or military administration) or indirectly (by participation in state-sponsored institutions like IRGO). The gloss of objective correctness with which all of their materials were equipped was important for scholarly and bureaucratic audiences alike, and all of the authors analyzed here shared a belief in the objectivity of their accounts – that is, at the time of writing, objectivity was not a conceit but perceived as real. Despite the contradictions and arguments among them, all accounts were gathered under the conviction that they were contributing to the accumulation of the data necessary to redress previous administrative missteps and govern more effectively. This was, fundamentally, a positivist view of the world, and oriented towards the advancement of state interests. That these purportedly objective accounts were frequently contradictory, or worked to cross-purposes, was a point unnoticed at the time. Still, while emphasizing the ambiguity that colonial scholarship engendered, it should be acknowledged that these authors would not have interpreted their own work in this way; for a group of committed technocrats, an informational approach to the steppe was the only one that could (indeed, *would certainly*) ensure its correct governance.

¹⁸³ This language is drawn from Nicholas B. Dirks, *Castes of Mind: Colonialism and the Making of Modern India* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton UP, 2001) 43.

Conclusion

The organized collection of data about the Kazakh steppe was vital to Russian attempts to establish imperial administration there. Bound in thick volumes for administrative and public consumption alike, this information created the only image of the new colony that most would ever know, while providing the knowledge base that, it was widely assumed, was necessary to govern correctly. Disagreements, however, lurked beneath the surface of such studies, and not always in predictable ways; there was no consensus even among a relatively small group of scholars and technocrats about whether the Kazakhs were wild or civilizable, or the steppe better suited for pastoralism, trade, or agriculture. Such conflicts were, in the main, *sotto voce* – it was rare for two authors to engage each other directly in print, rarer still for such debates to address issues of a political, rather than scholastic, nature – but appear readily when analyzing scholarly and bureaucratic accounts of the steppe as a collectivity. The will and resources to support extensive information gathering about the steppe existed, but ultimately, differing viewpoints among the people responsible for describing it to administrators and the interested public meant that the state saw its new colonies through a cracked lens. This incoherence never fully resolved itself, engendering half a century of policies about land use, education, judicial matters, and other vital issues that lacked a consistent direction, despite the widely-held belief that more detailed and increased observation of the steppe would ameliorate the many evident problems created by colonial administration.

This chapter has mostly been concerned with the incoherence and ambivalence of imperial Russian thinking about the steppe, as influenced by an increasing amount of information pertaining to it, at a corporate level. These concepts, however, are also

applicable to the careers and writings of individual agents of empire, and are particularly useful for discussing intermediary figures – Kazakhs attempting to chart a course between the cultural world of the steppe and the ever-more-present influence of Russian imperialism. The remainder of the present work is devoted, in large part, to such individuals, who responded to their encounters with the Empire, whether in education, state service, or simply individual friendships, by articulating a host of “third ways,” methods of securing Kazakh interests within an imperial framework that, they agreed, was unlikely to disappear. It was precisely the fragmented nature of colony and metropole alike that enabled the range of views of imperialism, and of Kazakhs’ place within the Russian Empire, encountered in their works. Uncertain as imperial Russian scholars were, as a group, about the steppe, Kazakh intellectuals were equally ambivalent on an individual level about the meaning of Russian governance for themselves and their people. Engaging with a scholarly and administrative discourse that concealed ambivalence about what to do with “foreigners” (*inorodtsy*), about what it meant to be an empire, with the certitude conferred by positivism, Kazakhs responded creatively and in equally diverse ways. Two such individuals, Chokan Valikhanov and Mukhammed-Salikh Babadzhanov, raised on the steppe, educated in Russian-language institutions, and charged as state servitors with observing and classifying their kinsmen for the sake of advancing governmental interests, are the subjects of the next chapter.

Chapter 2

“We Are In the Most Transitional State”: Chokan Valikhanov, Mukhammed-Salikh Babadzhanov, and the Ambiguities of Kazakhness, 1850-1871

Introduction

The Russian Empire’s expansion into the Kazakh steppe is normally considered to have begun around 1730, with Abulkhair Khan’s acceptance of an oath of allegiance to the tsar in exchange for protection against the Kalmyks, a nomadic people of Mongolian ethnicity. This process, which extended more than a century, was consolidated by the construction of fortifications along the Ural and Irtysh Rivers, and through the steppes between them (on a line between the modern-day cities of Troitsk and Petropavlovsk, both of which grew out of older Russian fortifications).¹ Such fortified points, staffed by Cossacks of the Siberian Host, often contained small general-educational schools (*uchilishche*), including special courses in “Oriental” languages for the preparation of translators, to which Kazakh children were sometimes permitted.² From these early schools grew, in some places, larger colleges for military cadets (*kadetskii korpus*), most notably the Nepluev college in Orenburg and the Siberian college in Omsk (reformed

¹ For an argument that this conquest was part of a broader effort by the Russian Empire to cultivate client states in the service of its geopolitical interests in peripheral areas, see John LeDonne, *The Grand Strategy of the Russian Empire* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2004), especially Chapter Three.

² A. Kh. Margulan, “Ocherk zhizni i deiatelnosti Ch. Ch. Valikhanova,” Margulan (glav. red.), *Ch. Ch. Valikhanov: Sobranie sochinenii v piati tomakh* (Alma-Ata: Glavnaia redaktsiia Kazakhskoi sovetskoi entsiklopedii, 1984), 11. This collection of Valikhanov’s scholarly articles, diaries, and correspondence will hereafter be cited as “SSCV”.

from a smaller Cossack school in 1846), at which Russians and a few aristocratic Kazakhs prepared for careers in state military service.³

Born in 1832 and 1835 respectively, Mukhammed-Salikh Babadzhanov and Chokan Chingisovich (born Mukhammed-Khanafiia) Valikhanov were among the first Kazakh children to be educated in these reformed Russian schools. Well-born members of, respectively, the Bukei and Middle Hordes, they entered into state service on completion of their education and also engaged in the ethnographic and historical study of their native lands and fellow Kazakhs.⁴ The life and work of both was riddled with ambiguity that deeply complicates theories of imperial power's influence on the culture of colonizer and colonized. As members of aristocratic ("white bone," Kaz. *aq-suiek*) lineages, they were legally distinct from commoners ("black bone," Kaz. *qara-suiek*), and were acutely aware of this distinction and the privileges it conferred. As servitors of the state, they enjoyed still greater prestige on the steppe, but this same state had recently conquered their ancestral lands, with uncertain ramifications for Kazakh culture and economy. Intellectually, it is insufficient to say simply that they were between Islamic and Russian cultural milieus, for the meanings of Islam and the precise nature of its coexistence with local traditions were always strongly contested on the steppe. Moreover, as I have argued in Chapter 1, Russian views of Europe, the steppe, and the project of empire varied greatly. That Babadzhanov and Valikhanov were intermediaries between

³ On the reformation of the Omsk college, see G. N. Potanin, "Biograficheskie svedeniia o Chokane Valikhanove" in SSCV, t. 5, 348.

⁴ The term "Bukei Horde" is identical to "Inner (*vnutrennaia*) Horde," also frequently used in Russian, and refers to a division of the Small Horde (Rus. *Malaia orda*, Kaz. *Kishi zhuz*) permitted to cross the Ural River by Tsar Paul I in 1801 and migrating between the Ural and Volga Rivers, north of the Caspian Sea, on lands belonging today to northwestern Kazakhstan. After the Bukei Khanate was abolished in 1845, these lands fell to the responsibility of the Governor-Generalship of Orenburg and Samara. See S. C. Zimanov, *Rossiia i bukeevskoe khanstvo* (Alma-ata: Nauka, 1982).

two cultures is clear enough; what these cultures represented to them, though, and the value they found in each, is a more difficult question, one this chapter will address.

Despite the complex lives these men led, and the multiple worlds among which they moved, scholarship about them has until recently been overly simple. Babadzhanov has gone all-but-unnoticed in English-language historiography; of Kazakhstani historians, N. P. Ivlev was the first to write about Babadzhanov, and his interpretation, positioning his subject as a “zealous proponent of the friendship of peoples,” remains dominant.⁵ While Valikhanov was intimately linked with the Russian imperial project by his contemporaries, especially with the prerogatives of “Westernizing” intellectuals, Kazakh scholars in the Soviet era most frequently described him as a “true (*vernyi*) defender” of the Kazakh people.⁶ Western scholars most frequently include him with a group of “enlighteners” that is also said to include Ibrai Altynsarin and Abai Qunanbaev (see Chapters 3 and 4 respectively).⁷ All of these interpretations are, in their own way, problematic. Reducing the complex ideas about civilization and progress inherent in Babadzhanov’s ethnographic work, and implied by his administrative and economic activity, to the Soviet “friendship of peoples” formula is tendentious at best. Further, the historical neglect of Babadzhanov is itself a problem to be redressed; though not as

⁵ N. P. Ivlev, “Vvedenie. Zabytyi etnograf iz Naryn-peskov,” *Khodzha Mukhammed-Salikh Babadzhanov: Sochineniia (sbornik statei 1861-1871 gg.)* (Almaty: Sanat, 1996), 25. On the development of the idea of the “Great Friendship” in Soviet historiography, the classic work, though overly critical of the real or imagined motivations of Soviet historians, is Lowell Tillet’s *The Great Friendship: Soviet Historians on the Non-Russian Nationalities* (Chapel Hill, NC: University of North Carolina Press, 1969).

⁶ On Valikhanov and Westernization, see A. N. Pypin’s *Istoriia russkoi etnografii* (1892), where he writes that according to Valikhanov’s close acquaintances, “According to his intellectual sympathies and direction Valikhanov was a Russian Westernizer; he sincerely loved Russia, saw its deficiencies and together with its best people passionately (*goriacho*) wished its renewal.” Cited in A. R. Akhmetov, *Chokan Valikhanov v vospominaniakh sovremennikov* (Alma-ata: Kazakhskoe gosudarstvennoe izdatel’stvo, 1964), 16.

⁷ Shirin Akiner, *The Formation of Kazakh National Identity: from Tribe to Nation-State* (London: Royal Institute of International Affairs, 1995) 30; Kermit McKenzie presents Valikhanov as a Westernizer who “would have become a leading light in the reforming *jadid* movement” (24), a dubious claim in light of Valikhanov’s personal hostility to Islam. See McKenzie, “Chokan Valikhanov: Kazakh Princeling and Scholar,” *Central Asian Survey* 8.3 (1989): 1-30.

productive a scholar as Valikhanov, he seems to have been held in equally high regard by scholars of the Kazakh steppe until the turn of the 20th century.⁸ To valorize Valikhanov as an “enlightener” is to give undue credence to 19th-century writers who were deeply interested in depicting the steppe, prior to the Russian conquest, as a cultural dead zone, and to neglect extensive scholarship from a variety of colonial contexts arguing that backwardness is more constructed trope than objective reality. Further, to position Valikhanov exclusively as an agent of empire, a proto-nationalist, or a defender of the Kazakh people is insufficient. As an aristocratic, Kazakh officer of the Russian Empire, educated in both cultural spheres, he saw little contradiction in his position, and through his scholarly and administrative activity was an advocate for both.

My reading of Valikhanov and Babadzhanov is in some respects inspired by, and extends, Scott Bailey’s recent work on the “multiple biographies” of Valikhanov, which positions him as a rational subject defying simple categorization.⁹ Bailey’s emphasis on the ambiguity of the colonial situation as embodied by Valikhanov is both a welcome intervention in the study of Kazakh intellectual history and a useful theoretical contribution.¹⁰ However, Bailey’s emphasis on the crossed lines and competing interests of Valikhanov’s biography, useful as it is for arguing against facile theories concerning cultural imperialism, works against any attempt to reconcile the apparent contradictions

⁸ The ethnographer of the Bukei horde Aleksei Kharuzin cites Babadzhanov frequently and approvingly in his massive *Kirgizy Bukeevskoi ordy: antropologo-etnograficheskii ocherk* (Moscow: tip. A. Levinson, 1889-1891). On the Kharuzin family, which produced no less than four prominent ethnographers, see Nathaniel Knight, “Nikolai Kharuzin and the Quest for a Universal Human Science: Anthropological Evolutionism and the Russian Ethnographic Tradition, 1885-1900,” *Kritika* 9.1 (Winter 2008): 83-111.

⁹ Scott C. Bailey, “A Biography in Motion: Chokan Valikhanov and His Travels in Central Eurasia,” *Ab Imperio* 2009.1 (January 2009): 165-190.

¹⁰ The term “colonial situation,” first used by Georges Balandier, comes from a disciplinary critique of anthropology wherein it is argued that the professional interests of ethnographers lay in their home countries even during their fieldwork, meaning that their existence was ultimately dependent on the continued viability of European dominance. See George Stocking, Jr.’s introduction to *Colonial Situations: Essays on the Contextualization of Ethnographic Knowledge* (Madison, WI: University of Wisconsin Press, 1991).

of Valikhanov's life and thought against one another. I submit that, for both Valikhanov and Babadzhanov, it is possible to discern a synthesis of imperial and Kazakh interests, a consistent argument about the empire's place in the steppe and the steppe's place in the empire, informed by their understandings of Kazakh cultural traditions and the "civilization" of which the Russian Empire claimed to be the bearer. Although their views were mainly expressed through official documents and scholarly publications, and this raises questions pertaining to the source frame through which a modern reader ascertains their views, both were at times quick to go against prevailing official opinion, and their views differed on several key points. Thus the strain in their views friendly to imperial prerogatives cannot be read as the product of a constraining source frame or a colonized mind. Rather, even within the single discursive space of imperial scholarship and bureaucracy, personal subjectivity permitted a variety of original formulations about the meaning of imperialism.

Babadzhanov and Valikhanov's intermediate standing between "educated society" in the capitals and city-forts of the steppe, on one hand, and the cultural world of the nomads on the other, indeed had multiple meanings. Valikhanov was capable of exoticizing his subjects every bit as much as a European ethnographer, while Babadzhanov occasionally seems openly contemptuous of the Kazakhs surrounding him. Yet they also advanced claims for the worth of Kazakh culture and lifeways rare or absent from other writings of the 1850s and '60s. Both absorbed ideas about civilization, progress, and proper governance from their interactions with contemporary Russian intellectuals; such interaction occurred both directly, through side-by-side education, state service, conversation, and correspondence, and indirectly, through subscription to

the major “thick journals” of the day.¹¹ This was not passive absorption, though, but active selection and interpretation of metropolitan concepts in a unique way. Valikhanov and Babadzhanov were convinced of the fundamental superiority of an idealized version of Russian culture and governance over their native surroundings, and still more so over the other outside cultures (Tatar and Chinese) competing for supremacy in the steppe. However, they also were acutely aware of the Empire’s deficiencies in practice, and spared no one in their criticism of corrupt administrators and ill-informed policies. Further, they did not consider the putative superiority of Russian culture and governance to be fixed and permanent, rather arguing that Kazakhs were also equipped to make the same transition while preserving the particularities of their ancient culture. Civilization and progress were, for them, universal ideals, met neither by Kazakhs nor the Cossacks who populated the line of Russian fortifications, and the responsibility of the Russian Empire was to protect Kazakhs from pernicious outside influences and permit them to meet these ideals in their own way. Compiling information about the cultural and economic life of the steppe, Babadzhanov and Valikhanov simultaneously served the interests of an empire systematically hamstrung by insufficient or bad information in its attempts to govern newly-conquered areas and promoted the distinctiveness and value of the steppe and its inhabitants.

Education and State Service

Valikhanov and Babadzhanov were both well-born Kazakhs; Valikhanov, the great-grandson of Ablai, khan of the Middle Horde, had a particularly noble lineage, and

¹¹ After his death, Babadzhanov’s personal effects included 33 volumes of *Vestnik Evropy*, nine of *Vsemirnyi trud*, and three of *Morskoi sbornik*, as well as the works of the conservative historian Nikolai Karamzin, among other publications; Valikhanov subscribed to the Dostoevsky brothers’ journal *Vremia*, as well as *Sovremennik*. See Ivlev 22 and SSCV, t. 5, 150. The latter is an 1862 letter to F. M. Dostoevsky; Valikhanov and Dostoevsky’s relationship will be addressed in greater detail below.

his father Chingis was the senior sultan of Kushmurun okrug (in the north-central part of present-day Kazakhstan), while Babadzhanov was the son of an *esaul* (captain) of the Inner Horde.¹² As such, both were part of a privileged group thought by Russian administrators to be most suitable for education and administrative work, and completed terms of study in the Orenburg (Babadzhanov) and Omsk (Valikhanov) *kadetskie korpusy*. Following a domestic education, establishing literacy in the Arabic script, Babadzhanov and Valikhanov entered the colleges for six- and eight-year terms respectively, studying history, geography, literature, arithmetic, military sciences, natural sciences, Russian and “Oriental” (Persian, Arabic, and Chaghatai) languages, along with the fundamentals of Islam.¹³ The course of study was meant to create effective and well-informed translators, officers, and bureaucrats to staff the Empire’s chanceries in the steppe; the social world of the schools, mixing a few Kazakh boys, usually from elite circles, with Russian pupils, facilitated the Kazakhs’ rapprochement (*sbliuzhenie*) with Russian culture, governance, and their representatives.

On completion of his studies at the Nepliuev *korpus*, Babadzhanov directly entered state service at the rank of *khurunzhii* (cornet, a junior cavalry officer post equivalent to the infantry rank of ensign) in 1852, rising to become deputy of the first okrug of the “coastal” (*primorskie*, a reference to the Caspian Sea) Kazakhs in 1854.¹⁴ After a brief arrest in 1855 on the basis of unfounded rumors of anti-governmental activity, he returned to Khanskaia Stavka (a settlement in Astrakhan guberniia founded

¹² SSCV t. 1, 11; Ivlev 10. “Okrug” can be roughly translated as “district,” a unit of territorial organization comparable to the county or uezd.

¹³ SSCV t. 1, 23. An undated program for teaching Islamic law in *kadetskie korpusy* can be found in Valikhanov’s personal archive fund, TsGA RK f. 829, op. 1, d. 32, sv. 5, “Programma prepodavaniia magometanskogo zakona v Orenburgskom kadetskom korpuse.”

¹⁴ Ivlev 11-12

by khan Dzhanger in 1826) to work in the chancery responsible for administration of the Bukei Horde and was quickly named an advisor of this chancery.¹⁵ Soon after this, though, he requested and was granted his release from service duties, in order to live with his elder brothers, exiled to the eastern part of the Bukei Horde's territories for alleged anti-governmental activity in 1854; dissatisfied with the conditions he found there, he returned to Khanskaia Stavka in 1858 and resumed work as an advisor in the Temporary Council for administration of the Bukei Horde. The remainder of Babadzhanov's career was equally uneven. He was well-regarded enough to be selected as part of a delegation of honored Kazakhs (*ordyntsy*) to St. Petersburg and Moscow in 1860, and described during the selection process as "a talented *ordynets*, notable for his education, development, and service."¹⁶ Yet, two years after this formative experience, he was granted his release from service "owing to domestic circumstances," which Ivlev attributes to the spread of malicious rumors by other Kazakhs (*sootechestvenniki*) "jealous of his fast rise in service."¹⁷ Taking up farming on his lands near Lake Baskunchak (a salt lake in Astrakhan guberniia, north of the Caspian Sea), writing scientific articles for publication in various journals, and occasionally quarrelling over land with nearby settlers, he was only called to service again in 1866, as administrator of the Kamysh-Samara section of the Bukei Horde. Despite accusations (unfounded, according to the results of an investigation) of cattle theft levied in 1867, he remained in service until forced to retire because of illness in 1869, and died two years later, leaving

¹⁵ Ibid.

¹⁶ TsGA RK f. 4, op. 1, d. 2929, ll. 100ob.-101, "Delo ob otpravke deputatsii kazakhov v Sankt-Peterburg." This deputation, which will be discussed further below, was an expensive and complex undertaking, draining more than 5000 rubles (l. 20) from the state's coffers.

¹⁷ Ivlev 17. For the "domestic circumstances" language, see TsGA RK f. 78, op. 3, d. 768, sv. 30, "Ob uvolnenii sovetnika vremennogo soveta Babdzhanova i o naznachenii na ego mesto esaula Niiazova."

behind him large amounts of land held on rights of long-term rental, almost 300 horses, and several scholarly publications.¹⁸

Although his service to the Russian state was more extensive, and is certainly better known today, than Babadzhanov's, Valikhanov too proved susceptible to the power of rumor and intrigue, never rising as far as his conspicuous talents and noble ancestry led contemporaries to predict. At the age of 18, on completion of the eight-year course of study in Omsk, he was formally enlisted as a *kornet* in the sixth cavalry regiment of the Siberian Cossack Host, although in fact he was left at the service of the Governor-General of Western Siberia, and soon named as an adjutant to Gen. G. Kh. Gasfort.¹⁹ It was to Gasfort and his assistant, D. fon-Fridrikhs (administrator of the Oblast of Siberian Kazakhs), both very conservative career officers, that Valikhanov reported during his early years of service. Valikhanov's scientific work began in concert with the fulfillment of his service duties; he gathered statistical materials on an 1855 journey with Gasfort to Semireche and Tarbagatai, and in 1856 collected a host of ethnographic data about the Kyrgyz while participating in M. M. Khomentovskii's topographical survey of the Issyk-Kul basin, exploring the central range of the Tian-Shan mountains under the auspices of the same survey.²⁰ During the following years, as his scholarly reputation waxed, Valikhanov completed his famous journey to Kashgaria, an idea instigated by the Russian scholars P. P. Semenov-Tian-Shanskii and E. P.

¹⁸ Ivlev 27, citing unnamed archival documents. Babadzhanov, somewhat controversially, rented 95 *desiatinas* from the state with the goal of developing an orchard, about which more below, per TsGA RK f. 78, op. 4, d. 222, sv. 15, "Ob otvode zemli upraviteliu Tapovskoi chasti Babadzhanovu, ob izbranii kazaka Usergenova starshinoi i dr." Either a landholding of this size (one *desiatina* was equivalent to 2.7 acres, giving Babadzhanov more than 250 acres of land) or possession of 300 horses would be sufficient to consider Babadzhanov, by the standards of his time, a fairly wealthy man.

¹⁹ SSCV t.1, 32-33. Gasfort had administrative responsibility for both Western Siberia and the northeastern regions of present-day Kazakhstan at this time.

²⁰ *Ibid.*, 37. Issyk-Kul ("warm lake") is located in present-day Kyrgyzstan.

Kovalevskii.²¹ Disguised as an Andijani merchant, Valikhanov spent six months in 1858-59 carrying out scholarly and military reconnaissance in the region. His successful journey was celebrated in the scholarly and military communities of the capital, and the Minister of Foreign Affairs, A. M. Gorchakov, invited him in 1860 to remain in St. Petersburg (where he had arrived at the end of 1859) at the Asiatic Department, a post he filled until serious illness, likely tuberculosis, forced him to retire to the steppe in the spring of 1861. Returning to his family's aul at Syrymbet, Valikhanov continued his scholarly activity and state service, despite an unsuccessful attempt to become the elected senior sultan of Atbasar okrug in 1862, a defeat he attributed to the machinations of reactionary colonial officials and "despotic" Kazakh aristocrats alike. He was an integral part of an 1863 commission on legal reform among the Kazakhs, and participated in M. G. Cherniaev's military campaign of 1864, which resulted in the seizure of the fortress of Aulie-ata (present-day Taraz). Margulan argues that Valikhanov's disgust at the cruelty with which this campaign was conducted caused him and other officers to refuse further service under Cherniaev; whether because of this or his failing health, Valikhanov took no further participation in state-directed activities after the Aulie-ata campaign, dying in his brother-in-law's aul in April 1865.²²

Although both Babadzhanov and Valikhanov gained the majority of their experience of metropolitan culture in the colonial outposts where they were educated and through journals, both also had some experience of St. Petersburg. Babadzhanov was

²¹ Kashgaria was the Western name for the region known to locals of Valikhanov's time as Altishahr ("six cities"), surrounded by the Tian-Shan mountain range in the north and Kuen-Lun range in the south and containing, as the name implied, six major cities (Kashgar, Aksu, Uch-Turfan, Yangisar, Yarkend, and Khotan). It is located today in the Xinjiang Uighur Autonomous Region within the People's Republic of China. Owing to the political influence of the khanate of Kokand on this region in the 1850s, it was an area of significant strategic interest to the Russian Empire.

²² SSCV t. 1, 64.

part of a deputation of Bukei Horde Kazakhs that spent three weeks in St. Petersburg (and a few days in Moscow) in 1860. This journey – neither the first nor the last organized by the Ministry of Internal Affairs (MVD), and undertaken at considerable expense – seems to have been intended to display the full grandeur of the northern capital to high-ranking Kazakhs and impress on them the putative superiority of its architecture and culture. Its itinerary included theatrical evenings, walks on Elagin and Krestovskii Islands, and visits to several palaces, including Peterhof, Gatchina, and Tsarskoe Selo. The traveling Kazakhs were also shown a wide range of museums and government buildings, “in accordance with the goal for which [they] were sent,” and presented to the Ministers of Internal Affairs and of State Properties. Plotnikov, assistant administrator of the Oblast of Siberian Kazakhs and the Russian bureaucrat responsible for leading the journey, was further ordered to take care that “[the Kazakhs’] journey to the two capitals leaves a pleasant and grateful (*blagodarnoe*) memory in them.”²³ The deputation, then, made explicit the civilizational hierarchies implicit for colonial administrators in the relationship between the Russian heartland and steppe, as well as the real hierarchies of service and obligation to which Babadzhanov and his traveling companions were committed. It also functioned as a reminder of the benefits, both personal and civilizational, to be reaped from continuing cooperation with colonial authority. As discussed in Chapter 1, this visit caused a minor sensation in the St. Petersburg press; it also had a profound influence on Babadzhanov’s thinking about Russian culture.

Valikhanov arrived to St. Petersburg not as a tourist or a curiosity, but as a respected authority on Central Asian affairs, and his experiences there reflect this more privileged position. Beyond his service in the Asiatic Department of the General Staff,

²³ TsGA RK f. 4, op. 1, d. 2929, l. 98. From a letter to Plotnikov dated 15 July 1860.

an elite military department coordinating the work of geographers, statisticians and ethnographers so as to promote the best possible administration of the Empire's Asian possessions, Valikhanov also was frequently in attendance at meetings of several learned societies.²⁴ According to N. P. Ivlev, these societies included the Imperial Russian Geographical Society and Free Economic Society.²⁵ Here, Valikhanov continued his acquaintance with the scholars and rationalizing "enlightened bureaucrats" discussed in Chapter 1, in whose eyes he was an invaluable source of the detailed local knowledge they considered so necessary for proper administration. Not all of his acquaintances, however, were so optimistic about the prospects of positivism for the future of the Empire; in Petersburg he also revived his relationship with F. M. Dostoevsky, whom he had first met during the latter's exile to Semipalatinsk for participation in the Petrashevskii circle.²⁶ The Dostoevsky brothers (Fyodor and Mikhail), along with their collaborators at the journal *Vremia*, were at this time beginning to articulate the ideas of *pochvennichestvo* (usually translated as "native-soil conservatism"), an anti-rational intellectual movement skeptical of universalistic claims about civilization and convinced that all nations were unique and governed by particular ideals.²⁷ As we will see, Valikhanov actively sought to read the Dostoevskys' journal and engaged critically with the ideas it contained. Hence, his stay in Petersburg immersed him in a range of contemporary intellectual currents, and he participated in the intellectual life of the

²⁴ On the Asiatic Department and the context of its founding, see Alex Marshall, *The Russian General Staff and Asia, 1800-1917* (New York: Routledge, 2006) 22-25.

²⁵ N. P. Ivlev, "Pobornik prosveshcheniia: novoe o Chokane." *Prostor* 10 (1993): 224-228.

²⁶ The Petrashevskii circle was a group of Utopian socialists that formed in St. Petersburg in the late Nicolaevan era. It was dissolved in 1849 and its participants, after a mock execution, sentenced to hard labor and exile. See J. H. Seddon, *The Petrashevtsy: A Study of the Russian Revolutionaries of 1848* (Manchester: Manchester UP, 1985).

²⁷ See the discussion in the most significant English-language work on this movement, Wayne Dowler's *Dostoevsky, Grigor'ev, and Native Soil Conservatism* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1982), 76-79.

capital as more than a passive listener. The ideas reflected in his scholarly and programmatic writings of the early 1860s are a powerful and creative synthesis of the positivism of the General Staff and Romanticism of Dostoevsky's circle.

Babadzhanov and Valikhanov were, in a sense, separated from most other Kazakhs even from birth, and educated to be part of a highly trained military elite. They sought education and the service that followed it as eagerly as the state did them, albeit for different reasons. Babadzhanov and Valikhanov had little choice but to pursue schooling in Omsk and Orenburg if they wished to preserve their ancestors' high status, while the perpetually undermanned imperial bureaucratic apparatus needed local, non-Russian administrators with the range of experiences and knowledge necessary for good governance.²⁸ From the perspective of the Russian state, then, it was creating administrative intermediaries, people with the combination of local knowledge (and influence) and formal, secular education necessary in its view to represent it most effectively to the Muslim population of the steppe and act in its interests. Further, both civil and military administrators saw Babadzhanov and Valikhanov's utility largely in terms of their ethnic and confessional belonging. Valikhanov's *incognito* journey to Kashgar, for example, depended on his knowledge of Turkic languages, Muslim religious rituals, and plausibility as an Andijani merchant, a combination no Russian officer could offer, while the composition of Babadzhanov's deputation to St. Petersburg implies that the Empire had a strong interest in cultivating the loyalty of high-ranking Kazakhs. Such

²⁸ On the role of schooling in creating a new elite, see TsGA RK f. 4, op. 1, d. 5742, sv. 737, "O zachislenii v Orenburgskoi Neplievskoi kadetskoi korpus detei starshiny Babadzhanova," wherein Mukhammed-Salikh Babadzhanov's brothers Mukhamadshakh and Sultan Mustafa are denied service positions above the lowest available owing to a lack of schooling (l. 18ob., February 1852), and the elder Babadzhanov's wives petition the state, on his death, to accept his sons and grandsons to the Nepliev college as a logical route towards continuing his service (ll. 2-3, December 1850).

servitors were indispensable for the day-to-day functioning of the imperial bureaucratic apparatus precisely because they were not Russian. A sense of distinctness, though, can be used both to discriminate and to defend a group's particular interests. While Babadzhanov and Valikhanov accepted an intermediate role, they also expanded it in a way that both reinforced and challenged the goals of imperial power. Uniquely positioned as interpreters of Russian governance and civilizational ideals to Kazakhs, and of Kazakh traditions and lifeways to Russians, they articulated powerful claims about Kazakhs' role in the life of the empire even as they were instrumental in expanding its territorial and administrative reach.

Ethnography and Imperial Power

In the 1960s, in the wake of the political decolonization of most of Asia and Africa, some prominent anthropologists, led by Claude Levi-Strauss, began to interrogate the relationship between ethnography and colonialism, arguing that ethnography had served as the “daughter” of Western imperialism.²⁹ Similarly, Bernard Cohn has argued that the project of empire was intimately linked with the creation and normalization of vast amounts of information through such “investigative modalities” as ethnography and cartography.³⁰ These critiques are rooted in the idea that scholars remained professionally interested in the metropole even while carrying out their fieldwork and hence that their advancement, indeed survival, was dependent on the continuation and expansion of European dominance over the territories inhabited by their ethnographic subjects. Babadzhanov and Valikhanov represent fascinating case studies, as yet

²⁹ Claude Levi-Strauss, “Anthropology: Its Achievements and its Future,” *Current Anthropology* 14 (1966): 581-597.

³⁰ Bernard Cohn, *Colonialism and its Forms of Knowledge* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1996) 3-5.

unexplored, for this line of argument in two senses. First, much of their scholarly work was carried out in the context of discharging their duties to a highly militarized colonial state, and, at times (especially after Valikhanov's journey to Kashgar), zealous and thorough completion of such duties had tangible professional rewards. At the same time, both also wrote and researched outside of a service context, and Valikhanov's personal wealth and standing in particular, if they were maintained by relations with the colonial state after the conquest of the steppe, also had their roots in a pre-colonial context. Second, the question of Valikhanov and Babadzhanov's primary interest group remains open, if they had one at all. It is not at all clear that questions of professional advancement and the relationships they formed with representatives of metropolitan culture – itself, as seen in Chapter 1, a more varied thing than discussions of the oppressive powers of colonial discourse tend to allow – were more significant to them than the affective, personal, and institutional ties connecting them with the steppe. Ethnography, as practiced by Valikhanov and Babadzhanov, doubtless reinforced imperial prerogatives, but the power of self-representation they possessed as transmitters of local knowledge must not be neglected.

Much of the data that Valikhanov collected during his travels went beyond arcana of interest to a few European Orientalists, but rather was of immediate practical value to an empire expanding into areas about which it still knew little. He referred to Central Asia, particularly eastern Turkestan, as *terra incognita*, expressing amazement that it had not received scholarly attention comparable to Africa and other parts of Asia, and surmised that under the circumstances, “all knowledge about the peoples of Central Asia,

especially those as little known as the Kyrgyz, should be very interesting.”³¹ Such useful knowledge included, for example, information about minerals available in the area surrounding Issyk-kul (scanty, as it turned out, and requiring further study, since the local Kyrgyz seemed to know little about the topic).³² Valikhanov’s cartography, too, was firmly grounded in questions of the Empire’s security and material well-being. He opens an official note from 1856 about administration and borders for the Kazakhs of the Large Horde by foregrounding the commercial context of his work:

“There is no doubt that soon in Central Asia bazaars, in which Russian goods currently predominate (*pervenstvuiut*) without competition, English goods will appear, and together with them also highly-developed European firearms. All this means it is necessary of taking precautionary measures. For the best clarity (*vidimosti*) we think it not superfluous to make a short survey of the state of our Central Asian border.”³³

Having made explicit the Empire’s interest in positioning its forward lines of defense, Valikhanov goes on to make a series of recommendations intended both to keep British goods out of Russian domains and destabilize Kokandian influence over the Kazakhs of the Great Horde, highlighting the importance of joining the Ili river valley to Russian possessions and settling it for both policy goals.³⁴ Traveling around Semireche in the employ of the tsarist government, Valikhanov was well aware of the purpose for

³¹ SSCV t. 2, 11, “Zapiski o kirgizakh.” In the original text Valikhanov, like most of his contemporaries, uses the term *dikokamennye kirgizy* (literally, “wild-stone Kirgiz”) to refer to the ethnic group known today as the Kyrgyz. I have translated this term as “Kyrgyz” throughout. In other places, the word *kirgiz*, which could denote either the present-day Kazakhs or Kyrgyz, is occasionally used, and I have been forced to judge his meaning from context while indicating the use of this term in the original text.

³² *Ibid.*, 25. Here *kirgizy* is in the original.

³³ SSCV t. 1, 223, “Ob upravlenii kazakhami bol’shogo zhuza.” This is an official note signed by Gasfort, but compiled by Valikhanov.

³⁴ *Ibid.*, 226.

which he was gathering information, and he moved beyond the role of passive observer to actively recommend proper courses of action to his employer.³⁵

At no point in Valikhanov's career was his personal and professional interest in defending the Russian Empire's prerogatives clearer than in his six-month *incognito* journey to eastern Turkestan. This was a significant, expensive undertaking, sponsored by important Petersburg organizations both civil (IRGO) and military (the Asiatic Department). As such, the metropole's interest in the scholarly and strategic results of Valikhanov's work was clear. He was aware of this scientific interest, noting in a diary entry of 14 September 1858, upon crossing the Zaukinsk pass, "Today we...are entering unknown countries. This unknown-ness (*neizvestnost'*) compels me to keep a more detailed and correct diary."³⁶ The diary details his gathering of Kyrgyz sheep-horn fetishes, used in religious rituals, and describes a growing collection of geological specimens.³⁷ Brief descriptions of the climate, flora and fauna of eastern Turkestan pepper his published account of the 1858-59 expedition. He notes the particularities of the clothing of his acquaintances in Kashgar and attempts, on the basis of his observations, to develop a master list of the moral characteristics of the Turkestanis (*Turkestanskaia natsiia* in the original), noting fondness for opium and sexual

³⁵ The "passive observer" discussion owes much to the work of Mary Louise Pratt on imperial travel writing. Pratt defines the "anti-conquest" mood in travel writing as "the strategies of representation whereby European bourgeois subjects seek to secure their innocence in the same moment as they assert European hegemony." (7) Valikhanov's career may be seen, in some respects, as straddling the line between Pratt's anti-conquest and a more explicit assertion of metropolitan dominance. See Pratt, *Imperial Eyes: Travel Writing and Transculturation* (New York: Routledge, 1992).

³⁶ SSCV t. 3, 14, "Kashgarshkii dnevnik 1 – verшина Zaukinskogo prokhoda."

³⁷ Ibid., 12 March 1859, 24-27. This mineralogical collection was, it seems, ultimately lost, despite the extraordinary significance which contemporary Russian scholars ascribed to it. The celebrated geologist I. V. Mushketov, for example, actively sought it to no avail, writing, "The collection [Valikhanov's] is yet more interesting because it could have given understanding about the structure and composition of the southern Tian-Shan, about which we know exactly nothing – but where was this collection put? I did not succeed in finding out, despite all my wishes." See I. V. Mushketov, "Kratkii otchet o geologicheskom puteshestvii po Turkestanu v 1875 g." (St. Petersburg: tip. Imperatorskoi Akademii Nauk, 1876) 43.

licentiousness among the negative traits and sociability as the main positive trait.³⁸

Though clearly imbued with Orientalist tropes, this attempt to describe the moral character of subjects from within the discursive frame of the passive observer was a relatively common feature of 19th century ethnography; Valikhanov would likely have seen these remarks as no less objective than his observations on climate, and equally as valuable to the metropolitan academic community to which he was answerable.³⁹ The Russian Empire's scholarly gaze penetrated further into Asia than ever before as a result of Valikhanov's work.

The broader community of Western explorers and adventurers of Central Asia, too, had an interest in Valikhanov's journey to eastern Turkestan, one more affective and personal than strictly academic. After the German traveler Adolf Shlagintveit disappeared in 1857 while traveling north from British-occupied India, his brothers appealed directly to the Russian Minister of Foreign Affairs, A. M. Gorchakov, for assistance in finding information about his fate, since "likely he [would] try to reach the Russian border, in the case that it is impossible for him to return to India via Turkestan and Tibet."⁴⁰ Gorchakov delegated this task to the Main Administration of Western Siberia, which, in a relation signed by fon-Fridrikhs, charged the senior sultans of all border okrugs with investigation of Shlagintveit's whereabouts, projected travel routes,

³⁸ SSCV t. 3, 166-170, "O sostoianii Altyskhara ili shesti vostochnykh gorodov kitaiskoi provintsii Nan-lu (Malo Bukharii) v 1858-9 gg."

³⁹ The second volume of Kharuzin's *Kirgizy Bukeevskoi ordy* features an attempt to synthesize the opinions of several different authors (Meier, Zavalishin, Zeland, Lansdell, Radlov, and others) on the morals of the Bukei Horde so as "to make a more or less exact definition of the character of the Kazakh." (207) The insistence in this text that such a definition is possible is quite notable in consideration of the highly contradictory nature of some of the earlier views Kharuzin cites.

⁴⁰ TsGA RK f. 345, op. 1, d. 648, sv. 73, l. 4, "Delo o rozyske puteshestvennika Adolfa Shlagintveita," letter of Shlagintveit brothers to Gorchakov, dated 8 November 1858.

and fate.⁴¹ Valikhanov, setting off for Altishahr just as this investigation began, was also ordered to gather all possible information about this matter. In a report first published in the Notes (*Zapiski*) of IRGO, he describes the circumstances of the death of Shlagintveit who, he discovered, had been executed at Yarkend by the *khodja* Valikhan-tiure during the civil war in Altishahr.⁴² The account is lurid, referring to Shlagintveit as one among many victims of Valikhan-tiure's "ferocity" and positioning the *khodja* as a murderous Asiatic despot *par excellence*:

"As a man who constantly smoked hashish, Valikhan-tiure reached a certain insanity (*sumasbrodstva*) and violently gave himself over to his passions. He was obsessed by his thirst for blood and could not pass a day without killing several people with his own hands."⁴³

The Shlagintveit episode reveals clearly the multiple valences of Valikhanov's journey to Kashgar. He was simultaneously answerable to a pan-European community of scholars and to tsarist officials; if the interests of these groups were substantially different, they could still be accommodated under the banner of a single expedition.⁴⁴

Valikhanov's career depended, in a significant way, on his ability to satisfy the prerogatives of these distinct, yet overlapping sponsors.

Valikhanov's research, as his partial sponsorship by the Asiatic Department indicates, was not scholarship for its own sake, but reconnaissance with a direct

⁴¹ Ibid., ll. 1-1ob., relation of the Main Administration of Western Siberia (signed by fon-Fridrikhs) to the Military Governor of the Oblast of the Siberian Kazakhs, dated 23 December 1858.

⁴² The *khodjas* (*khwajas*, in some transliterations) were dueling families of Kokandian Sufis who maintained a strong influence on the secular rulers of Altishahr, frequently warring for preeminence directly or via their secular proxies. See Hodong Kim, *Holy War in China: The Muslim Rebellion and State in Chinese Central Asia, 1864-1877* (Stanford, CA: Stanford UP, 2004).

⁴³ SSCV t. 4, 42, "Svedeniia ob obstoiatelstvakh, sposobstvovavshikh smerti Adolfa Shlagintveita." Originally published in *Zapiski Russkogo Geograficheskogo Obshchestva*, 1861, kn. 1, pp. 20-24.

⁴⁴ As I have argued elsewhere, a sense of shared mission and community linked scholars from a range of European polities, even under less-than-propitious diplomatic circumstances. See my "'Our Friendly Rivals': Yaqub Beg and the Limitations of the Great Game Paradigm, 1865-1880" (unpublished seminar paper, 2007).

connection to the Empire's political and commercial prerogatives. Thus some of the information he includes in the published account of his journey to eastern Turkestan is, explicitly, applicable in the context of military expansion. Such are, for example, his detailed description of routes of communication within Altishahr, his sketch of the number (around 15,000) and fighting readiness (poor, and badly armed) of Chinese troops there, and his account of the structures of administration and taxation established by the Qing Empire in the region.⁴⁵ Nor does the account neglect the Empire's commercial interests in Kashgar and its surroundings; Valikhanov describes the city of Kashgar as, both historically and at present, "one of the first-class markets of Central Asia" and a site of great importance for Russian export trade, and exhaustively describes caravan routes, available goods, and the market prices for them.⁴⁶ Russian trade and political interests are, he editorializes, strongly linked in the region: "The frequent rebellions and political upheavals (*perevoroty*) in eastern Turkestan should justly raise fear among our merchantry; during these upheavals, the interests of our merchantry may suffer, and it would not receive satisfaction from the Chinese or from the Kokandians."⁴⁷ Linking considerations of political strategy and commercial expediency, Valikhanov also provides his sponsors, invested in his work in the most literal sense, information to vouchsafe the Empire's success in both arenas.

Scholarship and expansionism (both military and commercial) are frequently difficult to separate from one another in Valikhanov's work. Though presented with an objective gloss, his writings often reinforced the very notions of civilizational difference

⁴⁵ SSCV t. 3, "O sostoianii Altysahra," 104-105 (on communication routes), 175 (on troop dispositions) and 162 (concerning Qing governance).

⁴⁶ Ibid. The quotation is from p. 202, the description of trade routes and prices on pp. 202-208.

⁴⁷ Ibid., 214.

that underlay arguments for further Russian advancement into Central Asia.⁴⁸ Although he imputes some praiseworthy character traits to the people of Altishahr, the general portrait that Valikhanov sketches is one of stagnation and decline. Of schools, for example, he writes:

“The education of the people here is in the same decline (*upadka*) as in Kokand and other domains (*vladeniakh*) of Central Asia. True, male and female children go to the medresse, but, having studied the main fundamentals of God’s law, only those who are preparing to become *akhuns* finish the course of study.”⁴⁹

The cities of Altishahr, too, are depicted as little more than sleepy, unsanitary backwaters. Describing all cities he encountered as basically identical, he continues:

“The external appearance of the cities of eastern Turkestan is uniform and sad (*pechalen*)...Streets are narrow – two-wheeled carts only travel along the main ones – and irregular. Shops, restaurants, barbers are scattered along both sides of large streets, which go from the gates to the center of the city to the trade square.”⁵⁰

Although Valikhanov does not make the comparison explicit, the implication that such cities were inferior to the wide boulevards and gridded streets of Russia’s capitals, that such schools left much to be desired in comparison with the course of study Valikhanov and others like him had passed, would have been clear enough to the metropolitan reader. Russia’s interest in the region Valikhanov explored was not always and invariably one of conquest, although the tsarist military did annex the Ili River valley, which became known as Kul’ja oblast, in 1871, and the territory was not returned to

⁴⁸ For an argument that makes a useful distinction between sufficient means for imperial expansion and sufficient motivation (in the realm of cultural attitudes) for same, see Daniel R. Headrick, *The Tools of Empire: Technology and European Imperialism in the Nineteenth Century* (New York: Oxford UP, 1981).

⁴⁹ SSCV t. 3, 164, “O sostoianii Altishahra.” This passage immediately follows a strong critique of the state of education in Central Asian *medresses*, though Valikhanov adds the qualifier that Kashgarian religious scholars are “less fanatical” than their Bukharan and Kokandian brethren.

⁵⁰ *Ibid.*, 114-115.

China until the ratification of the Treaty of St. Petersburg early in 1881.⁵¹ But Altishahr was an area of tremendous significance, as Valikhanov himself argued, to Russian geopolitical and economic interests. Depicting it as a place where backwardness and instability reigned, Valikhanov made a case that continuous Russian tutelary intervention there was required. At times this took the form of consulates arranging trade on terms highly favorable to Russian merchants; at others, it extended to full-fledged political control. In either case, for tsarist statesmen, expediency demanded an enlightened European presence on the spot. While many may have already believed that such a difference existed *a priori*, Valikhanov's travel writing confirmed their suspicions.

Babadzhanov's scholarly activity is less explicitly connected with his service career than Valikhanov's, but still closely intertwined with the imperial knowledge-gathering project. For example, in an 1865 article submitted to, and published by, IRGO, Babadzhanov brought to the attention of members of the Society the existence of huge deposits of salt, as well as lesser amounts of sulfur, on the territories of the Bukei Horde (particularly at Lake Baskunchak and Mt. Bol'shoe Bogdo).⁵² Considerable efforts had already been devoted to prospecting for useful minerals in this region, and in this context, Babadzhanov's was undoubtedly a useful contribution.⁵³ Further, Ivlev notes that, in 1862, Babadzhanov sent a collection of artifacts, predominantly arrowheads, to the ethnographic museum of IRGO, and that this "was not the only example of [his] collecting historical and ethnographic objects and sending them to scholarly

⁵¹ See Sarah C. M. Paine, *Imperial Rivals: China, Russia, and their Disputed Frontier* (Armonk, NY: M. E. Sharpe, 1996).

⁵² Ivlev 55, "Iz vnutrennei kirgizskoi ordy." First published in *Izvestiia IRGO*, t. 1, 1865.

⁵³ See, for example, TsGA RK f. 4, op. 1, d. 3791, sv. 509, "Delo o dozvolanii magistru zoologii Severtsovu N. A. proizvodit' razvedku mestorozhdenii kamennogo uglia v Kazakhskoi stepi," wherein Severtsov successfully petitions, in 1859, to develop lignite deposits at his own expense, arguing that such work would be beneficial to the interests of the entire region.

institutions.”⁵⁴ Requests for such artifacts from metropolitan institutions were fairly common during the middle decades of the 19th century; beyond IRGO, both the Imperial Kazan’ State University and Moscow Public Museum communicated their desire to purchase “antiquities” relating to the Bukei Horde to the Governor-General of Orenburg and Samara.⁵⁵ As John MacKenzie has argued for the case of the British Empire, 19th century museums embodied the goals of the rational, classifying Enlightenment project even as they depended on the mechanics and resources of the empire for their establishment and continued support; the imperial narrative experienced by visitors was implicit, with the metropole’s possession of colonies symbolized by the presence of artifacts of the latter in the former.⁵⁶ While many of the civil institutions interested in exhibiting Kazakh antiquities were serious scholarly organizations, and undoubtedly sincere in their academic goals, the version of Kazakh culture they displayed – indeed, that they actively selected for – was exoticized and stagnant. Attempting to make the purchases that Kazan’ University requested, a bureaucrat of the Orenburg Border Commission cautioned:

“Later, the items may turn out to be either too ordinary (*obyknovennye*), used also among Russians, completely unnecessary, or completely useless (*nikuda ne godnye*); it is especially easier for the latter to happen in relation to antiquities, the meaning of which among the Kazakhs is in general too conditional (*uslovno*), and among them will sooner be found old-fashioned (*starinnye*) items than truly ancient.”⁵⁷

⁵⁴ Ivlev 24.

⁵⁵ TsGA f. 4, op. 1, d. 2815, ll. 1 (1 September 1857, Imperial Kazan’ State University) and 62-63 (August 1862, Moscow Public Museum). The file is entitled “Vedomosti i spiski etnograficheskikh predmetov kazakhskogo naseleniia.” For lack of available funds to purchase items from those to whom they belonged, these requests often proved impracticable, heightening the real and symbolic value of Babadzhanov’s donations.

⁵⁶ John MacKenzie, *Museums and Empire: Natural History, Human Cultures and Colonial Identities* (New York: Manchester UP, 2009).

⁵⁷ *Ibid.*, l. 41ob. (29 June 1858. Report of the Orenburg Border Commission to the Governor-General of Orenburg and Samara.)

In other words, the items desirable for display were exclusively those which marked Kazakh material culture as distinct from Russian, unchanging, and unquestionably belonging to the remote past. Babadzhanov, then, played an active role in this commodification and ossification of Kazakh culture for the consumption of the metropolitan public.

It was Babadzhanov's scholarly writing, though, that earned him the respect both of later scholars and of the institutions to which he contributed (this latter marked by the award of a silver medal from IRGO in 1862).⁵⁸ Parallel to the ethnographic narrative of these articles – meticulous notes on, for example, hunting practices or stone artifacts – is a narrative wherein Babadzhanov attempts to demonstrate the inferiority of the Kazakhs around him in relation to the scientific authority he represents. This parallelism emerges most strikingly in his “Zametki o kamennoi babe”:

“When this statue was found, it seemed somehow wondrous (*chudesnym*) in the eyes of the simple-souled Kazakhs. They even suspected in the idol the presence of secret forces and wondrous character to cure illnesses, in a word they already were able to conceive of some kind of godlike respect to it. Only my personal example of disrespect and explanation to the Kazakhs of the hypothesis that this was a Kalmyk idol or grave monument could convince them that these guesses were unfounded.”⁵⁹

Babadzhanov positions himself here as the educated enlightener of an unwashed and superstitious mass. Although he cannot portray such ignorance as immutable and based in ethnicity (since he too, after all, is Kazakh), he unapologetically writes himself as superior to his companions precisely by virtue of his scholarly attitudes. His readers in the capitals, aware of the source of a portion of Babadzhanov's education (the part that had taught him Russian, and enabled him to contribute fluently to a scholarly journal),

⁵⁸ Ivlev 23. Babadzhanov was, according to Ivlev, the first Kazakh to be so honored.

⁵⁹ Khadzhi-Salikh Babadzhanov (sic), “O kamennoi babe, naidennaya v Kirgizskoi stepi,” *Etnograficheskii sbornik* 6 (1864). This journal was an irregular publication of IRGO.

were thus encouraged to engage in the fantasy of the civilizing mission even as they absorbed interesting trivia about the archaeology of the steppe. Babadzhanov, while linking Kazakhs' ignorance to their unwillingness to practice the sort of science his readers were interested in, reminded them that this was not a permanent condition, and tacitly drew attention to tsarist educational institutions as the engines for effecting such change.

Valikhanov and Babadzhanov were both products, in part, of the tsarist educational system, and had a range of connections, both personal and professional, to the state apparatus. Moreover, it is clear that both considered advancement within this apparatus to be a priority; Valikhanov, for example, wrote to a friend about his participation in M. G. Cherniaev's military campaign to Aulie-ata, "I go, I confess, to gain rank. Cherniaev, it seems, is a good man and maybe he won't begrudge the rank."⁶⁰ It is hardly surprising, then, that their activity should have supported the prerogatives of that state, whether by providing information of direct military or economic value or by inculcating in their readers the notion that Kazakhs badly needed Russian governance. Scholarship as a means of expanding the reach of imperial power to the steppe is a recurring theme in Valikhanov and Babadzhanov's writings. It is not, however, an invariant one. Even as they contributed, directly or indirectly, to Russian rule and expansionism in Central Asia, they also articulated a powerful vision of Kazakh distinctiveness and worthiness within the imperial framework. While it would be inaccurate to refer to this vision as nationalist *per se*, its celebration of steppe culture was vital to Valikhanov and Babadzhanov's claims about the place of Kazakhs within the Russian Empire, and about the latter's purpose on the steppe.

⁶⁰ SSCV t. 5, 161, letter of Valikhanov to K. K. Gutkovskii, dated 24 March 1864, written in Omsk.

Ethnography and the Power of Self-Representation

Contributing to scholarly polemics of their day, and emerging as scholars and professionals from institutions intimately connected with Russian military expansion, Valikhanov and Babadzhanov did not merely ape metropolitan discourse about Kazakhness and the steppe, but rather contributed to it in powerful and unique ways.⁶¹ Ethnography and geography, the handmaidens of empire, also served as venues for the expression of an argument, at turns implicit and explicit, about the distinctness and value of indigenous forms of knowledge in the face of metropolitan institutions that explicitly devalued them. This is not to say that the two valued such knowledge equally; indeed, while Valikhanov was a strong advocate in print and in private for the worth of steppe culture, stripped of scientific gloss, Babadzhanov viewed Kazakh practices as, if distinct and worthy of study, also unbearably dark and irrational. Their status as cultural insiders lent authority to their words when they wrote in the idiom of the scholarly “thick journals,” even as they challenged the conclusions and, at times, the fundamental assumptions of other writers. Representing themselves, and purporting to represent the culture of their birth, Valikhanov and Babadzhanov did not meekly submit to the tutelage of imperial Russian scholars.

Although he often engaged metropolitan scholars on their own terms, Valikhanov was willing to correct what he viewed as their mistakes when corresponding with them. A friendly 1852 letter to the orientalist I. N. Berezin, for example, is filled with clarifications of the meanings of older Turkic words, unused in the Tatar language with

⁶¹ Here I am interested in problematizing the concept of the “colonized mind” elaborated by Dipesh Chakrabarty and others. See Chakrabarty, “Postcoloniality and the Artifice of History: Who Speaks for ‘Indian’ Pasts?” *Representations* 37 (Winter 1992) 1-26.

which Berezin was familiar.⁶² In the course of this philological exercise, the young Valikhanov also advanced, unsolicited, a more complex argument about the origins of the Kazakh people, a topic hotly debated among orientalists of the era:

“All the data, the gathering of which I am involved with even now...attest that the Kazakh *narod* (so we call ourselves) formed from a union of different Turkic and Mongol tribes at a time of internecine struggle in the [Golden] Horde, beginning immediately after the death of Berdibek, and [was] not the ancient people, of which Firdousi wrote”⁶³

The tenor of the letter is conversational, as one specialist addressing another.

Privately, Valikhanov could be much more scathing about sloppy or ill-informed scholarship. Commenting on an article by the linguist and ethnographer E. K. Ogorodnikov on the place of the Yakut language within the Turkic language family, he wrote, “Something here is not right. It seems that the author mixed up the cases: his instrumental looks more like the genitive and the genitive, it seems, is instead of the accusative.”⁶⁴ Further criticism of this work led him to a damning conclusion:

“Overall it is clear that the author himself is not that strong in the language and did not study it, but wrote according to inquiries (*po rassprosam*). Through such observations we will never learn the languages of *inorodtsy*; we must wait and wait, until some scientist, knowing the Turkic and Mongol languages, studies and indicates particularities, more than that, it seems, is not necessary.”⁶⁵

His personal notes on A. I. Levshin’s *Opisanie kirgiz-kazach’ikh ord*, moreover, are venomous. Describing the earlier scholar as “too captivated by the ignorance of the people he describes,” he makes a withering attack on Levshin’s assertion that Kazakhs are not Muslim that is strongly informed and glossed by his status as a cultural insider:

⁶² SSCV t. 1, 163, “Pis’mo professoru I. N. Berezinu.” Berezin was a professor at Kazan’ University until 1858, when he moved to St. Petersburg; he was best known for his translations into Russian of the *iarlyks* (legal proclamations) of Tokhtamysh and other khans of the Golden Horde.

⁶³ *Ibid.*, 163-4.

⁶⁴ SSCV t. 1, 297, “Zametki po istorii iuzhnosibirskikh plemen”. These personal notes were first published in the *Zapiski* of IRGO, Ethnographic Division, in 1904.

⁶⁵ *Ibid.*, 298.

“The two Kirgiz-Kaisaks, whom A. I. Levshin asked what faith they belonged to (*kakoi oni very?*) – it is likely, that they did not fully understand something in the sense of the question and, puzzled by its novelty, did not find a response beyond the easiest in such situations: ‘I don’t know.’ Any Kazakh knows that he is a follower of Mohammed and that he is a Muslim; maybe he does not understand the meaning of the word, but all the same this constitutes his pride in front of non-believers. From childhood he hears constantly, that he is a Muslim, and that all others, apart from Muslims, are kafirs, judged by God for eternal punishment in the other world. After this is it possible to state, that a Kazakh does not know his faith?”⁶⁶

Valikhanov, in this critique, shares some basic assumptions about methodology and standards of proof with Levshin. Clearly, however, such common understandings did not prevent him from criticizing faulty conclusions; while Valikhanov may have shared categories with Russian scholars, his relationship with them was not uniformly hierarchical and tutelary.

Valikhanov, traveling the Kazakh steppe and Turkestan, was an ardent collector of songs, legends, and epic poetry, an activity to which he attached greater (and distinct) significance than his scholarly contemporaries. His *Collected Works* include transcribed legends about 18th-century *batyrs* (heroic warriors), songs about celebrated khans (including his ancestor Ablai), folk sayings, and many more examples of Central Asian oral literary production.⁶⁷ Valikhanov was far from the only imperial Russian orientalist to collect such legends; while serving as a bureaucrat of special orders in Semireche oblast, for example, N. N. Pantusov gathered a significant amount of similar material with the aid of a translator.⁶⁸ The significant difference between Valikhanov and other imperial Russian scholars lay in his insistence that such oral accounts were not legends,

⁶⁶ SSCV t. 1, 198-199, “Zamechaniia na tret’iu chast’ opisaniia kirgiz kazach’ikh ord [A. I. Levshina].”

⁶⁷ SSCV t. 1, “Istoricheskie predaniia o batyrakh XVIII v.,” “Pesnia ob Ablae,” “Pogovorki Bol’shoi ordy,” and others *passim*.

⁶⁸ See TsGA RK, f. 822, Pantusov’s personal *fond*. Of particular interest are d. 10, “Kirgizskaia pesnia o vybore dolzhnostnykh lits,” and d. 7, “Stikhi o pereselenii taranchei v Semirech’e.” Pantusov ultimately published many of the notes in these files in a 1909 book, *Obraztsy kirgizskoi narodnoi literatury* (Kazan’: n.p., 1909).

of interest only as ancient curiosities, but sources of vitally important historical data. Generally speaking, he noted, “However strange such unlikely precision of nomadic oral sources, of the illiterate horde, might seem, none the less it is a real fact, not a matter of doubt.”⁶⁹ Valikhanov was not always consistent on this score, writing elsewhere of oral accounts, “The history of nomadic peoples and generally of peoples not having written language includes above all more half-legendary tales (*predaniiakh*) than facts.”⁷⁰ Yet only a few pages later, in the same account, he ascribes value to them equal to the value his contemporaries associated with written sources (consisting primarily of Chinese chronicles). Although he explicitly disclaims the status of a historian with respect to the question of Kazakh and Kyrgyz ethnogenesis, and acknowledges that the Chinese chronicles are accepted as authoritative by most European scholars, he presents poetry and oral histories as useful auxiliary sources for others to decide the issue:

“We will only try to present all the historical data known to us about this people, we will present the legends of the people about its ancestry that we gathered. The only auxiliary sources for the explanation of this question are the oral legends of the people about its own ancestry and heroic sagas about the great deeds of their ancestor-*batyrs*.”⁷¹

In the explication that follows, Valikhanov gives greater credibility to the Kyrgyz’ epic poetry, passed orally from one generation to the next, than to the writings of Rashid-ad-din, a classic textual source for medieval Central Asian history.⁷² On the basis of these legends, which Valikhanov considers to “merit respect,” he argues that the Kyrgyz migrated to eastern Turkestan during the time of Chingghis Khan, or even before,

⁶⁹ SSCV t. 1, 305, “Zametki po istorii iuzhnosibirskikh plemen”.

⁷⁰ SSCV t. 2, 45-6, “Zametki o kirgizakh.” In this piece Valikhanov refers mostly to the modern-day Kyrgyz, although Kazakhs of the Great Horde are also discussed. It was never finished and, hence, not published in Valikhanov’s lifetime.

⁷¹ *Ibid.*, 54.

⁷² *Ibid.*, 58.

whereas European scholars of the day (Levshin among them) considered this to be a much later, 18th-century phenomenon.⁷³ While Valikhanov frequently expressed a strong sense of the distinction between Kazakhs and Kyrgyz, he also explicitly stated that songs and epic poetry, transmitted verbally, were vital ways of preserving knowledge for both groups (as, indeed, for any nomadic group). Advancing an argument about ethnogenesis that contradicted earlier academic accounts based on written sources, Valikhanov also made a powerful claim about the value of the cultures that produced such “legends.”

If Valikhanov’s argument about the value of steppe culture and civilization was only implicit in his polemic with Levshin and others about Kyrgyz ethnogenesis, it was much more explicit in some of his other writings. Commenting on Western portrayals of steppe nomads, he lampoons the pretensions of written, sedentary culture to superiority in comparison to nomads:

“In Europe, until now, there has been a false (*lozhnoe*) understanding, representing nomadic tribes as a type of fierce horde, disordered and wild. Understanding of the nomadic Mongol or Kirgiz is closely tied with the idea of the coarse and bestial (*skotopodobnogo*) barbarian. Meanwhile most of these barbarians have their own literature and sayings – written or oral...Of all the Tatar peoples, with respect to poetic gifts, the Kirgiz cannot but occupy first place. About them can be said the same, as our serving Orientalist Senkovskii said about the Arabs: the Bedouin is a poet from nature and by calling a poet.”⁷⁴

For Valikhanov, oral culture was significant not just as a new and unique primary source (though it was surely that as well). Rather, it represented a level of cultural development for which the nomads of Central Asia had not received sufficient credit from outside observers. This valorization of oral culture is clearest in his discussion of

⁷³ Ibid., 63 (“merits respect”) and 65 (conclusions).

⁷⁴ SSCV t. 1, 304, “Zametki po istorii iuzhnosibirskikh plemen”. It is unclear in this passage whether Valikhanov refers to the present-day Kazakhs, Kyrgyz, or both. Although here he uses the qualifier “written or oral,” it is clear from Valikhanov’s other statements, some of which are cited above, that he considers steppe culture to be fundamentally oral.

the Kyrgyz epic poem “Manas,” which Valikhanov was among the first to transcribe and translate. Reflecting on his first hearing of the epic, he writes:

“‘Manas’ is an encyclopedia, a collection of all tales, short stories, legends, geographic, religious, and intellectual knowledge and moral understanding of a people in one whole, focused on a single time, and all grouped around one figure, the hero (*bogatyr*) Manas. ‘Manas’ is the production of a whole people, a fruit grown and ripened over many years – a national (*narodnyi*) epic, something like a steppe Iliad.”⁷⁵

Rather than a wild, barbaric cultural dead zone, the steppe is, in Valikhanov’s depiction, capable of inspiring creativity equivalent to the classics of the Western canon. Just as importantly, the steppe’s inhabitants were able to produce and hold in their collective memory works of real beauty and historical precision. As such, Valikhanov builds a case for the inherent worth of both, and in some sense gives the lie to the rationales for expansion into Central Asia expressed by some hawks in the Asiatic Department.

Although Babadzhanov took, in general, a dim view of Kazakh cultural production in comparison to the Russian culture he encountered in thick journals, and the version of it displayed to him during his travels to St. Petersburg and Moscow, he also celebrated certain forms of indigenous knowledge and positioned himself, in his writings, as an interpreter of that knowledge for the metropolitan public. On the rearing of horses in the Bukei Horde, for example, which Babadzhanov described as “one of the most notable branches of the Fatherland’s wealth (*otechestvennogo bogatstva*),” he presents Kazakh practices as not necessarily worse than Russian, but simply different, or at least

⁷⁵ SSCV t. 2, 70, “Zametki o kirgizakh”.

conditioned by different requirements.⁷⁶ Because of the huge travel distances common on the steppe, he notes, Kazakhs prefer horses able to maintain their speed for 30 verstas or more, rather than the horses suited to short gallops preferred by Europeans. This preference, he explains, “completely corresponds...to local needs.”⁷⁷ Still, it is clear that Babadzhanov was much less inclined, at least in his public presentations, to ascribe the same value to indigenous forms of knowledge as Valikhanov. In the same article, he simultaneously provides and wholly discredits “legendary” information pertaining to the genealogy of the best horses of the Bukei Horde. Explaining first that many Kazakhs consider all their champion horses to be descendants of a single Turkmen colt, he continues, “It goes without saying that all these oral genealogies of current horses are subject to very strong doubt, but not a single Horde man has written information about his impressions (*o svoem zavode*).”⁷⁸ Rather, he emphasizes:

“There are no more than ten people who could with some certainty define these qualities [good qualities of a galloping horse, Kaz. *zhuriuk*] in the whole Inner Horde. The small number of knowledgeable people in this case stems not from the Kazakhs’ lack of eagerness and striving to own such horses, but only from the fact that to define the traits of a galloping horse is an extremely difficult task.”⁷⁹

Here again is the idea, axiomatic for Babadzhanov, that Kazakh lifeways, while interesting and distinct, suffer by their lack of rationality and organization. Despite their strong desire to have good horses, he argues, Kazakhs have taken no systematic measures for breeding more of them, “entrusting the whole matter...to the arbitrariness of fate,” much to the detriment of an important branch of their animal-rearing economy.⁸⁰ The

⁷⁶ Zh. O. Artykbaev, glav. red., *Khodzha Mukhammed Salikh Babadzhanov: etnografiia kazakhov Bukeevskoi ordy* (Astana: “Altyn kitap,” 2007), 52, “Loshchadi i ikh ispytaniia vo Vnutrennei Kirgizskoi Orde”.

⁷⁷ *Ibid.*, 38.

⁷⁸ *Ibid.*, 40-1.

⁷⁹ *Ibid.*, 38.

⁸⁰ *Ibid.*, 51.

solution that Babadzhanov proposes is state-centered, proposing to introduce the purported rationality of Russian administration to horse-breeding among the Bukey Horde Kazakhs:

“It is impossible not to relate with complete appreciation to the measures which, although on a small scale, are being taken now by the main administration of state horse production towards the development and encouragement of the art of training (*trenerogo isskustva*). Until now the horse production of the Inner Horde, unfortunately, has somehow remained outside the attention of this administration.”⁸¹

Babadzhanov, in sum, does not refuse the notion of the distinctiveness of Kazakh lifeways and material culture in his ethnographic writings, nor does he indicate that they are, in and of themselves, inferior to their Russian counterparts. Rather, he argues that conditions on the steppe have declined so severely that Kazakhs themselves are no longer able to see effectively to their own needs. In this context, he portrays Russian colonial administration – or, rather, an idealized, rational and highly-functional form of it – as the best possible means of protecting and nurturing Kazakh culture.

As steppe-born Kazakhs describing and interpreting the culture of their birth to an audience based almost entirely in European Russia and Western Europe, Valikhanov and Babadzhanov occupied a unique intermediary position. Both expressed strong arguments about the distinctiveness and merit of the literary and material culture of the steppe. However, while Valikhanov’s relativistic framing often accorded a place to Kazakh culture and forms of knowledge equivalent to metropolitan culture, Babadzhanov’s relativism did not go so far. Rather, he described steppe traditions as being in a state of decline, and argued that colonial administration, done properly, could in effect save Kazakhs from themselves. Neither argument was necessarily at odds with their status as

⁸¹ Ibid., 45.

officers of the tsarist state. Rather, Valikhanov and Babadzhanov's representations of Kazakh culture conveyed the idea to readers in the metropole that the steppe and its inhabitants were worthy of a visible and honored place within a well-run empire. Local traditions merited careful study and, for Valikhanov in particular, a terrific amount of respect; known thoroughly, they could flourish inside the Russian Empire.

Light, Darkness, and Shades of Gray: A Clash of Civilizations

The Kazakh steppe and its surroundings in the middle of the 19th century were areas of both intellectual and military contestation. From the north and west, the Russian Empire continued to expand into Turkestan and consolidate its gains; in the east, the domains of the Qing Empire were ill-defined and their border permeable, heightening the importance of political unrest in Xinjiang; in the south, the khanates of Bukhara, Khiva and Kokand jockeyed among themselves for influence over the steppe even as hawks within the Russian War Ministry targeted them for conquest. In the discourse of the era, this superficially military international competition was framed as a contest among civilizations; the victory of one side over another was not only an indication of superior firepower, supply, or tactical acumen, but a reflection of the civilization's worth, its merits or deficiencies before another. In particular, many publicists framed the conflict as pitting European civilization (of which the Russian Empire was unambiguously depicted as the bearer) against Asiatic. If Valikhanov and Babadzhanov, as non-European servitors of the tsarist state, occupied an ambiguous position in this polemic, the argument they articulated within it was clear. They agreed with their contemporaries that the Russian Empire was leading a struggle against Asiatic despotism and backwardness; crucially, though, they did not construct these categories as absolute,

rather depicting Kazakhs as a shade of gray between Russian enlightenment and Oriental darkness. Vulnerable to all the worst designs of Muslim and Chinese potentates, Kazakhs also, so Valikhanov and Babadzhanov argued, had the potential to benefit tremendously from European governance. From integration into a benevolent colonial state, they contended, both colonizers and colonized had much to gain; of all outside powers with an interest in the steppe, Russia, it was claimed, was far the most desirable.

Valikhanov's account of his journey to Altishahr abounds in common tropes about Asian governance and civilization in reference to all contestants for political power in the region; while the Kokandian *khojas* are depicted as despotic and fanatical, he describes Chinese administrators as weak, ineffectual and impotent. Of the rebellion and brief rule of the *khojas*, under the leadership of Valikhan-tiure, he writes:

“Despite the material forces supporting the power of the *khojas*, the Kashgarians also had to have much patience and devotion so as to endure over the course of 110 days all the cruelty and injustice of this tyrant. Like a man subjected to the constant smoking of hashish, Valikhan-tiure reached some sort of insanity and wildly indulged his passions; his mania was thirst for blood, he could not pass a day without killing (*izrubit*) several people with his own hands. On the banks of the r. Kyzyl he erected a pyramid of human heads...”⁸²

A lengthy and lurid description of Valikhan-tiure's misdeeds, comparable in tenor to British accounts of the Black Hole of Calcutta, or the execution of Connolly and Stoddard by the emir of Bukhara, follows. The key issue here is not the truth or lack thereof of Valikhanov's account, but rather the larger claims associated with it.

Valikhan-tiure was, in this telling, so given over to his passions that he practically ceased to be human; indeed, an account of one particular murder is prefaced with the idea that this case better than any other illustrates the degree of his bestial nature (*zverstvo*).⁸³ If

⁸² SSCV t. 3, 152, “O sostoianii Altishahra”.

⁸³ Ibid., 153.

Valikhanov was careful to point out that such brutality was not characteristic of all Muslims or Turkic people (for Valikhanov's mostly Kashgarian victims are always depicted as innocent), his vivid description served to utterly discredit, in European eyes, one of the most important contenders for power in western China, along the contested and unstable border with Russian domains.

The *khojas* of Altishahr, in Valikhanov's description, were exponents of Asiatic cruelty; the Chinese administrators they briefly deposed, on the other hand, were shown to be exemplars of Asiatic weakness and laziness even as they ruled brutally. Valikhanov attributed the military reversal suffered by the Qing, in large part, to their loss of a vigorous martial spirit: "The Chinese of the Western krai have so much fallen in spirit (*dukhom*) that they permit the Kirgiz at two verstas from their pickets to raid [them] unpunished."⁸⁴ Precisely because they were conscious of their powerlessness, Valikhanov argued, they ruled the population of Altishahr in a fashion as cruel as it was ineffective.⁸⁵ He claimed that the physical and financial constraints the Qing government had placed on those they governed made rebellion almost inevitable:

"The burdensome taxes, illegal exactions (*pobory*), extortions and constraints of the Chinese and the beks, placed by them, irritate (*razdrazhaiut*) the population of Altishahr, and they from their souls hate both the Chinese and their own bureaucrats. The position of the Chinese at present is so critical that they should try by all measures make the people well-disposed to themselves, but the Chinese think little about this."⁸⁶

⁸⁴ Ibid., 175. There are fascinating parallels here with N. M. Przhevalskii's later claim that Chinese weakness in Kashgaria was so extreme that only a small armed Russian party would be needed to drive them out of the country completely. See Przhevalskii, "An Outline of the Present Situation in Central Asia," originally published as the final chapter of his 1888 book, *Ot Kiakhty na istoki Zheltoi reki*.

⁸⁵ Ibid., 177. Full quote: "The Chinese, conscious of their powerlessness, became wary and evil."

⁸⁶ Ibid., 177.

Nor, Valikhanov argued, was such cruelty and disorder incidental to Altishahr, an undergoverned, multi-ethnic border region of the Qing polity. Rather, in a journal entry from his earlier trip to Kul'ja, to visit the Russian trade mission there, he wrote:

“Everyone writes about the European organization of Chinese institutions, says, that in China there are procurators, that the Chinese court is a thing both wonderful and worthy of belief. It seems to me that the opinion of Mr. Senkovskii is correct, that the Chinese, perhaps, have organization only in their books, which no-one reads, but in reality they are also Asiatics, like Turks and Persians. As much as we could note – everything in China related to governmental administration reminds one of Asia.”⁸⁷

Here Valikhanov places stereotypical constructions of European order and rationalism and Asian weakness and chaos in direct opposition to one another. Both of the contestants in the contest for Altishahr, *khojas* and Qing alike, were assigned to this latter category; the Russian Empire lurks in the background of the account both as an entity with real interest in events in eastern Turkestan and, in Valikhanov's view, a far more desirable steward of its territory.

The small khanates of western Turkestan (Bukhara, Khiva, and Kokand) are hardly cast in a more favorable light in Valikhanov's published works. In “Ocherki Dzhungarii” he refers to Central Asia as “an extremely lamentable thing (*iavlenie kraine pechal'noe*), a sort of pathological crisis of development,” full of abandoned irrigation canals and dried-up fields.⁸⁸ He goes on to compare the “current...ignorance and poverty” of Bukhara, Khiva and Kokand to a golden era of Islamic cultural flourishing in Samarkand, Tashkent, Fergana, and the other great oasis cities of the region.⁸⁹ Rather than writing poetry or compiling astronomical tables like their proud forebears, he claims,

⁸⁷ SSCV t. 2, 238-239, “Zapadnyi krai Kitaiskoi Imperii i gorod Kul'dzha (dnevnik poezdki v Kul'dzhu 1856 g.)”

⁸⁸ SSCV t. 3, 325, “Ocherki Dzhungarii.”

⁸⁹ *Ibid.*, 325-326.

the current generation of Central Asian leaders prefers to cruelly punish those serving under it.⁹⁰ This is a key moment for understanding Valikhanov's view of civilizational competition in Central Asia; here, he tacitly confirms that Asiatic civilization has been, in the past, just as culturally sophisticated as European, a rhetorical move echoing his defense of folk tales and songs as legitimate forms of historical knowledge. Yet this golden age of high Islamic culture, centered on oasis cities, belongs in Valikhanov's telling to the distant past, its achievements crowded out by "religious niceties" and fanaticism.⁹¹ The fatal flaw, according to this line of argument, is not fixed and inherent, but eminently correctable by vigorous and rational leadership.

For Valikhanov, the most promising source of such a cultural revival in Turkestan was clear. In an official note written for Gasfort in 1856 about the Russian military advance through the steppe (in particular, the strengthening of fortifications at Semipalatinsk and establishment of two major new forts, Perovskii on the Syr-Darya and Vernyi in Semireche), he wrote, "Around us in the Imperial borderlands (*okraine*) peoples are awakening from a dream, and the ignorant gloom, in which they were immersed for centuries, has begun to vanish."⁹² That such a sentence served as the introduction to an official note summarizing Russian military gains in Central Asia and recommending specific practices for their bordering indicates that Valikhanov saw a strong connection between Russian rule and the backwardness that, he contended, prevailed throughout the steppe and the oases of Turkestan at the time, with such backwardness enabling and justifying colonization. Elsewhere, he says of the Russian and British Empires, the two primary European contestants for influence in Central Asia

⁹⁰ Ibid., 326.

⁹¹ SSCV t. 3, 163, "O sostoianii Altysahra".

⁹² SSCV t. 1, "Ob upravlenie kazakhami bol'shogo zhuza".

in a lengthy cold war that historians have referred to as the “Great Game,” that it was “fated [to their people] to re-establish enlightenment in the most ancient (*drevneishei*) part of the world [i.e., Central Asia].”⁹³ Valikhanov continues by recommending specific methods for the strengthening of Russian power both hard (political) and soft (through commerce) in the region at the expense of British policy aims, but his formulation implies a certain equivalency between the Russian and British projects in his mind. One enlightener was, essentially, as good as the other.

Such a reading of Valikhanov may seem misguided or paradoxical in light of his views on the so-called “native-soil conservatism” espoused by the Dostoevskii brothers in their journals *Vremia* (Time) and *Epokha* (Epoch). Of this attempt to combine the German Romantic idea of a nation imbued with a historical and unchanging spirit with idealized views of the Russian peasant commune as a reservoir of piety and charity (a line of thinking generally hostile to Western thought), Valikhanov wrote to the poet and literary critic A. N. Maikov:

“Speaking amongst ourselves, I understand badly, somehow, their “soil”, their nationality (*narodnost'*), here it smells of Slavophilism, here of extreme Westernism, reconciliations of any sort are not seen, or maybe they aren't succeeding in finding this reconciliation? In my opinion there is something else: either fundamental transformations according to the Western example, or cling to the old, even confess the old faith...As Bokl' [English historian Henry Buckle] says, there are no national qualities, and education should be universal. And it

⁹³ SSCV t. 4, “Sredneaziatskie khanstva: Khiva, Bukhara i Kokand i otnoshenie ikh k Rossii”. This article was originally published anonymously in the generally hawkish and middle-class St. Petersburg newspaper *Severnaia pchela* on 7 August 1861 (issue #174). For more on *Severnaia pchela*, see Nurit Schleifman, “A Russian Daily Newspaper and its New Readership: *Severnaia Pchela*, 1825-1840,” *Cahiers du monde russe et soviétique* 28.2 (Apr.-Jun. 1987): 127-144. The Great Game has an extensive but deeply problematic historiography in English, which tends to take the tropes colonial officers deployed in describing their actions and the locals they met as factual, rather than as a starting point for further analysis. See, for example, the work of Peter Hopkirk, most notably *The Great Game: The Struggle for Empire in Central Asia* (New York: Kondasha, 1994), as well as Karl E. Meyer and Shareen Blair Brysac's *Tournament of Shadows: The Great Game and the Race for Empire in Central Asia* (Washington, DC: Counterpoint, 1999).

will receive the tint of nationality on its own, under the influence of locality, language, and our dispositions.”⁹⁴

This passage confirms, on one hand, what we have already seen – Valikhanov’s belief that civilizational difference is not fixed in nature, such that neither backwardness nor rationality may be interpreted as “national qualities.” At the same time, the ideas of universalism it expresses fit badly with the tropes of backwardness and fanaticism he employs in describing Xinjiang and the khanates of Central Asia. Valikhanov’s universalism, however, was centered firmly in the West; if he thought education should be universal, he meant this in the sense of opening more *kadetskie korpusy* in the steppe, and not *medresses* in St. Petersburg. Kazakhs, in Valikhanov’s scheme of things, had the seeds of civilization in them, and only needed proper administration to achieve their potential, but their earlier achievements, interesting as they were, fell short of the inarguably superior Western standard. Civilizational difference was not absolutely fixed, according to this line of argument – Valikhanov himself was living proof of this. But Central Asia and the steppe were unmistakably in a state of decline, and Europe the source of their renewal.

Babadzhanov did not travel to Xinjiang or the khanates of western Turkestan, but his writings contain an Asiatic *bete noir* to which Russian governance is routinely opposed – the Tatars. Although he does not depict Tatar culture itself as harmful (indeed praising an earlier khan of the Bukei Horde for teaching, by his example, the value of Tatar literacy), he directly counterposes their alleged fanaticism and ignorance to the finer qualities of the Russians around them:

“In general the Tatar influence on the Kazakhs was harmful, for they give over to the Kazakhs, together with the laws of Islam, their folk superstitions, and

⁹⁴ SSCV t. 5, 154, letter to A. N. Maikov, written at Kokshetau, 6 December 1862.

accustom the Horde people (*ordyntsy*) to oaths and swindling (*moshennichestvo*). I also suppose the influence and example of the Tatars to be harmful because they, with their awful fanaticism, despite having lived for so long with Russians, in no way (speaking about the majority) left behind their rough, inveterate ignorance. God grant that the Kazakhs do not follow them in this! The Russians have so much that is good, that we are ready to inherit with profound happiness.”⁹⁵

Tatar literacy might be useful instrumentally, then, but the presence of Tatars themselves among the Inner Horde was contrary to the civilizing prerogatives of the Russian Empire, as well as the material interests of Kazakhs. Making full use of the privileges literacy afforded them, Babadzhanov argued, Tatars set themselves up as teachers of a particularly “superstitious” brand of Islam, while also acting as intermediaries between Russians and Kazakhs, and using this latter position to turn financial and legal affairs to their advantage.⁹⁶ Only over time did Russians succeed in eliminating the middleman, so to speak, and it is to that most recent era that Babadzhanov ascribes the greatest successes of Russian administration.

Indeed, Babadzhanov is frequently unabashed in his admiration for Russian civilization, especially as displayed in the high, ceremonial culture he observed during his travels to St. Petersburg and Moscow. He explains the purpose of his deputation’s journey in terms that strongly indicate his view that civilization and culture are things to be possessed, to be learned, and that the Bukei Horde lacks both: “[The deputation was sent] so as to...bring the understandings of our people closer to the ideas of development of Russian people, and show us visually (*nagliadno*) the substantial superiority of a mind developed and educated over gloom and ignorance.”⁹⁷ Elsewhere, he explicitly equates rapprochement (*sblizhenie*) with Russian life with awareness of “the best acquisitions of

⁹⁵ Artykbaev, *Bukeevskoi ordy*, 85-86, “Zametki kirgiza o kirgizakh”.

⁹⁶ Artykbaev, *Bukeevskoi ordy*, *passim*, “Zametki kirgiza o zhyt’e-byt’e i uchasti ego rodichei”.

⁹⁷ *Ibid.*, 105-106.

developed humanity”.⁹⁸ This idealized version of Russian culture, a conduit for the best fruits of European civilization, was for Babadzhanov diametrically opposed to the “gloom and ignorance” surrounding him on the steppes, and the fanaticism of Tatar teachers and merchants in contact with the Kazakhs of the Inner Horde much more frequently than colonial officials. Yet like Valikhanov, he did not understand the divide between darkness and enlightenment, ignorance and rationalism, as fixed and permanent; if he is at pains to show exactly how backwards he considers his kinsmen, he also explains that this is a temporary situation and one that can be remediated by Russian governance. “We are in the most transitional state,” he closes his notes on the state-sponsored embassy to St. Petersburg, “and are ready with happiness, at any well-thought-out indication of a wise and correct path, to take it up and follow it relentlessly.”⁹⁹ The opposition between East and West here is not inherent. At the same time, Babadzhanov thinks one clearly superior to the other, and if the divide between them is to disappear, in his view this is only to be accomplished by the former rising up to the standards of the latter. The Kazakhs, according to this line of argument, are nothing less than a civilizational battleground, influenced by both the putative superstition of their Tatar neighbors and the logic, strength and order of the advancing Russian state. Babadzhanov practically invites Russian administration to the steppe as the only means of striking a decisive blow in this struggle.

This view of Russian colonialism, however, is idealized, and Babadzhanov is considerably less sanguine about what it has represented for the Bukei Horde in practice. Nowhere does this embedded counter-argument emerge more clearly than in his

⁹⁸ Ibid., 119.

⁹⁹ Ibid., 119.

discussion of the behavior of Cossacks of the Ural (Yaik) Host towards their Kazakh neighbors. Defending Kazakhs' right to land use in a dispute with the Ural Cossacks, he describes the latter as "as an estate (*soslovie*) still standing at the lower level of civilization," and hence a poor example for the Kazakhs whose hereditary lands they proposed to seize.¹⁰⁰ Acting not in the interests of the Russian Empire as a whole, but rather for the benefit of the Host Economic Administration, a "state within a state," the Cossacks attempted to seize all available lands for their exclusive profit, instead of acting with a view to the civilizing goals the central government was (or, at the very least, *should have been*, in Babadzhanov's view) pursuing.¹⁰¹ So exploitative was this relationship in practice, Babadzhanov claimed, that the surrounding Kazakh population was made no more than the "deplorable tributary (*plachevyi dannik*), and in some cases the serf (*krepostnik*) of the Cossack estate."¹⁰² Writing in 1868, a mere five years after the abolition of serfdom, this was inflammatory language, meant to demonstrate to the reader beyond any doubt the extent to which the Ural Host abused its power, the extent to which its actions were contrary to state interests. In Babadzhanov's view, then, while the Bukei Horde had much to learn, and much to gain, from Russian rule, the state had a responsibility to ensure that this relationship benefited the Kazakhs in practice. European civilization was an ideal, for him, and an ideal powerful enough to justify the Russian Empire's presence on the steppe, but its practice by colonial institutions rather more dubious, and he felt entitled to insist upon it when the actions of Russian colonizers fell short of it.

¹⁰⁰ Ibid., 122, "Spor uralskikh kazakov s kirgizami vnutrennei ordy".

¹⁰¹ Ibid., 124 (for the "state within a state" phrasing).

¹⁰² Ibid., 133.

Both Babadzhanov and Valikhanov accepted and employed in their writings a dichotomy between European and Asiatic civilization, replete with common Orientalist tropes of backwardness and fanaticism. Applying this dualism to the various competitors for political and cultural influence on the steppe, their preference for the supposed cultural achievement and rational administration represented by Russian rule emerged clearly. Neither, however, argued that civilizational difference was inherent and unchanging; indeed, they represented Kazakhs as caught in between, literally and metaphorically, Asiatic stagnation and European progress. Russian administration in its idealized form emerged in their writings as an imperative if the balance on the steppe was to be tipped towards the latter. This acceptance of Russian rule and its civilizing claims was far from unconditional; both men had enough experience in the day-to-day problems of colonial administration to understand how often, and how far, it fell short of the ideal model of benevolent enlightenment. But with the Kazakhs in a “transitional state,” as Babadzhanov put it, and self-rule firmly in the past, both agreed that the best way forward for the steppe and its inhabitants was found under St. Petersburg’s protection.

Islam, Shamanism, and the Battle for the Steppe’s Soul

Closely associated with the civilizational contest Babadzhanov, Valikhanov, and many others diagnosed in Central Asia was a polemic about the nature of religious belief – what Kazakhs believed, what choices were available to them, and what the state’s role should properly have been in mediating those choices. The two exhibit some disagreement with one another in this regard in their published works, difficult to ascribe to anything beyond personal subjectivity. Babadzhanov’s view of Islam is, for example, much more positive than Valikhanov’s. Both, however, share a sense of the

distinctiveness of Kazakh religious beliefs, and the danger of state sponsorship of religious education, a policy applied since the Catherinian era in governing the Tatars. Kazakhs, they argued, by naming themselves as Muslims but orienting themselves away from the text-based traditions of Turkestani and Tatar *ulema*, and preserving elements of shamanism in their beliefs and practices, represented a unique and desirable compromise – Muslim, but not so ardently as to damage inter-confessional relations in a diverse imperial polity. Valikhanov in particular argued that, misunderstanding Kazakh religious belief as chaotic and a threat to the well-ordered imperial state, and supporting the institutions it considered most likely to create such order, tsarist administrators created a threat to their power far more serious than the situation that had previously obtained on the steppe. In the realm of religious affairs, Valikhanov and Babadzhanov rejected the arguments of tsarist administrators and proposed an alternative model whereby local practices would be preserved not on their own merits, but because they furthered the state's goals in a way it had not been able to anticipate.

Reporting on his mission to Altishahr, Valikhanov noted that, in his view, Islam as practiced in eastern Turkestan was substantially different from the version practiced in the oases of western Turkestan: “Here Islam (*musulmanizm*) was forced to submit to the local customs of the country and weaken its fanatical chains; freedom of women alone is itself a phenomenon not met in other Muslim countries, and serves as a sufficient proof of this.”¹⁰³ In the text, such chains are positioned as a natural consequence of the fact that the unchanging text of the Koran undergirds all social and civil relations in the Central Asian khanates. Further, Valikhanov, Altishahr's geographical position, with high mountains in the west and plains to the east plays a role in its well-developed religious

¹⁰³ SSCV t. 3, 157, “O sostoianii Altyshahra.”

tolerance: “Disconnected by impassable mountains with its fanatical neighbors [i.e., Kokandians and Bukharans], eastern Turkestan is open, just the opposite, on the side of the Celestial Empire, and its population, relating freely with the Chinese, took on, in part, its religious tolerance.”¹⁰⁴ Valikhanov thus linked “fanaticism” both with textual, legalistic Islam and with specific geographical locations adjacent to the Kazakh steppe. Outside influences weakened, in his mind, the unquestionably deleterious influence of institutional Islam.

In his discussions of religious belief among Kazakhs under Russian suzerainty, Valikhanov continued to develop this set of arguments. Despite their superficial conversion to Islam (a self-designation that, arguing against Levshin, he insisted had to be taken seriously), Kazakhs remained shamanists at heart, because:

“Islam among an illiterate people could not take root without mullahs, but remained a sound, a phrase, under which were concealed the former shamanistic understandings. From this names and words were subject to change, but not thoughts – they started to call on “arvakh” (ancestral spirits), Kok-tengri – Allah or God, the spirit of the earth – Satan, *peri*, *divom*, and *dzhin*, but the idea remained shamanistic.”¹⁰⁵

Like the Chinese-influenced practices of Altishahr, Valikhanov interpreted this form of belief (which he compares explicitly, at one point, to the *dvoeverie* or dual-faith considered to prevail among ethnic Russian peasants) as milder, more tolerant, and less backward than the legalistic customs that obtained among Tatars and in the Central Asian khanates.¹⁰⁶ A host of observances novel in the steppe marked, in his mind, a decided change for the worse:

¹⁰⁴ Ibid., 157.

¹⁰⁵ Artykbaev, Zh. O. (glav. red.), *Ch. Ch. Valikhanov: etnograficheskoe nasledie kazakhov* (Astana: “Altyn-kitap,” 2007) “Sledy shamanstva u kirgizov,” 70-71.

¹⁰⁶ Artykbaev, *Etnograficheskoe nasledie*, 109, “O musul’manstve v stepi” for the *dvoeverie* comparison, although Valikhanov avoids taking the question of belief among Russian peasants head-on, rather averring

“Under the influence of Tatar mullahs, Central Asian *ishans* and their proselytes...our nationality more and more takes on the common Muslim type. Several sultans and rich Kazakhs lock their wives in separate yurts, as in harems. Devout Kazakhs have started to go to Mecca, and...instead of national *byliny* sing Muslim apocrypha, made to fit (*perelozhennye*) national poems.”¹⁰⁷

He warns that a disastrous period on the steppe, comparable to the period of strongest Byzantine influence in Kievan Rus’, will surely follow unless appropriate action is taken by Russian authorities; invoking Byzantium, he implicitly paints for his readers a portrait of extreme formalism and religious strictness to which, he implies, institutional Islam is comparable.¹⁰⁸ The enlightenment brought by Tatar mullahs, he claims, is no more than “dead scholasticism, suited only to hinder the development of thoughts and feelings.”¹⁰⁹ That the Russian government sponsored its spread by creating special administrative divisions (*muftiates*) for its Muslim subjects and materially supporting Muslim clergy is thus, for Valikhanov, unconscionable.¹¹⁰

Yet Valikhanov’s chief motivating concern in arguing against state-sponsored Islam is itself basically statist; the harm he describes in institutional, textual Islam is not to the unique syncretic culture of the steppe, but rather to the interests of the Russian Empire. The Islam he highlights in advancing this viewpoint is not the religion of Avicenna and Averroes, but that of Shamil, Abdelkader, and other violent rebels against imperial authority.¹¹¹ Just as jarringly for his intended audience, he connects state

that the situation on the steppe is similar to that of Rus’ during the Nestorian era. On *dvoeverie* and its implications for the 19th-century intellectuals who argued for its existence, see Eve Levin, “*Dvoeverie* and Popular Religion,” Stephen K. Batalden, ed., *Seeking God: The Recovery of Religious Identity in Orthodox Russia, Ukraine, and Georgia* (DeKalb: Northern Illinois University Press, 1993), 31-52.

¹⁰⁷ Ibid., 109. An *ishan* was the leader, often itinerant, of a Sufi circle. Imperial Russian sources often use the term interchangeably with “sheikh.”

¹⁰⁸ Ibid., 109.

¹⁰⁹ Ibid., 110.

¹¹⁰ For more on this effort, dating to the Catherinian era, see Robert Crews, *For Prophet and Tsar: Islam and Empire in Russia and Central Asia* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard UP, 2006).

¹¹¹ Ibid., 110. Full quote: “Shamils and Abdelkaders can appear only in countries with Muslim education.”

sponsorship of Muslim institutions and personnel with Russia's recent defeat in the Crimean War, an episode that arguably served as the proximal cause for Alexander II's military, judicial, educational, and economic reforms – which were ongoing as Valikhanov wrote “O musul'manstve v stepi” at the beginning of 1864.^{112,113} Islam and its proponents, he insisted,

“cannot help the Russian or any other Christian government – it is impossible to count on the devotion of the venal Tatar clergy. This fact becomes abundantly (*soblizitelno*) clear, if one takes into consideration the withdrawal (*otlozhenie*) of the Crimean Tatars during the 1854 campaigns. The Kazan' Tatars are just as disposed towards Russia as the Crimeans [i.e., hostile]... These unhappy fanatics look at the sultan just as dumbly as Catholics at the Pope.”¹¹⁴

The complicated foreign networks associated with institutional Islam, whether clergy or state-sponsored religious schools, in other words, presented risks far outweighing the dubious benefits to be gained from nurturing Islam. Beyond the external threat, Valikhanov claimed that Muslim medical and familial practices contravened established scientific facts; railing against the “Tatar charlatans” who traveled the steppe as doctors, he claimed, “These men treat in no other way than to death... They bleed everyone and each without any reason, only because Muhammad commanded it in the

¹¹² Valikhanov did not, however, succeed in publishing this manuscript before his untimely death, and it only appeared in print in an early (1904) collection of his works.

¹¹³ The school of thought highlighting the role of the Crimean War in spurring Alexander II to reform dates to the turn of the 20th century. Later, Soviet scholars (including, most notably, P. A. Zaionchkovskii) came to see the Great Reform era as multicausal, considering both military and economic (i.e., domestic) factors. Terence Emmons, in *The Russian Landed Gentry and the Emancipation of 1861* (Cambridge, UK: Cambridge UP, 1968), has argued that both economic and military reform were fundamentally rooted in Russia's experience of the Crimean War. For this argument, see also Alfred Rieber, “The Politics of Emancipation,” *The Politics of Autocracy: Letters of Alexander II to Prince A. I. Bariatinskii*, ed. Alfred Rieber (Mouton: Paris-Hague, 1966), 15-58. More recently, Bruce Lincoln has highlighted the roots of reform in the “enlightened bureaucrats” who began their careers in the chanceries of Nicholas I. See his *The Great Reforms: Autocracy, Bureaucracy, and the Politics of Change in Imperial Russia* (DeKalb, IL: Northern Illinois UP, 1990).

¹¹⁴ Artykbaev *Etnograficheskoe nasledie* 111, “O musul'manstve v stepi”.

Koran.”¹¹⁵ Islam, he argued, was harmful to the interests of both the state and its subjects, and hardly suited a modernizing, rational empire.

All this was particularly galling, for Valikhanov, in its application to the Kazakhs, among whom state support for Islam was not even in accordance with local religious practice. The abolition of Muslim laws in the oblast of the Siberian Kazakhs would, he claimed, be “in agreement with the wish of the Kazakh people itself.”¹¹⁶ Instead, he proposed a policy of strict non-interference (itself a strong current among tsarist bureaucrats, who were lukewarm at best towards Orthodox missionaries during Valikhanov’s lifetime), protecting neither Islam nor Christianity in the steppe lands under Russian administration.¹¹⁷ Although he presented Christianity as more desirable from the perspective of state interests (the creation of educated, quiescent subjects), he argued just as strongly against Orthodox missionaries, noting that proselytism among the “small peoples” of Siberia, especially the Ostiaks, had tended to harm them and hence indispose them to Russian aims in general.¹¹⁸ What was needed, he argued, was a two-pronged approach, systematically denying support to Muslim clergy on the steppe on one hand, and promoting secular educational institutions like the Omsk *korpus* from which he graduated on the other. His recommendations for securing the former are impressively thorough: to divide off Kazakhs, being culturally distinct from Tatars, from the Orenburg muftiate; to allow only ethnic Kazakhs as mullahs on the steppe; to allow only one

¹¹⁵ Ibid., 116-7.

¹¹⁶ Ibid., 115.

¹¹⁷ A brief period of more intense state sponsorship of Orthodox missionaries to the steppe coincided with the era of reaction under Alexander III, beginning in the early 1880s. See Robert Geraci, “Going Abroad or Going to Russia? Orthodox Missionaries in the Kazakh Steppe, 1881-1917,” and Michael Khodarkovsky, “The Conversion of Non-Christians in Early Modern Russia,” both Geraci and Khodarkovsky, eds., *Of Religion and Empire: Missions, Conversion, and Tolerance in Tsarist Russia* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell UP, 2001), 274-310 and 115-143, respectively.

¹¹⁸ Artykbaev, *Etnograficheskoe nasledie*, 114.

official mullah per okrug; and to not permit Tatar seminarians and Central Asian *ishans* to live on Kazakh pastures without a fixed occupation.¹¹⁹ In sum, the measures he proposes provide a bare minimum of support for official clergy, while simultaneously advancing an argument about the distinctiveness of Kazakh religious practices. With respect to education, the other vital function of institutional Islam in Central Asia, he recommends that the Russian Empire follow the example provided by the United States among the Creek and Choctaw, opening secular schools and inviting locals to enroll freely. Since the United States established such schools, he argues, “the Indian wars have almost ceased in that country,” implying that secular, scientific education could bring similar stability to a borderland in need of it.¹²⁰ In all, Valikhanov’s recommendations express an abhorrence of both “official Islam” and the tsarist state’s sponsorship of Islamic institutions while embodying absolute faith in the power of the same educational system that shaped him to work in the interests of the state. Failing to respect what was distinctive about Kazakh religious belief, he claimed, the state had harmed its subjects and itself alike, and the best course for one was best for the other as well.

Although Babadzhanov shared Valikhanov’s belief in the ability of the *kadetskie korpusty* to educate Kazakhs in a manner beneficial to themselves and the state alike, as well as his phobia of Tatar influence, the view of Islam that emerges from his writings is somewhat different. Whereas Valikhanov rails against the possibility of an intermediate phase of Tatar dominance en route to full incorporation of Western educational and social norms, Babadzhanov describes this very process among the Bukei Horde in more

¹¹⁹ Ibid., 116.

¹²⁰ Ibid., 110.

approving terms. On one hand, he denounced the purported cruelty of teaching in the Tatar *mektebs*:

“To be naughty (*shalit*) or get up from his place and talk with a comrade is strictly forbidden under danger of corporal punishment, by blows on the ear, trampling by the legs and blows of a light whip or a small rod. Beyond this very cruelly, until blood, they tug on the ears. God help one of the students if he errs in correct pronunciation.”¹²¹

On the other, feared as he claimed these Tatar mullahs were by Kazakh pupils, Babadzhanov did not see regimented, state-supported, institutionalized Islam as any kind of threat to the teleological, Western-modeled “progress” that he and Valikhanov agreed was desirable. The late Khan Dzhanger had, according to Babadzhanov, “established a school at Khanskaia Stavka, in which the laws of the Muslim religion, Russian literacy, and to some extent the Russian language were taught to up to 60 people.”¹²² It was to these schools, instituted by Dzhanger with the state’s support, that Babadzhanov attributed the cultural advances he considered his own career to typify. Religious education and the progressive values he identified in the tsarist educational system were not, in his mind, mutually exclusive; Islam, codified and brought under state control, was an important part of Kazakh culture and could remain so without threatening the state’s interests with respect to security and education.

Questions of religious belief and practice were at the heart of Valikhanov and Babadzhanov’s respective visions of the steppe’s place in the Russian Empire. A long-time student of shamanist practices, and collector of Kazakh folklore, Valikhanov argued strongly that Islam as practiced among the Kazan’ Tatars and in the khanates of Central Asia was alien to the steppe. Drawing on this sense of Kazakh distinctiveness, he

¹²¹ Artykbaev, *Bukeevskoi ordy*, 83, “Zametki Kirgiza o kirgizakh”.

¹²² *Ibid.*, 81.

contended that the Russian state's sponsorship of religious education and Islamic proselytism was harmful to the state and its subjects alike. Rather, he proposed strict non-interference in religious affairs on the part of tsarist administrators, neither in favor of Islam nor Christianity; this perspective also had other proponents in administrative circles, but Valikhanov's formulation, based equally on his status as a scholar and as a cultural insider, was unique. In contrast, Babadzhanov did not see Islam and the rational progress he considered the Russian Empire to embody as mutually hostile – indeed, he argued that the successes of the Inner Horde in culture and economics were largely due to an educational system that united the two. Neither Babadzhanov nor Valikhanov passively accepted the metropole's reading of Islam (indeed, there was more than one such reading available to them, and they chose critically among them). Both, however, accepted the argument that the Russian Empire, at least ideally, was the bearer of rationality and enlightenment, to which they opposed the worst excesses of Islamic “fanaticism” on the steppe.

Pastoral Heartland or Colonial Space?

Although the Russian Empire did not pursue an aggressive policy of settler colonization in the 1850s and 1860s, electing rather to consolidate its gains through Cossack foreposts, many observers, including Valikhanov and Babadzhanov, understood the incorporation of steppe territories into the empire as largely entailing a clash between pastoral nomadism and sedentary agriculture. Sedentary agriculture and gardening had long been practiced in the oasis cities of Turkestan, but both men thoroughly discredited the polities that had supported their development. At the same time, the existence of an agricultural past for Central Asia meant, for both, that sedentarization was a

developmental path as plausible for Kazakhs as it was desirable. Even while acknowledging the continuing value of mobile pastoralism in Kazakhs' lives, not through the lens of nostalgia but as an objective fact, Valikhanov and Babadzhanov identified values of culture and civic virtue with the sedentary lifestyle when developed and supported in the context of a well-administered imperial state. The chief difference in their thinking lies in Babadzhanov's hesitant support of settler colonization from European Russia to the steppe, a notion which Valikhanov entirely resisted. Both, however, saw sedentarization and a gradual transition away from animal husbandry as the best means of securing Kazakhs' full political incorporation into the Empire on an equal basis with all other subjects.

That Kazakhs had long been, and continued to be, fundamentally nomadic was a point on which Valikhanov and Babadzhanov agreed. Valikhanov refers to the "prevailing pastoral life of the Kazakhs" of the Siberian Department and frequently describes their behaviors and practices as typical of a nomadic people.¹²³ Babadzhanov, for his part, credited Khan Dzhanger for the introduction of grain cultivation to the Bukey Horde, implying and depicting a fully pastoral past for the Kazakhs of this region; elsewhere, in a petition to the Temporary Council, he asserts that the vast majority of his neighbors "lack...desire to take up anything beyond animal husbandry."¹²⁴ Valikhanov, however, traveling around the territories of the Great Horde in Semireche, observed that Kazakhs were quite capable of making a living through agriculture with little outside

¹²³ SSCV t. 1, 225, "Ob upravlenii Kazakhami bol'shogo zhuza"

¹²⁴ Artykbaev, *Bukeevskoi ordy*, 95, "Zametki Kirgiza o kirgizakh"; Ibid., 140-1, "Vo Vremennyi sovet po upravleniiu vnutrennoi Kirgizskoi ordoi". The original version of this latter document, dated 24 September 1868, can be found at TsGA RK, f. 78, op. 4, d. 222, sv. 15, "Ob otvode zemli upraviteliu Tapovskoi chasti Babadzhanovu, ob izbranii kazaka Usergenova starshinoi i dr." Though this assertion may have had instrumental value for Babadzhanov, since he was arguing to retain control of a substantial piece of land, I would contend that his investment of time and capital in the orchard the land supported strongly implies that he believed his own words.

influence. Although he gives some credit to the encouragement and example of “Tashkenters” (*tashkentsy*), the chief engine of Kazakh agriculture is, in his mind, the natural environment:

“Despite the lack among the Kazakhs of agricultural equipment, almost completely inappropriate for the purpose, the fertility of the topsoil (*grunt pochvy*) in the Great Horde always rewards the plowman’s labor and rewards at a significant level. The numerous streams, flowing down from the main mountain peaks, very much assists the irrigation of fields by means of water supply systems or, so to speak, irrigation canals (*aryks*), completely unknown in Russia.¹²⁵

Because of this, he noted, cultivation of fruits and vegetables was as well developed among the Great Horde Kazakhs as anywhere else in the world. This difference of views – Babadzhanov’s notion of exclusive pastoralism against Valikhanov’s of partial, environmentally conditioned pastoralism – accounts for the disagreement between the two on settler colonization. The lack of an agricultural past for Kazakhs, in Babadzhanov’s view, implied the need for tutelage and direction.

Both agreed unambiguously, however, on the desirability of sedentarization and agricultural development, and not simply for their own sake. Sedentarism was seen as a means rather than an end, a method of developing Kazakh consciousness and integrating them fully into the political life of the Empire. Commenting on the Alash legend, the Kazakhs’ foundational epic, Valikhanov wrote, in an aside, that Alash had made the “wandering Kazakhs” into a “nation [*natsiia*] (if this word may be applied to a nomadic people).”¹²⁶ The counter-argument implied within this statement is vital; according to this line of thinking, nomads, lacking centralized and fixed institutions, written laws, and a written cultural canon, cannot ever truly comprise a nation. This lack of fixity also, he argued, interfered with the development of civil order on the steppe, with Kazakhs’

¹²⁵ SSCV t.1, 184, “O khlebopashestve.”

¹²⁶ SSCV t. 2, 158-159, “Kirgizskoe rodoslovie”.

participation in institutions of self-governance sponsored by the chanceries of Petersburg. In a proposal to divide the Siberian steppe into two sections, administered differently, he argued that such a division would:

“First of all break apart a great mass of the Kazakhs of the Siberian department, scattered across an immense space, and bring each of the aforementioned two parts to civic education (*k grazhdanskomu obrazovaniuu*) by the normal route, corresponding with the goals and views of the government and the conditions of the locality, preserving on the right flank the prevailing pastoral life of the Kazakhs while strengthening on the left grain culture and sedentarism and, second, to speed up the development of civil order (*grazhdanstvennost*) and industry on the left flank, very important in political, military and financial relations.”¹²⁷

Pastoralism appears, in this passage, as a plausible and necessary waystation for Kazakh development. Yet it is clear that, for Valikhanov, the politically vital “left flank” (consisting of Semipalatinsk oblast and Semireche, unincorporated at the time of writing) is the most promising region agriculturally, and that sedentarism and the rapid development of *grazhdanstvennost* here are strongly connected.¹²⁸ His subsequent description of the soil and climactic conditions of the Ili river valley contains a strong argument for the possibility of profitable agriculture, and concludes with the comment that its occupation by a detachment of Russian troops would “establish order and tranquility in the Great Horde.”¹²⁹ Yet Valikhanov gives no indication that this parallel sedentarization and establishment of civil order need be accomplished by settler

¹²⁷ SSCV t. 1, 225, “Ob upravleni kazakhami bol’shogo zhuza”.

¹²⁸ *Grazhdanstvennost* is a virtually untranslatable term whose meanings changed several times in the 19th century. Dov Yaroshevski has argued that, by the Alexandrine era, it connoted civil order and citizenship as reflected by participation in reformed public institutions; Austin Jersild has rightly noted, however, that for many colonial officials (in the Caucasian provinces, in the case he treats) it came with a sense of obligation and responsibility to the colonial state, rather than rights. See Dov Yaroshevski, “Empire and Citizenship,” and Austin Jersild, “From Savagery to Citizenship: Caucasian Mountaineers and Muslims in the Russian Empire,” both Daniel R. Brower and Edward J. Lazzarini, eds., *Russia’s Orient: Imperial Borderlands and Peoples, 1700-1917* (Bloomington, IN: Indiana UP, 2001), 58-79, 101-114. For Valikhanov and other Kazakh intermediaries, though, the ideal of establishing *grazhdanstvennost* implied responsibilities on the part of colonizer and colonized alike.

¹²⁹ SSCV t. 1, 226, “Ob upravlenie kazakhami bol’shogo zhuza.”

colonization. The mission of tsarist power in this arena, then, in Valikhanov's view, was not to civilize per se but simply establish the conditions most propitious for Kazakhs to develop themselves, then to reap the benefits.

Babadzhanov shared Valikhanov's views on sedentarization as a means to the end of political and cultural development, but was considerably less sanguine about Kazakhs' prospects for achieving such independently. Describing the administration of khan Dzhanger with admiration, his praise of the latter's encouragement of education and grain cultivation is part of a coherent narrative, strongly suggesting that cultural development (and political as well, since the goal of such schools was to produce competent administrators with local connections) and sedentarization were linked in his mind. Much more than Valikhanov, though, Babadzhanov's imperatives with respect to agriculture were economic. In an 1870 letter to the journal *Deiatel'nost'* (*Enterprise*), he describes the development of private agriculture as "for us, Kazakhs...the most vital question – a question of our further survival."¹³⁰ But more than just amended regulations were needed to accomplish this, for Babadzhanov – Kazakhs needed tutelage, most likely in the form of Russian colonization. In the same letter, he argued that "colonization would be one of the beneficent measures towards rapprochement (*sblizhenie*) of Kazakhs with Russians, to inurement (*priuchenie*), so to speak, of the Kazakhs."¹³¹ By his own example, too, he claimed that he wished to demonstrate the profitability of cultivation to his neighbors; establishing an orchard and vegetable garden, he wrote to the Temporary Council, petitioning for permanent ownership of the land section, "I am sure that when the useful consequences of my occupation appear, my example will not remain without

¹³⁰ Artykbaev, *Bukeevskoi ordy*, 70, "Vnutrenniaia kirgizskaia orda."

¹³¹ *Ibid.*, 67.

beneficial influence towards the teaching and encouragement of the Kazakhs to take up this useful industry.”¹³² Undeveloped though he claimed they were, Kazakhs, he argued, could gradually learn from Russian colonizers and a few influential people of their own number to sedentarize, reaping material profits while developing culturally and politically in a manner beneficial to state interests.

At the same time, there were limits to Valikhanov and Babadzhanov’s endorsement of sedentarization, which both argued needed to be managed carefully to defend Kazakh interests. Valikhanov argued that, much like agriculture, mobile pastoralism depended not so much on intellect, culture, or civilizational progress as an easily defined set of environmental conditions favorable for its flourishing. In the same piece, he passionately defended the interests of a group of Kazakhs constrained in their animal husbandry by the land claims of a nearby Cossack station:

“Baian-aul belongs to the [Cossack] station; beyond the Irtysh, to where our ancestors drove a part of their livestock for the winter, the Cossacks do not permit us. Thus, the Kazakhs of the Tortygul volosts remain completely without winter camps and, as a consequence of this, suffer more than others from bad weather in winter and from deep snows.”¹³³

To prevent further suffering, he proposed that the Baian-aul *okrug prikaz* (district administrative committee) move to another area, where more land was available relative to the pastoralist population, rubbing salt along with this claims that nomads needed far less land than they claimed.¹³⁴ Even Babadzhanov, ardent supporter of unregulated settler colonization though he was, complained of Cossack wastefulness and asserted that “for this [settlement] it is not necessary to take away from the Kazakhs the best lands, as

¹³² Ibid., 140-141, “Vremennyi soviet po upravleniiu vnutrennoi Kirgizskoi ordoi.”

¹³³ Arytkbaev *Etnograficheskoe nasledie* 173, “O kochevkakh kirgiz.”

¹³⁴ Ibid., 171.

it has been done until now.”¹³⁵ Sedentarization could only bring progress if the Kazakhs lived through it; regardless of the means they proposed, Valikhanov and Babadzhanov agreed that a basic respect for Kazakhs’ physical needs was the *sine qua non* of expansion into the steppe, and protested against more rapacious, less organized forms of settlement.

Russian expansion into the steppe brought with it an obvious clash of lifeways. Although Babadzhanov and Valikhanov, especially the latter, considered Kazakhs’ eventual sedentarization necessary if they were to be fully integrated into the political system of the empire, they did not believe that it was to be accomplished rapidly, or that all costs were acceptable for the sake of achieving it. They shared an understanding of *grazhdanstvennost’* (civil order) with the reformers of the Alexandrine era, and argued that it could only truly develop among the Kazakhs when they remained permanently in one place. Settlement without the interests of the colonized at heart rhetorically and in fact was unacceptable to both. Whether simply encouraged (Valikhanov) or actively modeled by settlers from European Russia (Babadzhanov), Russian-style sedentarization brought with it, in theory, the tsarist educational system, fixed and codified laws, and centralized administration – all the trappings of progress as Valikhanov and Babadzhanov understood it. It was not desirable in and of itself; indeed, both positioned themselves strongly against the influence of Tatars and Turkestanis, both peoples among whom agriculture was well developed. But the steppe’s gradual transition from pastoral-nomadic to sedentary-agricultural spaces under the auspices of the reforming Russian Empire, they argued, would provide Kazakhs a framework for political development even as they preserved the most important aspects of their culture.

¹³⁵ Artykbaev *Etnografiia kazakhov* 67, “Vnutreniaia kirgizskaia orda.”

Of Good Administration and Bad

Babadzhanov and Valikhanov were at the same time active scholars and mid-level functionaries of the Alexandrine bureaucratic apparatus, and both aspects of their lives should be considered to gain a fuller view of their vision of the Russian Empire, and of Kazakhs' place within it.¹³⁶ The early 1860s, when both made their careers, was a time of tumultuous change in Russia, as Alexander II abolished serfdom and promulgated, along with it, a range of progressive and state-centered reforms (in law, education, and other arenas); both intervened originally in the debates of this era. Valikhanov, in particular, participated directly in the research leading to the implementation of the 1863 court reform on the steppe, gathering the opinions of the honored sultans and biys requested by the Main Administration of Western Siberia.¹³⁷ The notes he composed in 1864 about this experience, only published in 1904, represent the best available source for understanding the particular balance Valikhanov struck between Kazakh particularism and universal, progressivist values. Although no record exists that Babadzhanov participated so actively in any of the Great Reforms, he did publish a historical note including his opinions on past Russian colonial administrators and the changes taking place among the Bukei Horde in the 1860s. Both of these sources make it clear that Valikhanov and Babadzhanov shared a view of proper administration of the steppe that, while heavily influenced by European notions of development and progress, transcended the "Great Friendship" paradigm. Charting an original course between progressives who

¹³⁶ Indeed, on the Kazakh steppe and in Turkestan, these categories were frequently blurred; such noted scholars as N. N. Pantusov, A. K. Geins, and many more held service ranks within the colonial administration.

¹³⁷ TsGA RK, d. 345, op. 1, d. 807, sv. 93, l. 2, "Delo o preobrazovanii suda v Kazakhskoi stepi." This file contains the recorded opinions of a variety of honored people, including Valikhanov's father Chingis on ll. 85-88. The request for Chokan Valikhanov's participation dates to 13 May 1863.

wished to implement all the Great Reforms on the steppe immediately and wholesale, and conservatives skeptical of the entire enterprise, they argued that the most desirable sort of colonial administration would bring administrative reform to the steppe gradually and in stages. Positioning themselves (and positioned by the state, in Valikhanov's case) as insiders, better able to know the steppe than other state functionaries, they argued that progress and Western standards of civilization were universal, attainable by any nationality, but that such standards had to be implemented with a precise awareness of the specificity of local conditions. The bar, in other words, was much the same as that envisioned by reformers in the metropole; the timeline for clearing it, on the other hand, had more in common with conservative visions of colonial governance.

Virginia Martin dates the beginnings of an imperial system of legal administration on the Kazakh steppe (particularly in the Middle Horde) to 1822, when the "Regulations on Siberian Kirgiz," drafted by the Governor-General of Siberia, M. M. Speranskii, were made law. She argues that these regulations, allowing a role for *adat* (customary law) in cases involving Kazakhs even as they introduced chanceries to the steppe and furthered bureaucratic centralization, were part of a longer process of "imposing settled models of social and political organization on the nomads."¹³⁸ Legal reform in the early 1860s was yet another part of this process, endeavoring to at least partially formalize and centralize a judicial system that had formerly been mobile and based on *adat*. Valikhanov, drafted into the commission sent to solicit the opinions of Kazakh notables about the proposed changes, disagreed strongly with its purpose. Speranskii, the reformist bureaucrats of 1863, and Valikhanov all shared a basically statist and universalist vision, agreeing that it

¹³⁸ Virginia Martin, *Law and Custom in the Steppe: The Kazakhs of the Middle Horde and Russian Colonialism in the Nineteenth Century* (Richmond: Curzon, 2001) 39.

was necessary to bring the Kazakhs into a uniform imperial legal system at some point in time. But Valikhanov contended that both Speranskii's statutes and the proposed legal reform were based in insufficient knowledge of the social conditions of the steppe and the workings of *adat* among the Kazakhs; presenting "precise facts and observations" in opposition to these rumors, he argued instead for the continuing necessity of *adat* in governing the steppe long into the future.¹³⁹

While he explicitly separated himself from the label of a primordial nationalist, Valikhanov's criticisms of Speranskii's reforms were grounded in the specificities of the steppe's cultural and social milieu. Although his primary concern, that Speranskii's reforms were incomprehensible to an undeveloped people, were echoed by some commentators for the inner, predominantly Russian provinces of the Empire, a sense of Kazakh distinctiveness pervades his argument.¹⁴⁰ Citing the utilitarian philosopher John Stuart Mill, he wrote that the tsarist state had been correct in gathering as much information as possible about Kazakh legal customs before implementing the court reform, describing a sort of pathological illness in the imperial legal system:

"Before giving new rights to people of any estate, it is first necessary to do exact scientific research about the mental, moral and political qualities of the people of that estate. And in fact only then can the doctor treat the sick with certainty of success, when he knows not only the symptoms of the patient's illness, but also the fundamental reasons of the illness."¹⁴¹

However, he also argued that this survey had been done too credulously, spoiling its potentially useful results by relying on "the opinions of ignorant and wild aristocrats of an ignorant and half-wild people" rather than making a broader survey, including the

¹³⁹ SSCV t. 4, 82, "Zapiska o sudebnoi reforme."

¹⁴⁰ This criticism, along with an acknowledgement of parallel discussions related to ethnic-Russian peasants, is found most clearly in Artykbaev, *Etnograficheskoe nasledie*, 124, "Zapiska o sudebnoi reforme."

¹⁴¹ *Ibid.*, 122.

opinions of less privileged strata of Kazakh society. Had the state, in the person of its bureaucrat of special orders I. E. Iatsenko, troubled to do so, he claimed, it would have noted that “Kazakh opinion” was nothing uniform or unproblematic; rather, the wealthy and powerful sought to maintain, even increase their influence, and formalization of the traditional court of biys was simply another means for them to do so. Positioning himself as an “eyewitness” to events, Valikhanov constructed a narrative of legal reform that complicated the notions of universality, uniformity, and immediacy emerging from the chanceries of St. Petersburg.¹⁴²

It was on this last point, immediacy, that Valikhanov disagreed most with the reform-minded bureaucrats of his era. For he considered it axiomatic that the norms of development represented by the Great Reforms – progressive, emphasizing the rule of law and well-informed administration – were the only ones worth striving towards, enough so that he devotes significant space in an article directed against court reform on the steppe to establishing that Kazakhs, “connected with Russians by historical and even blood kinship,” and essentially similar to “higher” civilizations, were worth developing in this direction and *capable* of being developed.¹⁴³ But for the time being, he proposed a two-pronged alternative approach, one based on a knowledge of Kazakh legal customs unavailable to any other commentator of the era. The informal court of biys, he argued, was the preference of the majority, and not without reason, since its mobility was well suited to the nomadic lifestyle, and its open nature and oral, rather than written, procedures “[satisfied] the current development of the Kazakh people.”¹⁴⁴ Centralization, formalization, the transition from oral to written argument – all of these would shift the

¹⁴² Ibid., 134.

¹⁴³ Ibid., 127.

¹⁴⁴ Ibid., 141.

balance of justice on the steppe, he argued, towards a small and privileged sphere of aristocrats. While it is possible that Valikhanov is idealizing the court of biys here, what is most important is the implicit argument he is making, *viz.*, that political and cultural reform are intimately linked, and the latter must precede the former. Kazakhs, he claims, should and must ultimately be fully a part of the legal and political systems of the Russian Empire, with full implementation of all relevant reforms. But at present, they are unready, requiring extensive efforts on the part of the state in the sphere of education before the reforms can achieve their desired effect, and until such readiness is achieved, their indigenous forms suit them better than any kind of imposed reform.¹⁴⁵

Development, for Valikhanov, is natural, inevitable, and universal, but its pace and the specific forms it takes en route to the final and unchanging goal vary in response to ethnocultural particularities.

Babadzhanov, although not a direct participant in the implementation of the court reform of the early 1860s, identified similar problems with the legal structures of the Russian colonial government. Writing of the judicial situation under a deceased governor-general, he complained,

“There emerged an understanding that to comfortably escape punishment in an investigation and for certain accusation of someone, it was of course necessary to know Russian laws. But it turned out that there were very few among the Kazakhs with such knowledge. There were literate people...Who were they? Tatars and people who knew how to write.”¹⁴⁶

This comment predates the Alexandrine legal reforms by roughly three years, and Babadzhanov makes no specific recommendations on the basis of it; still, the sense that the introduction of chancery administration and written legal norms had unintended

¹⁴⁵ *Ibid.*, 124, for the most explicit statement of this argument, concluding (and continuing with the anatomical/medical metaphor cited above), “The body cannot accept that which it has not grown up to.”

¹⁴⁶ Artykbaev *Bukeevskoi ordy* 114, “Zametki kirgiza o zhit’e-byt’e i uchasti ego rodichei”

consequences on the steppe comes through clearly. His prescription was similar to Valikhanov's in that he valorized the tsarist educational system and argued strongly for its expansion, praising and criticizing Russian administrators in part on the basis of their successes in this arena.¹⁴⁷ Further, he saw a place for customary law in administration, noting that Kazakhs trusted the new collegiate administration formed in the Bukei Horde in 1845, after the death of khan Dzhanger, precisely because "in business of little importance [it] was led by the order which the deceased khan introduced to us, and by natural custom. In more important cases it acted in accordance with Russian laws."¹⁴⁸ At the same time, however, although Babadzhanov believed that the steppe was in a state of transition, he apparently did not attach the significance to the court of biys that Valikhanov did – indeed, he never mentioned it in his published works. Customary law and judges ruling by it, on par with Russian justices of the peace in Valikhanov's writings, are as "erroneous" and "incorrect" as other pre-colonial traditions, for Babadzhanov, and while they had a role within the colonial state, it was to be a role acceded to them temporarily and grudgingly.

Proper administration, Valikhanov and Babadzhanov argued, could only exist in the context of extensive knowledge of the cultural customs and social conditions of the administered. This was not because distinct ethnic groups were to remain forever separate from the culture and governing apparatus of the metropole, but rather because the incompleteness of such knowledge made their incorporation into both problematic. While some metropolitan proponents of reform considered that it should be implemented uniformly and immediately around the Russian Empire, others were hesitant about the

¹⁴⁷ Ibid., 118, noting regretfully that the administrator Vashchenko "was not able to render particular cooperation in the matter of education of youth and the development of national talents."

¹⁴⁸ Ibid., 111.

prospects of reform in the inner provinces of the Empire, let alone its putatively wild and uncivilized borderlands. Valikhanov and Babadzhanov charted an original middle course between these two schools of thought. While arguing that since the Kazakh steppe was indeed, in their view, wild and uncivilized, immediate wholesale reform was out of the question, they also made claims (stronger for Valikhanov than Babadzhanov) for the validity and utility of customary law, and both fervently contended that the steppe's wildness was only temporary, that Kazakhs were uncivilized but *civilizable*. Education was the first step, full-scale political and administrative integration to the empire the second. Their vision of imperial administration was grounded both in universalist dreams and, for their achievement, local particularities.

Conclusion

Chokan Valikhanov and Mukhammed-Salikh Babadzhanov were children of elite local families educated to be intermediaries between colonizers and colonized in administrative affairs. (Thus, according to their biographies, they were strikingly similar to administrators from non-dominant minority groups in other colonial empires, who, it has been argued, were unable to truly escape the claims and categories of the colonizer's discourse.) Like many who served in colonial posts in the Russian Empire, they were active both as administrators and scholars, describing the (relatively) new borderlands and their population to metropolitan readers even as they discharged the various tasks of imperial governance. Through policy recommendations, travelogues, and ethnographic sketches, they moved beyond simple transmission of information for the edification of a data-hungry bureaucratic apparatus, attempting rather to creatively express their own visions of Kazakhs' role within the Russian Empire, and the Empire's proper behavior

towards them. These views were strongly shaped by their education in Russian *kadetskie korpusy* and experiences serving among representatives of the metropole, but not entirely so. The totality of Valikhanov and Babadzhanov's views cannot be passed off as the product of colonized minds, nor as an early avatar of Russo-Kazakh friendship. Nor did their similar life trajectories and relationships to the Russian state produce identical solutions to the problems they considered most relevant. Their world was not divided so neatly.

Kazakhs, after all, differed markedly among themselves in their attitudes towards Islam and towards sedentarization; further, both Valikhanov and Babadzhanov were well aware of social stratification among the Kazakhs, and the implications of their relatively privileged status. Since the steppe was also populated by Tatar merchants, educators, and clergymen, it was not even homogeneous with respect to ethnicity. Imperial Russians were equally fractious. Among administrators and intellectuals, as discussed in Chapter 1, there was significant disagreement about the possibility and desirability of incorporating the Kazakh steppe and its inhabitants into the Empire with status equal to the provinces of European Russia and its inhabitants. High-level administrators ranged in attitude from K. K. Gutkovskii, who made significant efforts to advance Valikhanov's career, to the nameless bureaucrats who Valikhanov blamed for his non-election as senior sultan because, he argued in a letter to A. N. Maikov, they "acted towards [him] like [he] was an *inrodets*. And with *inorodtsy* in Siberia they do what they want, only they don't really exterminate them with dogs."¹⁴⁹ At lower levels, Cossacks and irregular peasants acted in ways that were frequently contrary to state prerogatives, engendering disputes with

¹⁴⁹ SSCV t. 5, 154.

nomads that were not always decided in the interests of the former.¹⁵⁰ Presented with such diverse choices intellectually (and, particularly in Valikhanov's case, socially) and ambiguous dividing lines, the synthesis that Babadzhanov and Valikhanov arrived at was necessarily the result of careful and critical evaluation even if it resembled the ideas discussed by contemporary reformist Russian administrators in many ways. Balancing universalist dreams with thorough knowledge of the milieu into which they were born, they foresaw the gradual and complete integration of the steppe territories into the Empire through education, not fiat; documenting Kazakhs' cultural achievements, they argued that such feats made them worthy and capable of participation in a Westernizing, modernizing empire.

It is important not to be overly sanguine about the colonial power that lurks in the background of this narrative. While Valikhanov and Babadzhanov's formulations were indeed original, it is difficult to demonstrate that they had any direct impact on imperial policy in the Kazakh steppe. The clearest influence that may be discerned is that, for some Russians on the political left, their scholarly achievements served as proof that Kazakhs could, in fact, participate fully in the political and cultural life of the Empire, that the distinction between borderland and metropole would ultimately disappear. The scholar N. A. Iadrintsev, for example, wrote: "We do not think that *inorodtsy*, even in their own pure, unspoiled type, were incapable of perception of European ideas; this is vouched for by the talented personages who emerged from them, such as...the Kazakh explorer to Kashgar Chokan Valikhanov."¹⁵¹ That said, the impact they had on

¹⁵⁰ Indeed, Babadzhanov took part in a lengthy legal dispute with irregular peasants for recovery of losses they had incurred to his lands, ending only when he dropped the suit five years later. See Ivlev 19.

¹⁵¹ SSCV t. 5, 274, N. A. Iadrintsev, "Otryvok iz stat'i 'Etnologicheskie osobennosti Sibirskogo naselenia.'" This article was published in *Tomskie gubernskie vedomosti* in 1865.

metropolitan thought and policy during their respective lifetimes was relatively limited. Still, they serve as an important reminder that original thought among colonized people need not be explicitly national or anti-colonial.¹⁵² Presented with diverse views of imperial governance, Valikhanov and Babadzhanov endorsed an idealized vision of administrative rationalism and cultural and economic development driven by the imperial state, but with a strong sense of the local specificity they came to understand, and present to the scholarly public of the metropole, as uniquely Kazakh. The central figure of the next chapter, Ibrai Altynsarin, had a similar biography, and went through a similar process of selective subjectivity among metropolitan and steppe perspectives concerning empire and Kazakhness, but arrived at a different synthesis, more centered on Islam than Valikhanov, but more hesitant about peasant settlement than Babadzhanov. Subaltern status did not override personal idiosyncrasy; neither, in Altynsarin's case, did it interfere with the exertion of a substantive influence on colonial politics.

¹⁵² This conclusion has parallels with intellectuals in other non-Russian regions of the Russian Empire. See, for example, Mikhail Dolbilov's treatment (185-89) of the Lithuanian scholar Adam Kirkor in *Russkii krai, chuzhaia vera: Etnokonfessional'naiia politika imperii v Litve i Belorusii pri Aleksandre II* (Moscow: Novoe literaturnoe obozrenie, 2010).

Chapter 3

The Subaltern Dilemma: Ibrai Altynsarin as Ethnographer, Administrator, and Educator, 1862-1889

Introduction

Chokan Valikhanov and Mukhammed-Salikh Babadzhanov both passed away before their attempts to reconcile Kazakh communal identity with imperial advancement could bear fruit in the form of policy. The central figure of the present chapter, Ibrai Altynsarin (1841-1889), was the product of institutional settings and administrative prerogatives similar to those that shaped the careers of Valikhanov and Babdzhanov; outliving them and finding support from colonial authorities, though, he was able to put some of his ideas about Kazakh identity, about Kazakhs' place within the Russian Empire, and about progress more generally into practice. Both as an ethnographer and an educator, Altynsarin was interested in producing, re-packaging, and compiling knowledge in a transformative fashion – that is, his writings, while not outwardly polemical, were composed with the intent of shaping the way his audience viewed the world in general and the steppe in particular. The first two chapters of this dissertation have, in the main, dealt with research pertaining to the steppe and its often convoluted relationship with imperial power, studies of interest to a comparatively small circle of literate and educated people. Altynsarin, on the other hand, was more concerned with compiling widely-known information, simplifying it, and disseminating it to a broad popular audience. This effort, too, was vital to the interventionist trend in Russian

governance on the steppe, and to shaping the views and priorities of colonial subjects, but differently from the ethnographic accounts and statistical manuals discussed previously. Defining the boundaries of the knowable (and of what was desirable to know) for his readers, Altynsarin exerted a selective influence on them, subtly remaking their identities and reconfiguring their relationship with the colonial state.

Whereas the authors and works discussed previously addressed themselves exclusively to a Russophone audience, based in the chanceries of St. Petersburg and a few colonial cities, Altynsarin's representational project had both metropolitan and colonial, Russian- and Kazakh-speaking audiences in mind. As an ethnographer and a mid-level administrator, he represented the steppe and its inhabitants to metropolitan readers curious and uncertain about both. As an educator, he assumed the responsibility of representing Kazakhs, the steppe, the Russian Empire, and the wider world *to other Kazakhs*. In so doing, he simultaneously argued implicitly that "Kazakh" was a comprehensible marker of communal identity – not a given in the 1860s and '70s – and, more importantly, attempted to define the values associated with this ethnonym. Writing for colonizer and colonized alike, and appropriating to himself the right to represent each to the other, Altynsarin was the ultimate intermediary figure. The argument he made to both audiences, though, was consistent, original, and distinctive, even as its implications for each drastically differed. Kazakhs, he argued, were in both language and culture both a coherent group and distinct from other Turkic Muslims of Central Asia and the Volga River region; further, they were not the brutes that Levshin and his peers had described, but rather intelligent, rational, and suitable for development, given appropriate support from tsarist administrators. Identifying malformed colonial policies and "fanatical" Islam

as the primary threats to Kazakhs' progress, his career as an educator and publicist was directed against both, attempting to chart a middle way between an ever more interventionist imperial power and a steppe milieu that, he argued, required reform.

Authors from the Subaltern Studies group have rightly noted the role that colonial schools played in the development of nationalist and anti-colonial movements in South Asia.¹ Altynsarin, though, was both the product of early colonial school institutions and played a signal role in shaping what they later became. As such, his interpretation and re-framing of the instruction he received for a second, more numerous generation of schools on the steppe has fascinating implications for such arguments. Notions of ethnic particularism in the Russian Empire, heavily influenced by German Romantic philosophers, dated to at least the 1830s, and played an important role in that polity's administrative discourse by the 1870s, when Altynsarin began to have an influence on educational affairs in the northern steppe.² Such concepts, however ill-defined and changeable, were an important part of the intellectual and professional spheres in which he operated. At the same time, however, Altynsarin defined the category of "Kazakh" in his own terms, informed by views emerging from metropolitan scholarship and administration alike, but also deeply infused with his own subjectivity. Many of the most important figures in the Kazakh nationalist movement that emerged in the early 20th century were the products of Russo-Kazakh schools, whose curricula and teaching materials Altynsarin had played a significant role in developing; it has been argued that

¹ See especially Dipesh Chakrabarty, "Postcoloniality and the Artifice of History: Who Speaks for 'Indian' Pasts?" *Representations* 37 (Winter 1992): 1-26 and *Provincializing Europe: Postcolonial Thought and Historical Difference* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton UP, 2000), as well as Partha Chatterjee, *The Nation and its Pasts: Colonial and Postcolonial Histories* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton UP, 1993).

² See Charles Steinwedel, "To Make a Difference: the Category of Ethnicity in Late Imperial Russian Politics, 1861-1917," David L. Hoffman and Yanni Kotsonis, eds., *Russian Modernity: Politics, Knowledge, Practices* (New York: St. Martin's Press, 2000), 67-86, for an argument that tsarist administrators played an active role in defining and constituting ethnic categories in the late-imperial era.

this connection is more than coincidental.³ Kazakh nationalists, according to this line of argument, were in a sense Altynsarin's children, making the transition from consciousness of ethnic difference to the articulation of a corresponding political program.⁴ Superficially, this would seem a challenge to Chatterjee's notion of the "colonized mind"; it would be reductionist to refer to the national as an exclusively colonial category when an administrator drawn from the colonized played a leading role in shaping the understandings of "nationality" of pupils in colonial schools.⁵

Neither the binaries of postcolonial theory nor the rosy formulations of Soviet "friendship of peoples" historiography are adequate to explain Altynsarin's activity as an educator and scholar.⁶ The conception of Kazakhness – a term I will use throughout to connote a sense of ethnic solidarity stopping short of self-determinative nationalism – that emerges in his writings is extraordinarily complicated. Informed by the discourse around ethnicity of imperial Russian administrative organs, Altynsarin did not always accept its assumptions; producing texts for colonial schools, his views on the steppe's future under Russian governance differed drastically from those of his employers. Articulating a sense of Kazakh distinctiveness through folklore, ethnography, and

³ Stephen Sabol, *Russian Colonization and the Genesis of Kazakh National Consciousness* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2003) 59. Sabol suggests a particularly strong influence on Akhmet Baitursynov, who studied in the Russo-Kazakh schools of Turgai oblast, where Altynsarin had worked (95).

⁴ This language strongly echoes Miroslav Hroch, *Social Preconditions of National Revival in Europe: A Comparative Analysis of the Social Composition of Patriotic Groups among the Smaller European Nations* (Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 1985); indeed, Hroch is by far the most influential theorist in Sabol's formulation of the rise of Kazakh nationalism (4-5).

⁵ Chatterjee first articulated this idea, arguing that all nationalist intellectuals in India had accepted the premise that Western-style modernization was a necessary condition of independence. See his *Nationalist Thought And the Colonial World: a Derivative Discourse?* (London: Zed Books, for the United Nations University, 1986). As we will see, Altynsarin's ideas about what modernity on the steppe would constitute were at times much opposed to the ideas mooted by imperial Russian policymakers.

⁶ T. Tazhibayev, *Prosveshchenie i shkoly Kazakhstana vo vtoroi polovine XIX veka* (Alma-ata: KazGosIzdat, 1962) is a good example of work on Altynsarin operating within this latter paradigm, which is as a rule insufficiently attentive to the coercive power of the Russian colonial administration and the complex, ambivalent views of Russian imperialism that even Russian-trained intermediaries held.

language textbooks that arguably inspired nationalist sentiments in others, he framed his activity in a way that assumed, even required, continued Russian governance on the steppe. Islam was at the center of his concept of Kazakhness in a way that it never was for some Kazakh nationalists, or for Russian administrators who saw their empire in ethnic categories; in this respect Altynsarin's educational program was sooner reminiscent of the Jadids of Tatarstan, but Altynsarin was also deeply suspicious of Tatar influence on the steppe, and at pains to define a Kazakh identity distinct from Tatar religious and literary culture.⁷ Altynsarin was a colonial administrator whose views of and relationship to the steppe differed strongly from his imperial Russian colleagues, a devout Muslim hesitant about both conservative and reformist currents in Central Asian Islam, a Kazakh critical of much that he observed among other Kazakhs. It is difficult, then, to think of his scholarly and administrative activity in terms of the oppositions that inform Chatterjee's work. Rather, Altynsarin was a profoundly ambivalent thinker, influenced by multiple intellectual currents (metropolitan and otherwise) and expressing a strong personal subjectivity, but often compelled to express his views on the terms of his imperial Russian interlocutors.⁸ The panoply of opinions on the meanings of Russianness, imperialism, subjecthood, and progress in late-imperial Russian thought left

⁷ The Jadids, a loosely-affiliated group of mostly Tatar intellectuals advocating first the phonetic method of teaching literacy in Islamic schools, but also arguing for the inclusion of secular sciences in their curricula, may be the only over-studied group in English-language Central Asian historiography. The most widely accepted interpretation of this movement is Adeeb Khalid, *The Politics of Muslim Cultural Reform: Jadidism in Central Asia* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1999), who uses Bourdieu's idea of "cultural capital" to explain how this innovative movement gained traction, particularly in Turkestan; also see Azade-Ayşe Rorlich, *The Volga Tatars: A Study in National Resilience* (Stanford, CA: Hoover Institution Press, 1986); Edward Lazzarini, "Beyond Renewal: The Jadid Response to Pressure for Change in the Modern Age," Jo-Ann Gross, ed., *Muslims of Central Asia: Expressions of Identity and Change* (Durham, NC: Duke UP, 1992), 151-66; Ahmet Kanlidere, *Reform Within Islam: The Tadjid and Jadid Movement Among the Kazan Tatars (1809-1917): Conciliation or Conflict?* (Istanbul: Eret, 1997).

⁸ Homi Bhabha has emphasized the importance of ambivalence for explaining how colonial discourse both gains currency among the colonized and can be manipulated by the latter. See "Of Mimicry and Man: The Ambivalence of Colonial Discourse" and "Signs Taken for Wonders: Questions of Ambivalence and Authority Under a Tree Outside Delhi, May 1917," *The Location of Culture* (New York: Routledge, 1994).

plenty of room for a thinker like Altynsarin to make original contributions to colonial discourse, but the administrative and professional milieu in which he worked strongly constrained the extent to which these contributions could be enacted in policy.

Between State and Steppe: Personal and Professional Life

Born in 1841 in the northern part of the Kazakh steppe (near present-day Kostanai), Altynsarin was orphaned at a young age, and subsequently raised by his grandfather, a *biy* named Balgozha.⁹ Thus, like Valikhanov and Babadzhanov before him, Altynsarin was born into a family enjoying high social status, and interested in maintaining it. Indeed, when the young Altynsarin was only five years old, his grandfather presented him as a candidate for study in a proposed school under the auspices of the Border Commission in Orenburg, intended to train Kazakh boys as translators and scribes for the colonial administration.¹⁰ When this school finally opened in the summer of 1850, Altynsarin and ten other Kazakh boys formed its first class, studying a curriculum that included formal instruction in the Koran, several languages (Russian, Arabic, Tatar, and Persian), and other subjects.¹¹ Here he studied until 1857, receiving excellent marks and forming connections with Russian intellectuals in the city, both the orientalist V. V. Grigor'ev and exiles from the intelligentsia of the 1830s and '40s, "exiled to the Orenburg *krai* because of their participation in secret societies."¹² The currents of thought influencing Altynsarin during these formative years were many and contradictory. On one hand, he would have absorbed a conservative ethos

⁹ K. Beisembiev, *Iz istorii obshchestvennoi mysli Kazakhstana vtoroi poloviny XIX veka* (Alma-ata: izd-vo. Akademii nauk Kazakhskoi SSR, 1957) 133.

¹⁰ B. S. Suleimenov (otv. red.), *Ibragim Altynsarin: sobranie sochinenii v trekh tomakh* (Alma-ata: izd-vo. "Nauka," 1975-78), v. 1, 9. Hereafter I will refer to this three-volume collection as "SSIA." This information is part of a biographical note by the editorial collective, "Zhizn' i deiatel'nost' Ibragima Altynsarina (1841-1889)."

¹¹ *Ibid.*, 12.

¹² *Ibid.*, 13.

privileging service to the Russian state, and in the person of Grigor'ev, a model of the idea that scholarship could serve state interests; Grigor'ev's famous anti-Tatarism also has echoes in some of Altynsarin's later writings.¹³ On the other hand, the exiled *raznochintsy* ("men of various ranks") of Siberia tended to espouse a brand of revolutionary liberalism informed by Enlightenment rationalism that sought to replace autocracy with limited republicanism; most also rejected Romantic ideals in favor of a fundamentally civic conception of the nation.¹⁴ Less is known about Altynsarin's relations with his Kazakh school comrades, although in his school, unlike the *kadetskie korpusy* in which Valikhanov and Babadzhanov studied, the student population was exclusively Kazakh; Altynsarin's socialization with Russians would have occurred mostly with teachers and in extracurricular activities. Upon completing coursework at this school in 1857, Altynsarin had the necessary qualifications for state employment, and at the age of 16 began his working life on the bottom rung of the ladder, serving as a scribe for his grandfather, who by this time was the administrator of a tribe of Kazakhs of the Qypshaq clan (Middle Horde).¹⁵

In November 1859, having recently received a promotion to the rank of junior translator in the administration of Orenburg oblast, Altynsarin had a meeting that would prove decisive in his career, making the acquaintance of the orientalist, pedagogue, and would-be Orthodox missionary N. I. Il'minskii, beginning a professional relationship and

¹³ On Grigor'ev's anti-Tatar attitudes see Wayne Dowler, *Classroom and Empire: The Politics of Schooling Russia's Eastern Nationalities, 1860-1917* (Montreal: McGill-Queen's UP, 2001), 38 and Robert P. Geraci, *Window on the East: National and Imperial Identities in Late Tsarist Russia* (Ithaca: Cornell UP, 2001) 59.

¹⁴ See the excellent summary in Andrzej Walicki, "Russian Social Thought: An Introduction to the Intellectual History of Nineteenth-Century Russia," *Russian Review* 36.1 (January 1977): 1-45.

¹⁵ SSIA t. 1, 14.

friendship that would last until Altynsarin's death in 1889.¹⁶ As a consequence of this meeting, as well as his acquaintance with Grigor'ev, who in his capacity as director of the Border Commission (responsible for administration of the Bukei Horde Kazakhs living around Orenburg) arranged in 1860 for the establishment of several primary schools for Kazakhs, Altynsarin secured an appointment in one of them, instructed to teach the Russian language to a class of children in the fortress at Orenburg.¹⁷ This appointment marked, it seems, the beginning of a difficult period in Altynsarin's life; the school proper was not opened immediately, and in the intervening four years he was forced to teach children informally, as they came to him.¹⁸ Further, the posting in Orenburg placed him far from family members to whom he had economic and personal responsibilities, such that he repeatedly petitioned Grigor'ev to release him from his duties in favor of something closer to home, petitions that were either denied or, when approved, not realized owing to a lack of suitable replacements.¹⁹ (This long-standing problem was only fixed when, in 1863, Altynsarin took the step of moving his entire household west to the Turgai river, much closer to the Orenburg fortress.)²⁰ Despite these difficulties, the school was formally opened in 1864, and Altynsarin used Il'minskii's textbook of the Russian language (*Samouchitel' russkoi gramoty dlia kirgizov*), printed originally in the Arabic script, in his classroom, and continued to serve in this capacity for five years, until accepting a promotion in 1869 to the rank of clerk (*deloproizvoditel'*) in the

¹⁶ Dowler 32-40 (for biographical data on Il'minskii); 138 (on the meeting of Il'minskii and Altynsarin).

¹⁷ SSIA t. 1, 14-15; also see TsGA RK f. 4, op. 1, d. 2953, sv. 424, "O naznachenii zauriad-khorunzhego Altynsarina perevodchikom Orenburgskogo ukrepleniia," which indicates that Altynsarin was to serve, due to lack of personnel, both as a translator and teacher of Russian in the fortress in exchange for an augmented salary.

¹⁸ He complains, retrospectively, of this in a letter to Il'minskii dated 16 March 1864. See SSIA t. 3, 25.

¹⁹ TsGA RK f. 4, op. 1, d. 2953, sv. 424, l. 21 (Grigor'ev).

²⁰ *Ibid.*, ll. 51-51ob.

administration of Turgai uezd, formed under the new administrative divisions created by the Provisional Statute.²¹

Altynsarin's relationship with Il'minskii was so long-lasting, and Il'minskii's influence on the education of non-Russian nationalities in the second half of the 19th century so great, that it is worth pausing to consider Il'minskii's pedagogical ideas, ideas which were influential, though not definitive, for Altynsarin. Il'minskii, a conservative and devoutly Orthodox product of the Kazan' Ecclesiastical Academy, was a gifted linguist whose method of elementary education for the *inorodtsy* of the Volga basin and the steppe was based upon vernacular-language education of young pupils.²² Although it was common during his lifetime to speak of an "Il'minskii system," schools working according to his methods operated under the auspices of the Orthodox Church, state, and private institutions alike, out of Il'minskii's direct control.²³ These institutions shared an emphasis on vernacular-language instruction as a transition to study of Russian, a curriculum focused almost exclusively on moral and religious education (as opposed to academic knowledge), and a gradualist approach to missionary work among the non-Orthodox population of the Empire.²⁴ Indeed, Wayne Dowler argues that Il'minskii was not hopeful of the prospects of his schools winning converts from the convinced Muslims of Tatarstan; rather, he set out to prevent apostasy among the Baptized Tatars (*kriasheny*)

²¹ SSIA t. 3, 19; Dowler 38.

²² Isabelle Kreindler has argued that the creation of literary language from vernacular languages embodied by this method was a key forerunner of Soviet nationalities policy. See Kreindler, "A Neglected Source of Lenin's Nationality Policy," *Slavic Review* 36.1 (March 1977): 86-100. Mustafa Tuna counters that such continuity can be found precisely in the lack of control *inorodtsy* had over linguistic and educational reform under both regimes. See Tuna, "Gaspirali v. Il'minskii: Two Identity Projects for the Muslims of the Russian Empire," *Nationalities Papers* 30.2 (2002): 265-289, as well as "Imperial Russia's Muslims: Inroads of Modernity," Diss. Princeton University, 2009.

²³ Dowler 17.

²⁴ This sentence is drawn from Dowler, Chapter Two, "The Il'minskii Method" (41-61). In Russian, the distinction between moral upbringing and education in academic subjects is expressed by the words *vospitanie* and *obrazovanie* respectively.

and, more significantly for Altynsarin, expose “weakly Islamized groups like the Kazakhs...to the advantages of Russian civilization over Islamic culture and draw them into cultural alignment with Russians.”²⁵ The stress placed on vernacular-language education came to be important to Altynsarin’s pedagogical thinking, as well; however, where Il’minskii destabilized the Islamic component of Kazakh identity, Altynsarin considered it central, and further came to reject his mentor’s disdain for practical and scientific instruction in primary schools. Use of the vernacular language could serve, as we will see, vastly divergent visions of Russian governance, progress, and of the future of non-Slavic *inorodtsy*.

Working in the Turgai uezd administration for a decade following his appointment, Altynsarin also served as the assistant to the director of the Turgai school okrug from 1872 onward.²⁶ Observing and assessing the performance of Russo-Kazakh schools in the northern steppe, as well as social, legal, and economic conditions more broadly (in his role as a clerk, traveling frequently to compile official reports for oblast administrators), Altynsarin formed his own views of colonial governance, the state of the Kazakhs, and the role education was to play in their future.²⁷ The social and professional connections he formed during this period proved, in retrospect, important, particularly in a context where schools on the steppe were to increase in number (following the Regulations of 1870), but vernacular textbooks save for Il’minskii’s were absent. On the recommendation of his superior in the administration of Turgai uezd, the *uezd nachal’nik* (county head) Ia. P. Iakovlev, as well as of Il’minskii, to D. A. Tol’stoi, the Minister of

²⁵ Dowler 17.

²⁶ Dowler 139; Beisembiev 137.

²⁷ On the breadth of Altynsarin’s administrative activity in the 1870s, note that SSIA t. 3 contains ten reports to the Turgai oblast administration for 1872 alone, none of them concerning education (202-208).

Education and procurator of the Holy Synod, Altynsarin was promoted to inspector of schools for Turgai oblast in 1879, the same year that his *Kazakh Reader* (a textbook for Russo-Kazakh schools) was published.²⁸ Isabelle Kreindler notes that this position was unusually, even unprecedentedly high for an *inorodets* in tsarist Russia (implying both a high degree of influence in policy-making and that Russian and Orthodox bureaucrats were subordinate to him), and Altynsarin held it for a further decade, often tumultuous, until his death in 1889.²⁹

Altynsarin's life, of course, was far from being defined by state service, and several of his "extracurricular" activities are useful in understanding the specific meanings he came to attach to civilizational progress and Kazakhness. A sense of devotion to Islam (mixed with disdain for some of its practitioners on the steppe) pervades his correspondence, and he was committed enough to his faith to write and publish a vernacular-language guide to the fundamentals of Islam in 1884.³⁰ He briefly attempted to publish a newspaper in the Kazakh language and Cyrillic script, called *Kirgizskaia gazeta* (Kazakh newspaper), although only one issue ever seems to have appeared.³¹ Lastly, like Babadzhanov before him, Altynsarin was willing to embrace

²⁸ Iakovlev's recommendation is SSIA t. 3, 253-54; permission to publish the *Kazakh Reader* is in the same volume, 255-56.

²⁹ Isabelle Kreindler, "Ibrahim Altynsarin, Nikolai Il'minskii, and the Kazakh National Awakening," *Central Asian Survey* 2 (1983), 107.

³⁰ Searches in several libraries in Russia and Kazakhstan for the original text of this work, published at Kazan' in 1884, were fruitless, forcing me to consult instead a reprint, G. B. Mandybaeva, ed., *Musylmanshylyqyng tutqasy* (Almaty: "Qalamger," 1991). Here I am sharply opposing the tendentious claims of Soviet historians that Altynsarin was opposed to religion, a claim that was used to both cast Altynsarin as an ideal pre-revolutionary hero and fit him to the "secular enlightener" terminology used for both Chokan Valikhanov and Abai Qunanbaev (particularly inappropriately in the latter case). It is deeply mistaken to represent the anti-clerical or anti-Tatar rhetoric in Altynsarin's writings as anti-Islam; he understood a difference between what he viewed as corruptions of Islam perpetrated by traveling mullahs and the fundamentals of the faith. For an interpretation of Altynsarin as non-religious, even anti-religious, see B. S. Suleimenov's introduction to *I. Altynsarin: izbrannye proizvedeniia* (Alma-ata: izd-vo. Akademii nauk Kazakhskoi SSR, 1957), 15-18.

³¹ SSIA t. 2, 107-115.

economic change, even sedentarism, in his own life. Explaining his hesitancy to take a promotion, Altynsarin emphasized to Il'minskii that he did not want to be far from his household, "which [was] starting to get fame as one of the best in the steppe."³² This was not a household run entirely on mobile pastoralist principles, but one that relied on the storage of hay for animals in the winter, which in turn required the construction of some sort of permanent building for storage.³³ Further, in 1883, while serving as inspector of schools, Altynsarin constructed a permanent, immobile dwelling for his family on the outskirts of the uezd city of Kostanai. He would remain in residence here until his death.

Ibrai Altynsarin spent the majority of his professional life in milieux dominated by Russian colonial administrators. His formal education was meant to qualify him for a mid-level administrative post, with some authority over small groups of other Kazakhs, but little authority to influence policies and implement new ones of his own creation. Without a well-connected advisor and ideas that were very much in tune with the dominant metropolitan spirit of the times in educational and colonial policy, it is likely that he would not have risen as far as he did. Yet the external factors facilitating Altynsarin's advancement should not distract us from the substance and originality of his own work, not only in representing Kazakhs to colonial administrators but also in representing both Kazakhness and imperial governance to a second generation of Kazakh pupils. The vernacular-language educational system promoted by Grigor'ev, Il'minskii, and Tolstoi had as its goal the conversion of Muslims perceived to be wavering in their

³² SSIA t. 3, 41-42, letter to N. I. Il'minskii, 18 June 1877.

³³ Storage of hay was generally considered by Russian observers to be the first step en route from mobile pastoralism to sedentary agriculture. See Chapter Five.

faith to Christianity and, with this, their spiritual rapprochement with Russian colonists.³⁴ Altynsarin's project, while it reckoned with the realities of metropolitan control on the steppe, and indeed relied on financial and human support from colonial institutions, also rested on ideas of Kazakh identity that differed fundamentally from those that Il'minskii and others offered, while promoting a vision of the steppe's future largely independent from Russian agricultural settlement – a part of some visions of Russian imperialism as early as the 1850s, and widely considered to be necessary by the late 1870s. Education in colonial schools, for Altynsarin, did not mean that Kazakhs' Islamic identity was to be sacrificed, nor that state service was the only desirable goal to be pursued by graduates. Contesting the meaning of empire in ethnographic and administrative writings alike, Altynsarin expressed an ambivalent understanding of Kazakhness and Russian imperialism, refiguring both on terms that opposed the dominant discourses of his era, but assumed the long-term presence of Russian governance on the steppe.

Kazakhness for the Metropole: Ethnographies of the Steppe

The majority of Altynsarin's ethnographic work was not published directly in scholarly journals, but rather emerged in the collected sayings, proverbs and tales that filled his textbooks. However, he also published two ethnographic studies of Kazakhs in the *Zapiski* of the Orenburg division of IRGO, intended primarily for a learned metropolitan audience, which indicate both the image of the Kazakhs that he wished to present to the wider world and the limitations of what I described, in the previous

³⁴ It cannot be emphasized strongly enough that Altynsarin was far removed from any efforts to Christianize the steppe, despite claims made by, for example, Bhavna Dave, in *Kazakhstan: Ethnicity, Language, and Power* (New York: Routledge, 2007) 35.

chapter, as the power of self-representation for subaltern ethnographers.³⁵ These short articles were published at the beginning of his administrative career (written in 1867 and published in 1870), while working with the Border Commission of the Orenburg Department (*vedomstvo*), before the peak of his influence on educational affairs in the northern steppe. In these sketches, describing the wedding and burial rites of Kazakhs living around Orenburg, Altynsarin presented the Kazakhs as distinct from surrounding ethnicities, as well as their Muslim co-religionists outside of Eurasia, associating positive values with this distinctiveness and valorizing rituals seen as primitive or irrational by most metropolitan observers. His implicit authority to represent other Kazakhs was constrained not by another Kazakh, though, but by an ethnic Russian commentator and colleague of Altynsarin's in the Border Commission. This author, V. Plotnikov, challenged several of his claims. The relative unity that Altynsarin presented, Plotnikov argued, was illusory; in this case ethnicity was not the only, or even the primary, factor in the presentation of authority to represent ethnographic subjects.

Altynsarin's fundamental and implicit claim, in these two ethnographic sketches, was that the wedding and funereal customs he described constituted something uniquely Kazakh. Such an argument was never voiced explicitly, but embedded all the same in descriptions of what "the Kazakhs" (*kirgizy*) usually did or did not do in specific rituals.³⁶ He demonstrated this uniqueness by depicting certain practices as customary and

³⁵ From its founding in the 1870s, the Orenburg Division's *Notes* featured contributions from Kazakhs on a fairly regular basis, so Altynsarin's presence in this volume was not exceptional of itself – though the content of his writing, I contend, certainly was. See for example Sultan Seidalin 2-yi, "O razvitiu khlebopashstva po basseinu r. Turgaia," *Zapiski Orenburgskogo otdela Imperatorskogo Russkogo Geograficheskogo Obshchestva* (hereafter *ZOO*) 1 (Kazan': Universitetskaia tipografiia, 1870).

³⁶ In the wake of the national delimitation of Central Asia carried out by the Soviet Union, this language may seem unusual, but the Russian language of the 19th century referred to the groups known in English as "Kazakh" and "Kyrgyz" under the general ethnonym *Kirgiz*, at times specifying *Kirgiz-kaisak* and *Kara-kirgiz*, respectively, to distinguish between the two.

primordial, and attributing changes in them to the influence of non-Kazakhs living on the steppe. Although previously, he observed, “when the only rulers of social relations among the Kazakhs were customs and legends,” it had been common practice for close friends to promise their children to one another even before the child’s birth, this custom by the late 1860s was going out of fashion, “which can be related to some...influence of the neighboring peoples.”³⁷ The distinctiveness of Kazakh practices was further underlined by the distinction Altynsarin drew between his subjects and the global community of Muslims; he noted that, while Kazakhs had a strong taboo against marriage within seven degrees of kinship, such arrangements with close relatives “[were] observed among all Muslims besides the Kazakhs.”³⁸ Further, Kazakhs permitted a prospective bride and groom to spend the night together before the wedding day proper; while other Muslims forbade such “temptations before the wedding,” he wrote, “the Kazakhs have their own customs.”³⁹ Of course, such claims of themselves were far from nationalism, strictly speaking, and were in a sense consonant with other depictions of Kazakh piety as distinct from that of sedentary Muslims (Tatars and Uzbeks, principally) living around them – a fairly common argument among contemporary Russian observers. But Altynsarin was different from his metropolitan interlocutors in seeing such difference as positive, and drawing a line between Kazakhs and other Turks, or Kazakhs and other Muslims, was consonant with a career-long effort on his part to define the boundaries of Kazakh culture by what it was and what it was not.

³⁷ I. Altynsarin, “Ocherk obychaev, pri svatovstve i svad’be, u Kirgizov Orenburgskogo vedomstva” in *ZOO 1* (Kazan’: Universitetskaia tipografiia, 1870), 101.

³⁸ Altynsarin, “Svatovstve,” 104.

³⁹ *Ibid.*, 111.

Tension existed between universalistic, leveling claims about ethnicity and religion and the specificity of the communities to which Altynsarin referred, a point he acknowledged only sporadically. Though he referred in the titles of both sketches to “Kazakhs of the Orenburg *vedomstvo*” (i.e., predominantly of the Bukei and Small Hordes), this point receives no emphasis in the articles, implying that such differences as existed among the ritual cultures of the separate Kazakh hordes were not significant enough to militate against grouping them together. The practices Altynsarin observed would also not have characterized all Kazakhs of a region, but only the wealthiest among them; it defies credulity to think that every male Kazakh of the Orenburg Department was able to give fifty horses to his new daughter-in-law’s family on completion of the engagement.⁴⁰ Altynsarin was, on this latter point, more forthcoming about the limitations of his study, noting frequently that his descriptions referred to “more prosperous (*sostoiateľnyi*)” households.⁴¹ Still, other forms of wedding ritual were not described, as Plotnikov pointed out in his response to Altynsarin. In his discussion of funeral rituals (the second of the pair of ethnographic sketches), moreover, caveats about social standing are wholly absent. Absent further descriptions, the elaborate and costly set of rituals Altynsarin portrays appears somehow representative, for him, of Kazakh culture writ large, rather than the practices of a few wealthy people living near Orenburg.

Altynsarin represented this discrete Kazakh culture – distinct from its surroundings, although not wholly unified – for a predominantly Russian audience, imbuing practices unfamiliar to his readers with rational, comprehensible motivations.

⁴⁰ Ibid., 105. Indeed, according to the materials of the Expedition for Research of the Steppe Oblasts (1896-1903), ownership of fifty horses would have already signified a wealthy family. See Chapter Five for more on this expedition.

⁴¹ Ibid., 103, for example, pointing out that polygyny was only practiced by those able to pay the *kalym* (bride-wealth) for multiple wives.

Polygyny, according to this narrative, was not necessarily a remnant of barbaric patriarchy. Rather, considered from the perspective of his subjects, it was a logical step for those able to pursue it, whether because of the absence of romantic love for an arranged marriage partner or infertility.⁴² Moreover, taboos against marriage to close relations and strategically promising children to one another before their majority served, he claimed, a useful social function:

“Well-born (*znatnye*) Kazakhs always tried – and this is even done now – to marry to their son the daughter of other well-born people, only of a completely different section or clan. According to legends existing in the Horde, matchmaking of this type was prescribed by a certain khan Ishim, and Kazakh elders are convinced that this order was compiled not without farsighted intent, since its consequences, during peaceful times among the Kazakhs, brought the people benefit. And really, judging by the unusual influence on the Kazakhs of several biys (a title that exists even now) one can acknowledge that kinship (*rodstvo*) of the main or warring parties facilitated the establishment of mutual tranquility between the separate clans.”⁴³

What might have seemed exotic in the metropolitan gaze could be rational, for Altynsarin, and the subjects of colonial ethnography no less capable of creating lasting social structures than those who colonized them.⁴⁴ The explanations of ritual behavior he offered were not necessarily those his subjects would have provided, but he framed such behaviors in terms a scholarly, imperial Russian audience would have understood. At core, this was a complication of the essentialist claim that Kazakhs confronting the Russian Empire had to transform themselves, that the civilizational and cultural

⁴² Ibid., 103

⁴³ Ibid., 104.

⁴⁴ This was against a trend, not restricted to ethnic Russian observers, excoriating the economic irrationality of Kazakh feasting at marriage and funeral rites. Alikhan Bokeikhanov, a publicist, scientist and nationalist politician, would later excoriate a certain “Nurdzhanov” (a clearly Turkic surname) for arguing along these lines in *Turkestanские ведомости*. See Bokeikhanov, “O kirgizskikh pominkakh,” Zh. O. Artykbaev, ed., *Kazakhi: istoriko-etnograficheskie trudy* (Astana: “Altyn-kitap,” 2007) 251.

differences laid bare in the colonial encounter were not in the Kazakhs' favor. A similar argument underlay the educational policies he came to develop.

Yet to reduce Altynsarin's value judgments in these sketches exclusively to valorization of practices he identified as distinctively Kazakh is to miss the complexity of his argument. Rather, he exhibited a sense of selectivity, not blindly advocating the value of local practice for its own sake, but criticizing what he considered to be its excesses. The series of rituals leading to a wedding, complicated and occurring over an extended period of time, in his view provided a commonly-used opportunity for the bride's relatives to exploit the new groom: "A very natural wish – to see his fiancée at the first legal opportunity that presents itself – often compels the most prudent groom to agree to the most unscrupulous (*bessovestnye*) demands."⁴⁵ He lampooned, further, customs restricting the rights of new daughters-in-law in relation to their older male relatives, forbidding them from fully entering the homes of their husbands' relations or even pronouncing the names of the latter.⁴⁶ While Altynsarin made an argument for Kazakh distinctiveness, then, he did not blindly contend that this difference was positive; rather, he sets himself up in these ethnographic sketches as a thinking intermediary (as opposed to the passive observer more common in ethnographies of the era), representing what he considered both the internal logic and the deficiencies of his subjects to a scholarly audience. Although he did not explicitly claim authority as a cultural insider in these sketches, his name alone marked him as Turkic, Muslim, and hence connected to his subjects differently than a Russian ethnographer. The version of Kazakhness he presented here was unique and rational, but also open to improvement from without; as

⁴⁵ Ibid., 108-9.

⁴⁶ Ibid., 116.

an educator, he would carry this basic idea forward. Most importantly, he tacitly assumes in this text the right to actively interpret the steppe for the metropole, to define its culture and shape the way it is known.

However, Altynsarin's representational project did not go unchallenged; in the same journal in which his articles appeared, an ethnic Russian scholar with whom he worked in the Border Commission, V. Plotnikov, argued against several of his claims. Plotnikov's critique, while it focused on minor details, emphasized the diversity of Kazakh practices rather than the unity that Altynsarin's general sketch implied. Kazakh culture, he claimed, was so varied and irregular that creating a general sketch of its ritual life was impossible, since "there are [among the Kazakhs] so many deviations from the core wedding rules that there can hardly be found among them people who fulfill them precisely."⁴⁷ This variation, for Plotnikov, was chiefly among the various Kazakh hordes; he noted for instance that a specific step of the payment of bride-wealth was perhaps observed among the Middle Horde, but not the Small.⁴⁸ Recent rapid changes to living conditions on the steppe also played a role in this inconvenient diversity, as Plotnikov also argued that several of the practices Altynsarin mentioned were no longer observed anywhere. Most telling in what appears at first to be an isolated and disinterested scholarly dispute is the way Plotnikov frames his critique of an article for which he otherwise expresses admiration: "[Errors] happened likely because...Mr. Altynsarin wrote his article as a general sketch of the Kazakh wedding, *not having a scientific goal in mind.*"⁴⁹ A "scientific" sketch of Kazakh rituals, for Plotnikov, would

⁴⁷ V. Plotnikov, "Zametki na stat'iu g. Altynsarina 'Ocherk Kirgizskikh obychaev pri svatovstve i svad'be,'" *ZOO 1* (Kazan': Universitetskaia tipografiia, 1870), 122-23.

⁴⁸ *Ibid.*, 127.

⁴⁹ *Ibid.*, 122, italics added.

have gone into finer detail, not eliding small differences for the sake of making a broad interpretive point; the issue, then, was with Altynsarin's decision to subjectively choose certain practices as representative rather than passively report what he saw. In arguing this way, Plotnikov denies the claim that Altynsarin, as a cultural insider, is best positioned to represent the steppe for a scholarly audience; disciplinary ideals of objectivity are given pride of place over local knowledge, subjectively framed. This is significant of a larger trend in Altynsarin's career, whereby his efforts to define Kazakh culture were subject to contestation; belonging to the group he wished to represent was not, of itself, necessarily considered a sufficient qualification to do so. Altynsarin the author was free, to a point, to depict the Kazakhs as he wished, but the realities of colonial power meant both that not all ethnographies of the steppe were taken equally seriously, and that Altynsarin had to concern himself with their reception.

As an administrator, Ibrai Altynsarin wrote many reports intended for an official, non-Kazakh audience, but these early ethnographic sketches represent his only known attempt to do so for a scholarly audience. Presenting a general portrait of Kazakh ritual practices as representative, he implicitly engaged in a selective process. Questions lurk beneath the surface of his articles – why, and of what, are these practices representative? The answer to the first is unstated; the rituals described are representative, it is implied, because Altynsarin chose them, a claim which the commentator Plotnikov denied. The second question was one that Altynsarin addressed, in different ways, for his entire career. Without arguing the point directly, he claimed that the rituals he described were characteristic of an ethnic group distinct from those surrounding it and, while not without flaws, or necessarily hostile to outside influences, possessing a logical and organized

social structure. As pressure to Russify the steppe heightened during the later years of Altynsarin's career, such claims took on increased significance.⁵⁰ Imperial Russian scholars and bureaucrats were not, however, the only audience for Altynsarin's selection and interpretation of Kazakh culture; as an educator he was also interested in defining the meaning and limits of Kazakhness – a sense of distinctiveness stopping short of nationalism – for other Kazakhs.

Kazakhness for Kazakhs: The *Kirgizskaia Khrestomatiia*

Published in Cyrillicized Kazakh in 1879, Altynsarin's *Kirgizskaia khrestomatiia* (*Kazakh Reader*) was his pedagogical masterwork, a collection of riddles, poems and stories commissioned to serve as introductory material in Russo-Kazakh schools, bilingual institutions, which, by providing language training and a basic general education, were oriented toward the creation of a group of Russophone Kazakhs for imperial service.⁵¹ Its compilation fit within a broader official trend, in the face of opposition from Russian nationalists, recognizing the necessity of native-language education alongside the teaching of the Russian language in primary schools with a predominantly non-Russian population, dating to the School Regulations of 1870.⁵² The institutional and personal circumstances under which this primer was written were important, as officials within the Ministry of Education (MNP), as well as Altynsarin's

⁵⁰ It has been widely noted that intensified Russification of areas populated by non-dominant national groups was a signal characteristic of the late imperial period of Russian history. See e.g. Willard Sunderland, "The Ministry of Asiatic Russia: The Colonial Office That Never Was But Might Have Been," *Slavic Review* 69.1 (Spring 2010) for an emphasis on the pairing of Russification and colonization, particularly relevant for the steppe oblasts; this shift also plays a significant role in Paul Werth, *At the Margins of Orthodoxy: Mission, Governance and Confessional Politics in Russia's Volga-Kama Region* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell UP, 2002). The pre-history of this shift in imperial Russian culture, across the political spectrum, is masterfully explored in Olga Maiorova, *From the Shadow of Empire: Defining the Russian Nation through Cultural Mythology, 1855-1870* (Madison, WI: University of Wisconsin Press, 2010).

⁵¹ *Khrestomatiia* is directly translated as "chrestomathy," a selection of literary passages used in teaching foreign languages. I use "reader" as a less clumsy means of communicating this meaning.

⁵² Dowler 76.

close friend N. I. Il'minskii (a proponent of native-language education, orientalist, and Orthodox seminarian) exerted an influence over the form it ultimately took.⁵³ Still, while Altynsarin was constrained enough in his preparation of the work that we should not be overly credulous in discussing its presentation and framing, the *Khrestomatiia* was also an important part of his efforts to define and shape Kazakh culture. Presenting to Kazakh pupils the essentials of their language and “spirit” not as lived experience, but as academic subjects, Altynsarin communicated a sense of community and distinctiveness to them; selecting the texts he considered to best suit his educational goals, he hinted at what specifically made his pupils unique.

The choice of Cyrillic printing for the Kazakh-language text of Altynsarin’s primer has been taken by Soviet commentators as proof of the existence of the “friendship of peoples” *avant la lettre*.⁵⁴ Such arguments, however, do not reckon with the circumstances under which the work was produced. As early as 1860, the geographer and orientalist V. V. Grigor’ev advised Il'minskii to print his Kazakh-language textbook of Russian grammar in Cyrillic rather than Arabic letters, advice that Il'minskii ignored at the time, but later came to consider correct.⁵⁵ A Cyrillic alphabet for Kazakh had existed before Altynsarin composed the *Khrestomatiia*, and publishing native-language educational materials for *inorodtsy* in this script was official MNP policy by the time he wrote. Meanwhile, Altynsarin had expressed doubts about the practical utility of the Cyrillic script – much better suited, with modifications, to Turkic sound systems than

⁵³ For a detailed account of Il'minskii’s dual role as an educator and proselytizer among the Muslims of the Volga basin and the Kazakh steppe, see Michael Johnson, “Imperial Commission or Orthodox Mission: Nikolai Il'minskii’s Work Among the Tatars of Kazan’, 1862-1891,” Diss. University of Illinois-Chicago, 2005.

⁵⁴ M. Auezov et al., eds., *Istoriia Kazakhskoi SSR* v. 1 (Alma-ata: izd-vo. Akademii Nauk Kazakhskoi SSR, 1957).

⁵⁵ Dowler 38.

Arabic, but clearly marked as alien – for pedagogy to Il'minskii almost a decade before composing his primer, and never fully accepted the idea.⁵⁶ He published this primer in Cyrillic letters, in short, because this was among the conditions his employers required of him, rather than out of some deep conviction regarding the coming rapprochement of Russians and Kazakhs.

Not all of the framing of the *Kazakh Reader*, though, can be so easily brushed aside as instrumental. Indeed, the complicated balancing act he attempts between pragmatic gradualism and a sense of Kazakh distinctiveness in this work is emblematic of his entire career. Tatar literary culture features prominently in the introductory essay as a foil for Altynsarin's project; while he was a devout Muslim and far from the virulent paranoia about the cultural and political threat represented by Tatar mullahs that characterized many Russian administrators in Central Asia, a sense of hesitancy about it remains clear.⁵⁷ The Tatar literary language, he complained, was “neglected” (*prenebregaemyi*) by Tatar scholars and “filled therefore with Arabo-Persian words,” thus making it “incomprehensible for illiterate Kazakhs.”⁵⁸ Meanwhile, no books whatsoever had been published in the Kazakh language (a rhetorical exaggeration, as Il'minskii's own *Samouchitel'* was also in the Kazakh vernacular), meaning that teachers and students had been forced to go over to Tatar, “ignoring in this way their native dialect (*narechie*), in no respect worse than Tatar.”⁵⁹ Altynsarin's correspondence with Il'minskii makes it clear that his interest in setting a boundary between the Tatar and

⁵⁶ SSIA t. 3, 30-32, letter to N. I. Il'minskii, 31 August 1871. More than a decade later, Altynsarin argued that it would be better to publish a second volume of the *Kazakh Reader* in Arabic script. See SSIA t. 1, 94, letter to V. V. Katarinskii, 1 April 1883.

⁵⁷ For a sense of Russian administrative paranoia about Jadidism as an irredentist, Tatarizing movement, see for example TsGA RK, f. 369, op. 1, d. 780, sv. 185, “O literaturno-obshchestvennom i nationalno-religiozno dvizhenii sredi kazakhskogo naseleniia,” *passim*.

⁵⁸ Ibrahim Altynsarin, *Kirgizskaia khrestomatiiia*, 2nd ed. (Orenburg: tip-lit. B. A. Breslina, 1906) III.

⁵⁹ *Ibid.*, III.

Kazakh languages was practical, rather than ideologically driven. He wrote, very early in their correspondence, that while Il'minskii was in a constant battle against the Tatar literary language's tendency to absorb non-Turkic loan words, "It seems to me, however, that it will not be a problem to incorporate into Kazakh letters (*pis'mena*) several Persian or Arabic words, when in the current Kazakh language we do not find the necessary word. In this conviction I use them in some of my Kazakh writings."⁶⁰ Further, he emphasized, the Tatar language and Arabic script defined the pre-existing literary and religious culture on the steppe, and as such could not simply be wished away; as a practical matter, they would have to remain in use.⁶¹ Still, while his views on the pace and purpose of de-Tatarizing Kazakh schools may have differed from Il'minskii's, there is little doubt that Altynsarin came to see doing so as desirable, later writing to a colleague that most of his Kazakh acquaintances reported that "Tatar primers are not comprehensible for their children."⁶² In short, despite his gradualism, the institutional and personal circumstances framing Altynsarin's composition of the *Kazakh Reader* are not sufficient reasons to discount his presentation of the book as opposed to a literary culture to which Kazakhs had been frequently and erroneously ascribed.

Indeed, having defined the Kazakh language and literary culture by what they were not (i.e., non-Tatar), Altynsarin went on to argue that a primer devoted exclusively to them was valuable for several reasons. He sought to exert a moral and practical influence on his readers, since "the Kazakh people is uncorrupted, and its strivings are not restricted to a narrow framework [i.e., not restricted to religious questions alone]; it

⁶⁰ SSIA v. 1, 23, letter of Altynsarin to Il'minskii, sometime in 1862.

⁶¹ SSIA v. 1, 30-31, letter of Altynsarin to Il'minskii, 31 August 1871.

⁶² SSIA v. 1, 79, letter of Altynsarin to Il'minskii, 12 September 1882.

thinks freely.”⁶³ Tatar, in this formulation, was depicted as the language of dry religious formalism, unsuited to the scientific and administrative tasks Altynsarin hoped lay in his students’ future. Moreover, it was alien to the experiences of the Kazakhs who were the intended consumers of Altynsarin’s primer. Decrying the lack of other Kazakh-language educational materials, he framed his text in part as a call to other scholars, expressing the hope that

“Consciousness will be aroused among other, more educated fellow-countrymen of mine that our people badly needs now scholarly textbooks in its native language, and that each of our duties is to do our small part (*prinesti posil’ nuiu leptu*) for the good of our homeland (*rodina*), still ignorant, but not spoiled by any hostile element and receptive (*vospriimchivoi*) towards everything that is useful.”⁶⁴

Here Altynsarin expresses a sense both of a unique and distinct homeland, an in-group whose interests are separate from others surrounding it, possessing its own language, and a sense that the culture of this in-group could be “spoiled” by outside influences. This idea of distinctiveness, in turn, substantiated claims that pre-existing textbooks were not up to the tasks of educating Kazakhs. In compiling his reader, Altynsarin claimed that his guiding principle was that “the tales in the book were predominantly in the spirit of the Kazakhs,” necessitating care in their selection.⁶⁵ In such a formulation, Altynsarin’s own role in communicating to Kazakh pupils what their “spirit” consisted of was both crucial and *sotto voce*. His selection of texts as appropriate or inappropriate defined, for his pupils, conceptions of “useful” knowledge and Kazakhness alike even as he framed his project as capturing a pre-existing idea of Kazakh identity.

⁶³ Altynsarin, *Khrestomatiia*, III.

⁶⁴ *Ibid.*, IV.

⁶⁵ *Ibid.*

Much of the content of the *Kazakh Reader* (the final three sections, comprising half of the book) consisted of Kazakh-language songs, poems, proverbs and riddles, the latter collected by Altynsarin over the course of a decade of administrative service, spent traveling around Turgai uezd.⁶⁶ Some of the poems included were the product of similar, folkloristic collection and observation, while Altynsarin composed others purposefully for primary education. The choice and transcription of all of these examples of oral literature inherently involved creating the appearance of lexical, grammatical, and cultural regularity where none had previously existed, placing all under the broader heading of “native language”.⁶⁷ This could take two forms. First, Altynsarin’s lexical choices were significant; for example, he used *dadandyq*, a word characteristic of the region around Kostanai in the northern steppe (where he spent his career), to connote moral ignorance or illiteracy, rather than the forms *nadandyq* or *sauatsyzdyq* used in the south and east.⁶⁸ Second, choices in pronunciation favored the region with which Altynsarin was most familiar – hence *patsa* instead of *patsha* (tsar or ruler), or *keshkentai* instead of *kishkentai* (small).⁶⁹ Not in vain, then, in 1884 did a group of Kazakhs publish, in the newspaper *Orenburgskii listok*, a letter hailing Altynsarin’s work as “just as important as [that] of Lomonosov for Russia.”⁷⁰ Collecting everyday speech and oral literature and, most critically, presenting them to Kazakhs as subjects to be learned, Altynsarin laid the beginnings of the standardization of the Kazakh language. The sense

⁶⁶ Zh. O. Artykbaev, *Ibrai Altynsarin: etnograficheskie ocherki i obraztsy ustnogo tvorchestva* (Astana: “Altyn-kitap,” 2007) 132.

⁶⁷ By way of analogy, see Adrienne Lynn Edgar, *Tribal Nation: The Making of Soviet Turkmenistan* (Princeton: Princeton UP, 2004), especially Chapter Five, “Dueling Dialects: The Creation of a Turkmen Language,” concerning the conflicts that arose when attempts were made to create a standard language from several local lexical variants among another Turkic pastoralist people of Central Asia.

⁶⁸ Altynsarin, *Khrestomatiia*, VII; for the dialect reference see Sh. Sarybaev and E. Nurmaghambetov, eds., *Qazaq tilining dialektologiyalyq sozdigi*, v. 1 (Almaty: “Ghylym,” 1996) 155.

⁶⁹ Altynsarin, *Khrestomatiia*, 3 (*patsa*) and 6 (*keshkentai*).

⁷⁰ SSIA, t. 3, 308, “O znachenii Altynsarina dlia kirgizov v literaturnom otnoshenii.”

of primordial distinctiveness that pervades the introduction to the *Khrestomatia* was, in fact, something that Altynsarin played a pivotal role in creating.

Distinctiveness, however, is not nationalism, and a deeper look into the *Kazakh Reader* reveals the complex relationship in Altynsarin's mind between Kazakhness and Russian colonial governance, as well as between Kazakhness and metropolitan culture. Several of the stories in the *Reader*, although sometimes slightly changed, were borrowed directly from the didactic tales of Russian fabulists such as I. A. Krylov and, especially, I. I. Paul'son, an innovative pedagogue who developed a reader for Russian primary schools in 1871; others were created by Altynsarin for the volume.⁷¹ The changes that Altynsarin made were minor – for example, eliminating Paul'son's original setting of a village (*gorodok*) in the story “*Dadandyq*” (“Ignorance”), since there were few permanent Kazakh settlements in Turgai oblast; the lessons, intended for an empire-wide audience, remained.⁷² The lessons of these short stories were fairly simple. “A Mouse's Advice,” for example (“*Tyshqannyng osiety*”), promoted respect for one's elders, while “Ignorance” lampooned charlatans in the religious and medical professions, and “Politeness” (“*Adep*”) highlighted the importance of a respectful demeanor and good etiquette regardless of social station.⁷³ All of these seem standard lessons for primary education, but present little in the way of practical or scientific knowledge – they are fundamentally arguments for either basic morality or the value of education itself.

Altynsarin's own exhortations to his pupils were broadly similar. One pair of poems

⁷¹ Paul'son's reader is I. I. Paul'son, *Kniga dlia chteniia i prakticheskikh uprazhnenii v russkom iazyke: uchebnoe posobie dlia narodnykh uchilishch* (Moscow: tip. S. Orlova, 1872). On Paul'son's progressive methodologies in *zemstvo* schools, see Ben Eklof, *Russian Peasant Schools: Officialdom, Village Culture, and Popular Pedagogy, 1861-1914* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1986) 77. On the sources of the *Kirgizskaia Khrestomatia*, see SSIA t. 1, 342.

⁷² On the changes, see the notes to extracts from the *Kirgizskaia Khrestomatia* in SSIA t. 1, 338-343.

⁷³ These three stories can be found in the original Kazakh in the *Khrestomatia* on pp. 10, 49-53, and 39 respectively; Russian translations are in SSIA t. 1, pp. 146, 98-102, and 140.

outlined the qualities of moral and immoral rulers, while another group of “exhortations” (*osiet*) called readers to be charitable, if rich, and honest and hard-working, if poor.⁷⁴ Further, the text proper began with an untitled poem by Altynsarin (referred to under the title “Enlightenment” in later Russian editions) outlining the benefits of learning to his readers, appealing to them first on the level of personal interest: “The literate person knows life in all its beauty/The literate person can achieve his dreams/Your fathers and mothers want only one thing/to see in each of you a knowledgeable person.”⁷⁵ He closed, however, with a call to collective action: “We grew old in blind ignorance/Brought little good for our people...What we gray elders could not do/You now must achieve, you rising blades of grass!”⁷⁶ The *Kazakh Reader* was thus meant as a textbook to instill in students the moral qualities, including consciousness of the worth of education, required for advanced study in the future.

This sort of moral and ethical education, for Altynsarin, was vital to Kazakhs’ functioning within the cultural, political, and administrative world that Russian colonialism created on the steppe. Even in his early years as a translator and teacher in the fortress at Orenburg, he emphasized in his correspondence with Il’minskii the teacher’s role in shaping pupils’ behavior and ethical outlook.⁷⁷ As an administrator, he had blamed “moral underdevelopment” (*nравstvennoe nedorazvitie*) on the Kazakhs’ part for many of the practical failings of the Provisional Statute of 1868, expressing a sense that if Kazakhs were not inherently unsuited for the changes this statute brought about,

⁷⁴ *Khrestomatiia* 84, 116-120.

⁷⁵ *Ibid.*, VIII; SSIA, t. 1, 54

⁷⁶ *Khrestomatiia* IX-X; SSIA, t. 1, 55

⁷⁷ See SSIA t. 1, 14 (letter to N. I. Il’minskii, 19 January 1861) and *ibid.*, 25 (letter to N. I. Il’minskii, 16 March 1864).

they were certainly unprepared for them.⁷⁸ This underdevelopment was all the more correctible, in Altynsarin's mind, because, as he argued a decade later, Russians and Kazakhs shared "a certain similarity of their moral order [*nравstvennyi stroi*]."⁷⁹ The conclusion he drew on the basis of this assumption was striking:

"One should seek the true method towards rapprochement of the Kazakh people with Russians in exerting a moral influence... The spread of Russian education, among other things, among the Kazakhs, indicating to the people the obvious advantages of rapprochement, will help this."⁸⁰

Morality is an ambiguous category in Altynsarin's writings, but the overwhelming sense that emerges is that the moral and ethical lessons that filled the *Kazakh Reader* were meant to bring Kazakhs closer to the advancing wave of Russian colonists, to shape them in a way that would help them function within new legal and physical circumstances. Paradoxically, in Altynsarin's mind it took educational materials formulated with consciousness of the distinctiveness of Kazakh language and culture to shape his pupils and readers into people equipped to bear the same rights, privileges and duties as colonists from the inner guberniias of the Empire. Altynsarin's sense of Kazakhness, in other words, was not at odds with a concept of subjecthood based on moral and civil, rather than ethnic, criteria.

The plans for Altynsarin's second volume of the *Kazakh Reader*, partially completed but never published, show more clearly the compromise he attempted between the specificity of local conditions and knowledge mediated through metropolitan culture. If the first volume had focused mainly on moral and ethical issues, the second was to

⁷⁸ SSIA, t. 2, 38-39, "O vremennom polozhenii ob upravlenii v stepnykh oblastiakh 1868 g." The Provisional Statute, Virginia Martin has argued, continued a process of "imposing settled models of social and political organization on the nomads" that had begun with Speranskii's creation of local administrative institutions in 1822. See Martin, *Law and Custom in the Steppe: The Kazakhs of the Middle Horde and Colonialism in the Nineteenth Century* (Richmond: Curzon, 2001).

⁷⁹ SSIA, t. 2, 104, "Po povodu goloda v kirgizskoi stepi."

⁸⁰ Ibid.

introduce what Altynsarin considered to be the information most practically useful for a new generation of state servitors, entrepreneurs, teachers, and agriculturalists, all drawn from the Kazakh population of the northern steppe. A year after completion of the first volume, he wrote to V. V. Katarinskii, the inspector of the Orenburg School okrug, “I intend to give as complete and fundamental understanding as possible about natural history, geography, history, a little chemistry, physics, technical productions... [The second volume] will change much in the steppe, if it is used well.”⁸¹ If suitable textbooks on these subjects were unavailable in the local language, Altynsarin considered it his duty to compile one himself. At the same time, all of this general knowledge, even if published in the Kazakh language, was to be filtered through the metropole. In an 1884 official report on the state of education in Turgai oblast, Altynsarin argued that proficiency in written and spoken Russian was important for Kazakh pupils not only in the sense of encouraging their economic rapprochement with settlers, but as a means of “borrowing... [settlers’] scientific and practical knowledge.”⁸² Volume Two of the *Kazakh Reader*, then, was only the first step in a much longer process of acquiring the knowledge that only the metropole was depicted as possessing; ultimately, Kazakhs who wished to pass beyond the fundamentals would have to learn Russian, ideally (in Altynsarin’s mind) in a Russo-Kazakh school. In some cases (chemistry, for instance) his assessment that advanced study was only practically available in Russian was probably true to life. In other fields, though, especially history, the selection criteria by which he operated were clearer. Several Kazakh-language historical poems were in the first volume of the *Reader*, but for the second volume, Altynsarin complained to

⁸¹ SSIA t. 1, 60, letter to V. V. Katarinskii, 7 April 1880.

⁸² SSIA t. 2, 193, “Zapiski na imia voennogo gubernatora Turgaiskoi obl., ‘O vvedenii professionalno-tekhnicheskogo obucheniia v dvukhklassnykh rusko-kazakhskikh shkolakh.’”

Il'minskii that "it would be necessary to include something about the history of the Kazakhs proper, materials for which I cannot find anywhere; even Levshin and Vel'iaminov-Zernov's works I found nowhere."⁸³ This, then, was not a matter of selecting any kind of historical material for the *Reader*, but rather narratives with a scholarly gloss, based on archival documentation, thus privileging metropolitan ways of knowing over local. Yet for all his privileging of non-local ways of apprehending the world, Altynsarin also came to contest, while compiling the second volume, the MNP dogma of publishing textbooks exclusively in the Cyrillic script, writing to Katarinskii in 1883, "once more I stop on the thought that it would be necessary to print [the reader] in Arabic letters."⁸⁴ Even a textbook intended to produce good imperial servitors, and strongly valorizing non-steppe forms of knowledge, then, had to be adapted to local tastes to be effective – even if this adaptation clashed with other prerogatives of the colonial administration.⁸⁵

To the administrators who commissioned it, Altynsarin represented the *Kazakh Reader* as a means to encourage Kazakh pupils' facility with Russian letters, train them morally, and entice some to further study of the Russian language, proficiency in which would enable them to study at higher levels and enter state service. Such a presentation seems contradictory in light of Altynsarin's representation, throughout the *Reader*, of Kazakh language and culture as unique, different from those of other communities on the steppe; this emphasis on Kazakh distinctiveness, captured in a textbook meant to be

⁸³ SSIA t. 1, 108-9, letter to N. I. Il'minskii, 30 September 1884.

⁸⁴ SSIA t. 1, 94, letter to V. V. Katarinskii, 1 April 1883. There are later indications, most notably in an 1884 letter to Il'minskii (SSIA t. 1, 108-9) that Altynsarin was persuaded to use the Cyrillic script for this volume, but his attempt to eschew it is suggestive.

⁸⁵ Altynsarin also argued, roughly contemporaneously, that Arabic script, rather than Cyrillic, gave texts an appearance more familiar and comfortable even for a mostly illiterate population. See the discussion of his *Musylmanshylyqtyng tutqasy* (*The Pillar of Islam*) below.

attuned to their own “spirit,” has led some observers to label Altynsarin as an important part of the rise of Kazakh nationalism. Altynsarin, however, did not understand cultural distinctiveness and service to the imperial state as contradictory, and the rise of Kazakh nationalism would have been an unintended consequence for him. His pedagogical principles were expressly intended to operate within a framework of expanding Russian power on the steppe, even if his pragmatic attitudes towards local culture and conception of moral education diverged sharply from those of his mentors and administrative superiors. Actively interpreting both the limits and meaning of Kazakh identity and the significance of Russian colonialism on the steppe, Altynsarin expressed a unique understanding of both in the *Kazakh Reader*. If ethnic particularism and imperial subjecthood were not mutually exclusive, for him, neither did he passively accept the most readily available understandings of what subjecthood meant.

Islam and Kazakhness: *The Pillar of Islam (Musylmanshylyqtyng Tutqasy)*

Indeed, another cherished moral-educational project of Altynsarin’s was diametrically opposed to the proselytizing spirit of the Il’minskii schools, although still suffused with a sense of Kazakh uniqueness. This was a slender volume compiling the fundamentals of the Islamic faith, printed in Kazakh (Arabic script) in 1884, entitled *Musylmanshylyqtyng tutqasy (The Pillar of Islam)*. Presenting Islam as an academic subject to be studied, Altynsarin consciously separated the material he presented from the lived experience of Islam on the steppe; the *Pillar* was intended to save Islam among the Kazakhs from dangerous corruption associated principally with non-Kazakh teachers from neighboring sedentary societies. This was, however, less an argument against external religious impositions and more an effort to reform Islamic practice by making its

tenets understandable for any Kazakh who wished to study them; the problem with “Tatar fanaticism” was not that it was Tatar *per se* but that it was far from what Altynsarin claimed were the fundamentals of the faith. This brand of reformed Islam, further, was represented as particularly friendly to imperial governance. To be a Kazakh, for Altynsarin, was to be a good Muslim; to be a good Muslim was to focus on the content, rather than form, of prayers and rituals, and to remain open to secular knowledge as mediated through the educational institutions and common language of the metropole.⁸⁶

In his description of the *Pillar to Il’minskii*, much like in his early ethnographies of Kazakh ritual behavior, Altynsarin opposed its content to the practices of other Muslim ethnic groups influential on the steppe. Although the Kazakhs had long been eager to better learn the tenets of their religion, he claimed (at least since Russian administration had, in his interpretation, put an end to internecine warfare), colonial administrators had failed to provide adequate facilities for doing so.⁸⁷ Into this breach had stepped Tatar and “Bukharan” (of indistinct ethnicity, but coming from Turkestan) mullahs, aided by the similarity of their language and commonality of religious confession with the Kazakhs. Such neglect on the part of the colonial state had, in Altynsarin’s mind, several severe consequences. The lack of a systematic approach to religious education on the part of travelling mullahs meant, he argued, that “students of Tatar medresses, having studied

⁸⁶ This discussion of the content, as opposed to the form, of religious ritual echoes Boris Uspenskii’s semiotic analysis of the rise of Old Belief in 17th century Muscovy. See Uspenskii, “The Schism and Cultural Conflict in the Seventeenth Century,” *Seeking God: The Recovery of Religious Identity in Orthodox Russia, Ukraine, and Georgia*, ed. Stephen K. Batalden (DeKalb, IL: Northern Illinois UP, 1993), 106-33.

⁸⁷ SSIA t. 1, 77, letter to N. I. Il’minskii, 12 September 1882. Among contemporary scholars, Allen Frank dates an “Islamic transformation” on the steppe to 1742, attributing direct agency in this to the Tatars Altynsarin identifies, but also portraying it as an unintended consequence of Russian imperialism in the steppe and Volga basin. See Allen Frank, “Islamic Transformation on the Kazakh Steppe, 1742-1917: Towards an Islamic History of Kazakhstan under Russian Rule,” *The Construction and Deconstruction of National Histories in Slavic Eurasia*, ed. Tadayuki Hayashi (Sapporo: Slavic Research Center, 2003), 261-289.

according to the existing leadership over the course of several years, all the same remain completely ignorant in relation to their religion, but only lacking tolerance for everything that is not Muslim.”⁸⁸ Such teachings, he claimed, were not only harmful to Russian interests on the steppe (a common enough complaint among colonial administrators) but themselves un-Islamic, since Muslim law “nowhere refuses the need to teach secular sciences, whichever people they emerged from.”⁸⁹ Altynsarin was thus interested in making two critiques of Islam on the steppe. While he deployed the rhetoric of ethnicity (opposition to “Tatar Islam”), though, he was more concerned with re-orienting Islam more broadly in light of new scholarly developments and, as he understood it, rational judgment.

These mutually-reinforcing critiques emerge in Altynsarin’s descriptions of Islamic charitable offerings (*gushur* and *ziakat*), published in the first edition of *Kirgizskaia gazeta*. Altynsarin described *gushur* as a practice whereby “according to holy writ of Muslim law, each grain cultivator is obligated on completion of the harvest to give a tenth part of all the grain he gathered exclusively to the poorest people...or those who constantly study religion.”⁹⁰ Originating on the Arabian Peninsula, the practice had come to Bukhara and Khiva during the successful military campaigns of Qutayba ibn Muslim in the 8th century CE, and spread from there to the Kazakhs migrating along the Syr-Darya river, often under Bukharan or Khivan suzerainty and adopting the Muslim faith, “although not with great precision (*so vsei tochnost’iu*).”⁹¹ Altynsarin devoted this article to criticism of the practice of *gushur*, less because it was

⁸⁸ SSIA, t. 1, 77-78.

⁸⁹ Ibid., 78.

⁹⁰ SSIA t. 2, 115. Pastoralists, Altynsarin noted, were permitted to pay the charitable tax in livestock.

⁹¹ Ibid.

alien to the Kazakhs (although they had adopted it late) and more because it was, owing to changing economic conditions along the Syr-Darya, no longer rational, failing to serve the purpose for which it was intended. The Kazakhs of this region, he argued, had ceased making donations to the poor and scholarly, rather paying a tenth of their income to local garrisons in case of attack – a reasonable decision in light of a series of raids that had occurred throughout the 1830s and ‘40s.⁹² But most of the collection remained in the hands of those who collected it. Meanwhile, with the establishment of a Russian fortification at the village of Raim (on the Syr-Darya),

“the mutually hostile activities of the Kazakhs migrating on the right side of the Syr-Darya, and equally raids on them on the part of Kazakhs (*ordyntsy*) living beyond the Syr – Khivan and Karakalpak gangs, have already almost totally ceased. Thus the existence of the *gushur* collection brings no use whatsoever to the natives, and its destruction would be very useful to the people, for the total sum of the collection is significant.”⁹³

Traditions, in this telling, were constantly changing with the world around them, and clinging to them after they had surpassed their utility only created opportunities for exploitation. His description of *zakat* (alms-giving), on the other hand, one of the five pillars of the Islamic faith, was much more laconic, quoting directly from the Koran and the *shariat* codified by Dzhanger, late khan of the Bukei Horde.⁹⁴ The concern, in this latter case, seems to have been that vital rituals were being carried out incorrectly or ignorantly. The article was verified by and supplemented with notes from mullahs with names that were not obviously Kazakh (and more likely Tatar, such as Nigmatulla and Gabdulrahimov), indicating that, while Islam was central to Altynsarin’s thinking about Kazakhness, he did not see Kazakh Islam as entirely disconnected from a broader

⁹² SSIA t. 2, 116-17.

⁹³ Ibid., 117.

⁹⁴ Ibid., 118-124.

community of believers. Uneducated Tatar and “Bukharan” mullahs were associated with undesirable innovations and “fanaticism,” but the well-trained had a role to play in the spread of information about correct Islamic ritual and practice around the steppe.

Indeed, the purpose of the *Pillar* was to distribute such “correct” information, as opposed to incorrect observance or non-observance of rituals and correct behaviors, in the vernacular language. The book itself consisted of four sections, in which were explained the confession of faith (*shahada*), the five actions obligatory for all Muslims, and other moral prohibitions and recommendations; it also included translations into Kazakh and explanations of Arabic prayers for a variety of special occasions.⁹⁵ While the content of the work was not especially novel, the form in which it was presented was significant. According to the precepts of Hanafi jurisprudence (by far the most common among the Sunni Muslims of Central Asia), it is obligatory to complete all prayers in Arabic.⁹⁶ Altynsarin’s translations, then, could not have been intended for use in rituals proper – at any rate, the Arabic texts would have been familiar, by virtue of repetition, to anyone with minimal religious education – but were rather produced in the conviction that it was important for believers to understand why, and for what, they were praying. This belief in the necessity of fully-informed religious belief was at the core of Altynsarin’s introductory appeal to his readers. “It is obligatory,” he reminded them, “for each individual Muslim to know the essence of Islam,” since “good done without faith (*iman*) is useless.”⁹⁷ For example, he argued, “If one reads a prayer without

⁹⁵ G. B. Mandybaeva, ed., *Musylmanshylyqtyng tutqasy* (Almaty: TPO “Qalamger,” 1991).

⁹⁶ H. A. R. Gibb et. al., *The Encyclopedia of Islam*, vol. 5 (Leiden: E. J. Brill, 1983) 858; for a more detailed account of Hanafi jurisprudence see Brannon M. Wheeler, *Applying the Canon in Islam: The Authorization and Maintenance of Interpretive Reasoning in Hanafi Scholarship* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1996).

⁹⁷ Mandybaeva 9, 11.

understanding its spiritual meaning, of course, the prayer will not come to fruition (*bolyp tabylmas*).”⁹⁸ Failure to understand the meaning, rather than the form of religion, then, threatened to create apostasy (*kupirliq*).⁹⁹

Linguistic barriers, for Altynsarin, were the reason that most Kazakhs confessing Islam did so incorrectly, or more to the point blindly. While the Qur’an and other scholarly treatises were written in Arabic, he noted, “It is difficult for everyone to learn Arabic, and impossible for most of the simple people (*qara khalyq*).”¹⁰⁰ Meanwhile, he claimed:

“There is no book written in our Kazakh language that is comprehensible for everyone to read, or understandable for simple people if one reads it aloud to others. For this reason when there are mullahs who only know books many simple people completely do not understand what their religion is. Many people walk around as unbelievers (*kaepir*), just as before.”¹⁰¹

Thus, he wrote, he, the poor son of a biy of the Qypshaq tribe, had taken up the project of the *Pillar*, “intending to bring our own blood-related people (*qaryndas khalqymyz*) benefit by explaining to the ignorant-born their own religion in understandable words.”¹⁰² What Altynsarin presented in vernacular Kazakh, though, connected his readers to a global religious community, one to which most imperial Russian observers did not yet consider the Kazakhs to fully belong.¹⁰³ Portions of this

⁹⁸ Ibid., 11.

⁹⁹ Ibid.

¹⁰⁰ Ibid., 9.

¹⁰¹ Ibid., 9-10.

¹⁰² Ibid., 10.

¹⁰³ See for example V. V. Radlov, *Iz Sibiri* (Moscow: Nauka, 1989), originally published in 1884. Allen Frank (276-77), as part of a larger argument for the importance of Islam on the steppe during the pre-Russian era, excoriates scholarly Western commentators for taking such accounts at their word. See also Robert Crews, *For Prophet and Tsar: Islam and Empire in Russia and Central Asia* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard UP, 2006) for an argument that Russian policies played a pivotal role in shaping institutional Islam among the Muslims of the empire, as well as Devin DeWeese, *Islamization and Native Religion in the Golden Horde: Baba Tukles and Conversion to Islam in Epic and Historical Tradition* (State College, PA: Pennsylvania State University Press, 1995) for a magisterial account of Islam’s acceptance and popularization among the Turco-Mongol ethnic groups of Central Asia and the steppe.

community were also organizing vernacular-language religious education at roughly the same time, although there does not seem to have been any direct connection between Altynsarin and other proponents of vernacular language education.¹⁰⁴ Paradoxically, the specificity of the local, living language in the *Pillar* was a bridge to erasing such specificity in religious practice, to transform the unique lived experience of Islam on the steppe and ensure, in conception, that prayers said in a lone *yurta* of Turgai oblast would be identical, in terms of external formalities and the inner attitudes of those saying them, to prayers in Cairo or Istanbul.

By publishing the *Pillar* in the Arabic script, Altynsarin indicated that it was intended for the widest possible use, both in the new Russo-Kazakh schools and the home. Had the book been published in Cyrillic, he wrote to Il'minskii, "even if compiled completely in accordance with *shariat's* decrees, having a non-Muslim external form, [it] could not have gained trust among the Kazakhs, would have raised only unpleasant rumors (*tolki*) and remained in school libraries [i.e., unused]."¹⁰⁵ In its vernacular form, though, he expressed hope that his work would serve as a guiding resource "for Kazakh households, wishing to teach their children God's law as much as is obligatory for every Muslim, and also for Russo-Kazakh schools, in which this subject is taught."¹⁰⁶ Indeed, Altynsarin did not see Islamic education and practice as incompatible with imperial Russian institutions, or Muslim faith as exclusive of belonging to the body social and cultural of the empire. Isabelle Kreindler has described the lowest-level (*aul*) schools

¹⁰⁴ See Khalid 210-13 for discussion of the production of educational materials in "Turkestan Turkic" by the Jadids of Central Asia after the turn of the 20th century; also see Yumi Sugahara, "The Publication of Vernacular Islamic Textbooks and Islamicization in Southeast Asia," *The Journal of Sophia Asian Studies* 27 (2009): 22-36.

¹⁰⁵ SSIA t. 3, 79-80.

¹⁰⁶ *Ibid.*, 79.

opened under his supervision as “basically Koranic schools (*mekteps*) with the addition of a Russian language class.”¹⁰⁷ Two-class Russo-Kazakh schools were opened in uezd centers with a mullah present to lead prayers, and study of the fundamentals of Islam (*verouchenie*) was part of the curriculum there; towards the end of his career he wrote to Katarinskii, enraged that Kazakh students at the agricultural *Realschule* in Krasnoufimsk had been given pork to eat, compelled to look after swine, and to pray alongside Russian students.¹⁰⁸ Whatever cultural, intellectual, or moral change the schools under Altynsarin’s supervision were meant to create in their Kazakh pupils, they were not engines of religious conversion. Just the opposite, they were to teach students the tenets of Islam (ideally according to Altynsarin’s own textbook) while preparing them for secular education and state service – a curriculum Altynsarin did not view as contradictory.

Like Altynsarin, Il’minskii was a proponent of vernacular-language education, opening tens of schools with vernacular curricula that were, for a time, strongly supported by high-level administrators. Such schools were to bridge the gap between metropolitan, Orthodox culture and non-Orthodox *inorodtsy* so as to, in the long run, facilitate the conversion of the latter to Orthodoxy (for him, the most important part of Russian cultural identity). Altynsarin shared his colleague’s belief that education in the vernacular language was important, and generally that educational materials and methods needed to be adapted to local conditions, but to drastically different ends. The *Pillar*, calculated to appeal to a wide audience of Kazakhs, but also forced to pass a state censor’s approval before publication, was intended to simultaneously underline the

¹⁰⁷ Kreindler, “National Awakening,” 107.

¹⁰⁸ SSIA t. 2, 145 (“Ob otkrytii Aktiubinskoi rusko-kazakhskoi shkoly”); Ibid., 164-65 (“O sostoianii uchebnoi chasti Turgaiskoi oblasti za 1882 g”); SSIA t. 3, 153 (letter to Katarinskii, 10 May 1889).

importance of Islam as a part of Kazakh identity and help readers to understand the logic behind their faith (and to indicate where their practices differed from general-Islamic norms). Altynsarin's thinking about vernacular-language education, then, had drastically different ends in mind from his mentors and colleagues. Crucially, though, a reformed and modernized Islam, if untenable for advocates of the Il'minskii system and an awkward fit with other forms of Russification, was perfectly compatible with imperial governance as Altynsarin envisioned it. The *Pillar* reveals in full the ambiguity of Altynsarin's position with respect to Russian colonialism – frequently opposed to its practices and practitioners, yet framing his opposition to both in terms that assumed, supported, and even necessitated a continuing colonial presence on the steppe.

Subaltern Ambivalence: The Volost School and the Problem of Development

The visibility of Islam in Altynsarin's schools suggests that the cultural change he was interested in bringing about among the Kazakhs differed from that envisioned by his mentors and colleagues.¹⁰⁹ Indeed, although his two-class schools provided instruction in the Russian language, and in many cases were intended to graduate a new class of imperial servitors, cultural Russification was not their goal. Moreover, the central two-class school – a “finishing school” where pupils were to learn not only Russian, but also grow accustomed to the habits of life and material culture associated with sedentarism – was in the long term intended to be a late stage of what was planned to be a wide-ranging

¹⁰⁹ Although Altynsarin is absent from Crews' treatment of Islam on the steppe (192-240) in *For Prophet and Tsar*, the visibility of Islam in his two-class schools is a good fit for Crews' argument that state institutions became important to the Muslims of the Russian Empire as a means of shaping and mediating belief. The context in which Altynsarin operated, however, was permeated by suspicion of Muslim “fanaticism” and substantial administrative distrust in the merits of what Crews terms the “confessional state.” That Altynsarin sought to incorporate a reformed Islam in state schools is thus consonant with Crews' argument; that he was fairly isolated among his colleagues in doing so is a worse fit. At any rate, as the following section will show, a reformed and consciously practiced Islam was only part of Altynsarin's vision of the cultural transformation of the steppe.

system of mobile schools adapted to pastoralist lifeways. Many of the first graduates of the two-class school, in fact, were intended to serve as teachers in these rudimentary, but still bilingual volost-level schools. Mastering Russian language and literacy, for Altynsarin, meant not preparing Kazakh pupils for a later conversion to Orthodoxy, but rather stemming the deleterious tide of “Tatar” Islam on the steppe and permitting Kazakhs the same rights and privileges vis a vis the central government as other subjects, regardless of ethnicity, enjoyed. The gradualist viewpoint signified by the mobile volost school, further, was a radical departure from the dyad of mobility and civilizational wildness that characterized most previous imperial Russian scholarship concerning the steppe, and indeed from the doctrines of evolutionary anthropology that had currency in European scholarship of the era. If sedentarization was still a necessary part of the steppe’s distant future, in Altynsarin’s mind, this did not mean that pastoral mobility was incompatible with intellectual, moral, and civil development in the short and medium term.

The institutional forms that Russo-Kazakh education took, under Altynsarin’s leadership, were complex, geared towards achieving the gradual political integration of the steppe and its people with the Russian Empire while maintaining the distinctiveness of local culture as well as the political and economic priorities unique to the steppe region. The showpieces of the colonial educational system in Turgai oblast were to be two-class, six-year bilingual schools, one located centrally, at first, in each uezd.¹¹⁰ These new and well-appointed buildings were to serve several purposes, ideally, beyond language instruction. First, they were to impress schoolchildren and their parents alike by their warmth, cleanliness, and the abundance to be found within them, so that

¹¹⁰ SSIA t. 3, 63, letter to N. I. Il’minskii, 4 October 1881.

education would not be interfered with by “such obstacles as dirt, dampness, darkness, refuse (*ugar*), hunger, cold, lack of textbooks and still illiterate teachers.”¹¹¹ (Such niceties would, he thought, both keep children in school until their course of study was completed and demonstrate the material advantages of sedentarism.) Altynsarin, as an intermediary, did not make explicit political arguments to his pupils about the nature of Russian imperialism; comfortable schools promising useful knowledge (emerging outside the steppe) and social advancement under the auspices of the colonial administration were themselves, though, arguments for the potential benefits to be derived from making common cause with the colonizer.

Indeed, the new central schools were to produce, as their graduates, a new generation of well-educated imperial servitors. Altynsarin proposed in 1883 that the two-class schools be given the status of *uezd* schools, since this would give those completing them the right to state employment, a proposal he justified with the claim that “Kazakh children, having finished a course in steppe schools... would not be useless servants in administration over Kazakhs, for example in *uezd* administrations where they often need people knowing both Russian and Kazakh languages and literacy.”¹¹² In many cases, this service was to eventually be, after completion of a special pedagogical course, in a second wave of more numerous, lower-level schools, which could not be opened in the absence of teachers with the necessary qualifications (Russo-Kazakh bilingualism) and willing to live far outside of urban areas. Early in his term as school inspector, Altynsarin complained that the opening of lower-level (*volost*) schools was impossible

¹¹¹ Ibid.

¹¹² SSIA t. 2, 177, “Predstavlenie popechiteliu Orenburgskogo uchebnogo okruga ob otkrytii shkol v Turgaiskoi oblasti.”

“since fitting teachers [of Russian language] are not available.”¹¹³ Some of the teachers could be drawn from Il’minskii’s Kazan’ Teachers’ Seminary, but because of Altynsarin’s preference to have one Russian and one Kazakh instructor in each school, some method of training local teachers was also needed, in his view.¹¹⁴ Until a Kazakh teachers’ seminary could be firmly established, he proposed that graduates of the four uezd schools could serve as teachers in local schools:

“It was proposed that when in the aforementioned four [uezd] schools Kazakh children finish the course of study and it turns out possible, to take the most talented of them for the duty of teachers and other social obligations, and to begin building local, for example volost schools, if means permit.”¹¹⁵

The central uezd schools were to train a new, more competent and honest group of Kazakh state servitors than the bribe-takers of whom Altynsarin had complained earlier in his career; more specifically, they were to graduate an advance guard of teachers qualified to work in local schools. Having gained a moral education and command of Russian in the central schools, such pupils were charged with spreading literacy and morality among a larger group of students.

Russian-language literacy education was, from the very beginning of Altynsarin’s career, a vital component of his pedagogical mission among the Kazakhs. The curriculum at his first teaching post, in Orenburg, included “learn[ing] by heart about a thousand Russian words and various written Russian conversations with translation to

¹¹³ SSIA t. 2, 133, “Otchet o sostoianii kazakhskikh shkol Turgaiskoi oblasti za 1880 g.”

¹¹⁴ Dowler 141

¹¹⁵ SSIA t. 2, 158-59, “O sostoianii uchebnoi chasti v Turgaiskoi oblasti za 1882 g.” There is some confusion about when the Kazakh teachers’ seminary Altynsarin considered necessary actually opened. Dowler (141) claims that it opened in 1880 in Troitsk, and subsequently moved to Orsk (Orenburg guberniia) in 1881, but this report on Turgai oblast schools for 1882, written in January 1883, speaks of the teachers’ seminary as still unopened.

Kazakh... [and] the rules of sequencing (*soedinenie*) of Russian words.”¹¹⁶ Such rote learning, however, missed the point of literacy education, for Altynsarin; soon after beginning his work, he expressed concern to Il’minskii that the curriculum of the Orenburg fortress school would worsen conditions for most Kazakhs:

“Having learned only two or three Russian words, not taking with them from study in school a fitting education or good understanding, they will proudly go off to the steppe and, showing themselves to be people who know a lot, great legal minds (*zakonshchiki*), which the Kazakhs will not doubt, they will use for evil their little knowledge, become ruthless offenders (*obidniki*) of the Kazakhs.”¹¹⁷

The study of conversational and written Russian, then, despite its immediate value in training competent servitors of the colonial administration, was valuable in Altynsarin’s mind in part because it would give less-educated Kazakhs reliable and honest low-level officials. Nor would such study serve its purpose automatically, in the absence of deeper linguistic understanding and the moral education Altynsarin considered so vital (he complained in the same letter that it was, at times impossible *not* to punish misbehaving pupils).¹¹⁸ But the indifferent attitude of pupils and administrators alike towards the curriculum, not to mention the extreme mobility of pupils – who could, he claimed, come and go as they pleased – made such deep and thorough study unlikely.¹¹⁹ Thus early in Altynsarin’s career, it is possible to find the germ of dissatisfaction with the setting and form of Russian language education; it was not the content *per se* he objected to, but rather the way in which and ends to which it was delivered.

¹¹⁶ SSIA t. 2, 130-31, “Ob uspevaemosti uchenikov shkoly pri Orenburgskom ukr. Raport v Obl. pravlenie Orenburgskimi kirgizami.” Other points of the curriculum included the four basic arithmetical functions, Russian grammar and penmanship, basic geography, and, for a few students, Tatar reading and penmanship.

¹¹⁷ SSIA t. 1, 14, letter to N. I. Il’minskii, 19 January 1861.

¹¹⁸ Ibid.

¹¹⁹ Ibid.

Bilingual education – providing some moral and factual lessons in Cyrillicized Kazakh, but also introductory training in the Russian language – was also central to all of the institutions that Altynsarin championed and influenced during his tenure as inspector of schools for Turgai oblast. Responding hesitantly to a proposal to expand vocational schooling, for instance, he argued that such programs would “interfere with achieving the main goal in Kazakh schools – teaching Kazakh children Russian language and spelling (*pravopisanie*).”¹²⁰ Although Altynsarin wrote, when reporting to other administrators, that such a program was necessary to foster the Kazakhs’ “spiritual and economic rapprochement (*sblizhenie*) with the ruling Russian people and borrowing from the latter of its scientific and practical knowledge,” the cultural transformation he envisioned differed sharply from Russification.¹²¹ The Russian language, according to this way of thinking, was to be used instrumentally, not only to disseminate useful knowledge, but as a means of fostering subjecthood on equal terms among all ethnic groups within the Russian Empire.¹²² Hence in 1880 he lamented:

“All tribes under the White Tsar’s authority can at least report to the authorities about their needs via their own confederates (*edinomyshlenniki*) either in oral or written form; while we [Kazakhs], when need appears, seek out at first some man knowing Kazakh and Russian, with whom we go to the authorities, not knowing whether or not this person (*vozhak*) is suited to truthfully and effectively translate our words...”¹²³

The only solution to this problem, he concluded, was for knowledge of Russian to become more widespread on the steppe, to the point that dishonest middlemen and

¹²⁰ Ibid., 108, letter to N. I. Il’minskii, 30 September 1884. Similar sentiments, connecting the development of literacy in Russian with the purpose of the two-class schools, pervade the majority of Altynsarin’s reports from 1879-89.

¹²¹ SSIA t. 2, 193, “Zapiski na imia voennogo gubernatora Turgaiskoi obl., ‘O vvedenii professionalno-tekhnicheskogo obucheniia v dvukhklassnykh russko-kazakhskikh shkolakh.’”

¹²² Altynsarin’s instrumental view of the Russian language anticipates the writings of Abai Qunanbaev. See Chapter Four.

¹²³ SSIA t. 2, 104, “Kirgizskaia gazeta god pervyi, ianvar’ 1880.”

translators would no longer be able to take advantage of innocent petitioners. This position is complicated, and cannot be understood as supporting either Russification (since a sense that Kazakh interests will continue to be distinct, and the Kazakh language important in internal communication, is implied) or self-determination (since Russian appears as a practical tool for functioning within the imperial framework). Rather, the Russian language was the best available means for Kazakhs to petition the tsar or his functionaries – a right enjoyed by all subjects of the empire. Bilingualism, then, was the tool by which Kazakhs could participate in metropolitan politics on the same basis as other imperial subjects. Not losing their distinct culture and interests, they needed, in Altynsarin’s view, at least a means of making their priorities known to colonial administrators, and since Russian was the language of administrative power, it could serve this purpose. Thus teaching Russian language served, in this formulation, goals of political integration rather than political or cultural assimilation. It could fit, moreover, in a variety of institutions, not just the showpiece uezd schools. More numerous and, ultimately, influential were to be volost schools, institutions adapted to the continuing mobility of Kazakh economic life, and formed under the twin assumptions that sedentarization was significantly in the future, and mobility not opposed to material and moral development.

Altynsarin had long noted that mobile pastoralist lifeways created specific and chronic problems for educating the bulk of the steppe’s Kazakh population. He had complained of his Orenburg pupils’ tendency to run from school before learning what was required of them even in the early 1860s. Subsequently, in 1883, he reported to the

military governor of Turgai oblast, A. P. Konstantinovich, that this problem had not been resolved, with deleterious consequences for the fate of education there:

“Many Kazakh students, because of the restlessness (*neusidchivost'*) of Kazakhs in general in this matter, before the end of the course and only having been at the school a year or two remain in their auls sometimes according to the frivolous (*pustaia*) whim either of the student-boys themselves, or of their parents... Thus, in many cases the teacher's work, and the students' work, falls in vain, not bringing substantial benefit to anyone.”¹²⁴

Freedom of movement on the part of enrollees and their families, associated further with a childlike frivolity (echoing earlier ethnographic descriptions of the Kazakhs as “children of nature”), threatened to undermine the tasks for which the central uezd schools had been built. Altynsarin feared, further, a domino effect as a result of this predicted failure. If the two-class uezd schools were the showpieces of the Russo-Kazakh educational system in Turgai oblast, then the achievements of their graduates were the index according to which Kazakhs more hesitant about the benefits of colonial education would make their judgments. Thus he argued:

“It is beyond doubt that the people will start to blame not itself, but the school for the poor literacy of their children, who have not finished the course of study in the schools. They will find it an institution unsound for the teaching of knowledge and literacy to its children; and such a view of things can bring much more harm to the schools than, for example, a direct refusal to accept children.”¹²⁵

According to this line of thinking, then, the consequences of failing to come to grips with the problems inherent in serving a mobile population were severe.

If the problems Altynsarin diagnosed with respect to mobility were chronic throughout his career, the solutions he developed to them evolved over time, on the basis of regular school inspections and debates with colleagues. A proposal in the early 1880s,

¹²⁴ SSIA t. 2, 163, “O sostoianii uchebnoi chasti Turgaiskoi oblasti za 1882 g.” Report dated 12 January 1883.

¹²⁵ Ibid., 163-64

akin to his earlier correspondence (with Il'minskii) suggesting that stricter discipline was required, that constant attendance to the central two-class schools be simply mandated (with punitive fines for failing to complete the course of study) was rejected, according to him, because the administration of Turgai oblast "[feared] to weaken by such a measure the eagerness of the Kazakhs to give their children to Russian schools."¹²⁶ With forcible measures both administratively untenable and unlikely to be effective, Altynsarin re-evaluated the issue of Kazakh attendance to schools from a more pragmatic standpoint. Although the central two-class schools had already been built and needed to remain in the form they had been constructed, local volost schools, the second wave of Altynsarin's educational program, were still open to reformation. Late in 1883, Altynsarin recommended to V. F. Il'in, the new temporary governor of Turgai oblast, that these volost schools take a very different shape than their higher-level predecessors:

"In my opinion, the establishment of these [volost] schools, being located exclusively among the Kazakhs, should be adapted to the life conditions of this people, in view of which these schools should winter with the Kazakhs, when they winter, and migrate when they migrate."¹²⁷

The volost schools would spend the bulk of their time in one place, from mid-September until the end of April, corresponding to the usual period of winter settlement in the northern steppe, then move together with the Kazakhs they served to a central location among their summer pastures (*zhailiau*). Pastoralist form, in this view, was less important than content – which was to be similar to, but less complicated and detailed, than the curriculum offered in central two-class schools, focusing on the rudiments of

¹²⁶ Ibid.

¹²⁷ SSIA t. 2, 175, "Ob otkrytii volostnykh shkol v Turgaiskoi oblasti." Report dated 3 October 1883.

Russian literacy and Muslim catechistics.¹²⁸ Further support for this point of view is found in Altynsarin's analysis of the teaching methodology Il'in proposed:

“I find it necessary to add that the method of conducting the curriculum in the volost schools that you have indicated may turn out, at first, very complicated, and possibly cost a great deal, but in practice these complications are not found among the mullahs who have already practiced such methods of teaching Kazakh children for several decades.”¹²⁹

Locally-tested pedagogical methods, then, were not of themselves problematic for Altynsarin (indeed, they could be helpful), as long as their content was correct. Further, placing schools immediately among the Kazakhs, and moving them when the Kazakhs moved, was not just a grudging concession for Altynsarin, but rather a source of new advantages. Specifically, he argued to Il'in that mobile volost schools were desirable because:

“those studying in them remain in their native environment, and however little education is received, their beneficial influence on moral and economic life of the surrounding population all the same will exist, will further protect the people from the uncountable exploitations of unreliable scribes (*gramoteev*), and the young generation of Kazakhs will look at language and Russian literacy as the only language of culture and knowledge, become addicted to them, and will develop in a more or less Russian spirit (*dukha*).”¹³⁰

In this note, Altynsarin was arguing for the expansion of local schooling among the Kazakhs to a colonial administration that, by the 1880s, strongly prioritized Russification, so his rhetoric concerning the “Russian spirit” should be approached cautiously. What is clear, though, is that language education was at the core of his thinking about Kazakhs' place within the Russian Empire, both as it currently was and

¹²⁸ SSIA t. 2, 237, “Zapiski o kirgizskikh volostnykh shkolakh” (1886). The volost schools were to prepare students who wished for the two-class school; the two-class school, in turn, was to prepare students who wished for higher education in agricultural schools (such as the *Realschule* at Krasnoufimsk) or gymnasia.

¹²⁹ SSIA t. 2, 176. I have thus far been unable to find Il'in's proposal, but the analogy with *mektep* pedagogy seems significant on its own.

¹³⁰ SSIA t. 2, 238-39.

might be in the future. Mobile pastoralism did not create in his pupils, he considered, a primordial wildness that was impossible to overcome; rather, institutions adapted to their lifeways could bridge linguistic and cultural gaps. If Altynsarin shared with his interlocutors an assumption that some sort of civilizational progress was necessary on the steppe, and that Russian-language education could be a key vehicle for it, he also devoted tremendous energy to an educational program distinct in form and purpose from the models proposed by his contemporaries. Though an eventual transition to sedentarism was part of the future he envisioned for the steppe, the initial change he saw as necessary could be accomplished without abandoning what made Kazakhs distinct, economically and culturally.

The fate of Altynsarin's proposal for volost schools is a useful reminder both of its distinctiveness from the fiscal and educational priorities of the Turgai oblast administration of the 1880s and the limitations placed on even high-ranking subalterns within colonial administrative organs. The new military governor of the province, A. P. Protsenko, re-apportioned funds previously devoted to an initial group of model volost schools to the building of a new central school.¹³¹ This problematic (from Altynsarin's point of view) decision was only remedied, ultimately, by the intervention of the still-influential Il'minskii on behalf of the volost schools and the appointment of Gen. Ia. F. Barabash, as governor of Turgai oblast. Altynsarin described the latter to Il'minskii as "an intelligent and learned man, and generally sympathizing with Kazakhs and their life questions."¹³² Some colonial administrators, then, were not deeply convinced about the

¹³¹ Dowler 142

¹³² SSIA t. 3, 137-38, letter to N. I. Il'minskii, September 1888. In a slightly earlier letter to Katarinskii, Altynsarin noted that the new governor, Barabash, agreed to all of his educational proposals without hesitation.

connections between mobility and wildness, or sedentarism and progress. The ambivalence that Altynsarin felt about such linkages was amply reflected in an educational policy that was adapted to pastoral mobility for the sake of, in the distant future, inculcating many of the trappings of sedentary lifeways in the residents of the steppe. But for such complicated views to be implemented in law and financially supported required the cooperation of higher-ranking representatives of the metropole, who often – though not always – were disinclined to listen. The hierarchies of power among administrators of Turgai oblast meant that Altynsarin’s gradualist views were, until Barabash’s appointment, ignored or neglected in favor of a model of colonial education privileging rapid sedentarization and cultural Russification of the Kazakhs.

Which Progress?

As we have already seen in Chapter 1, metropolitan understandings of the purposes of empire on the Kazakh steppe were several and subject to significant internal contestation. By the late 1870s, though, the period of Altynsarin’s greatest political influence and publishing activity, a broad consensus had formed in administrative circles that it was necessary to sedentarize the Kazakhs, and that this could best be accomplished by the resettlement of Slavic peasants from central Russia and Ukraine to the steppe. Such visions were based predominantly, but not exclusively, on an agricultural vision of the economic future of the steppe and, more importantly, an understanding that only Russian colonizers could create among the Kazakhs the changes in work habits, lifestyle, and morality that most administrators considered to be necessary. Altynsarin, however, expressed an opposing view, grounded in the metropole’s own anthropological discourse, and suffused with a different sense of both the agents and direction of historical change on the steppe. Kazakh sedentarization meant progress for Altynsarin, too, but it did not

have to mean peasant settlement on the steppe; if he saw aspects of Kazakh society and culture as declining, this could be remedied by metropolitan financial and institutional support, rather than the transfer of land. Sharing the terms through which he evaluated the steppe with his interlocutors, Altynsarin envisioned a very different future for it.

A. Iu. Bykov has argued that, from the late 1860s through the 1890s,

“interest in the problem of the transformation of the Kazakhs’ traditional nomadic society on the basis of their transition to sedentarism, the introduction of a new legal and administrative system, and education (*prosveshchenie*) was present in all structures of the colonial administration.”¹³³

Mobile pastoralist lifeways had been closely associated with administrative chaos since A. I. Levshin’s work was published in the early 1830s, but this understanding was not necessarily associated with the idea that there was any need to “civilize” the Kazakhs, or indeed that such a thing was possible. However, a rising consciousness of Russia as the chief representative of European culture in a part of the world labeled “wild” and “primitive” gradually engendered a consensus among administrators that the Russian Empire had a civilizing mission on the steppe.¹³⁴ This was to be accomplished not only through the expansion of Russian educational and legal institutions but, increasingly, by the movement of agricultural settlers to the steppe. Although Kazakh sedentarization and Russian settlement were, in theory, separate issues, negative assessments of the indigenous economy convinced most colonial administrators that the Kazakhs would need a live example if they were to settle and till the land. By 1870 G. A. Kolpakovskii, the military governor of Semireche oblast, even rejecting a proposal to grant steppe land to Russians as private property to foster the merging (*sliianie*) of Kazakhs with them,

¹³³ A. Iu. Bykov, *Istoki modernizatsii Kazakhstana problem sedentarizatsii v rossiiskoi politike XVIII-nachala XX veka* (Barnaul: AzBuka, 2003) 149.

¹³⁴ Willard Sunderland, “The ‘Colonization Question’: Visions of Colonization in Late Imperial Russia,” *Jahrbucher fur Geschichte Osteuropas* 48.2 (2000), 221.

shared his subordinate's basic assumption that bringing more Russians to the region would improve Kazakhs and other *inorodtsy* both morally and materially.¹³⁵ Thus, at the same time as the Altynsarin schools were opened, if there was not absolute agreement that the Kazakhs should immediately sedentarize, there was at least a broad sense that they were deficient precisely in those areas of morality and intellect associated with sedentary lifeways. Minimally, there was consensus that the steppe required some kind of economic transformation, if not exclusively agricultural; in the early 1880s the uezd nachalniks of Akmolinsk oblast unanimously supported a proposal for the expansion of teaching Kazakh children skilled trades and cottage industries alongside basic agricultural skills.¹³⁶ All plans for economic transformation, whether based on trade or cultivation, would have required, by definition, the Kazakhs who took up these new occupations to sedentarize partially or completely.

Simultaneously, from the late 1860s onward, changes in the administrative and legal system by which the steppe was ruled also encouraged sedentarization. By the Provisional Statute of 1868, the steppe was divided into hierarchical administrative units (oblast, uezd, and volost), and movement across these borders was, in principle, restricted. The Provisional Statute also declared all steppe land to be state property, laid the legal framework for the expropriation of formerly communal lands from mobile pastoralists, ultimately opposing the extensive land use on which this lifeway depended and compelling many to settle; whether intended or not, then, colonization was an

¹³⁵ TsGA RK f. 64, op. 1, d. 3, sv. 1. Kolpakovskii cautioned that granting private land property to settlers would inevitably lead to the decline of mobile pastoralism and animal husbandry (7ob.-8), which struck him as needlessly inhumane. Thus at this stage the linkage between colonization and sedentarization was not viewed as unambiguously positive.

¹³⁶ TsGA RK f. 393, op. 1, d. 6, sv. 2, "Raporty uездных nachalnikov i perepiska s kantseliariei Stepnogo general-gubernatora ob obuchenii v internatakh kazakhskikh mal'chikov i devochek remeslam i sel'skomu khozyaistvu." See especially ll. 31-32, report of the *nachal'nik* of Akmolinsk uezd to military governor M. A. Liventsov, 2 December 1883.

important part of sedentarizing the Kazakhs.¹³⁷ Indeed, agricultural settlement had been an awkward question for Alexander II after the emancipation of the serfs, but this awkwardness stemmed from a distrust of peasant mobility rather than hesitation about the desirability of settlement to Siberia and the steppe.¹³⁸ Administrators on the steppe began to propose organized settlement in the late 1870s, and Alexander III's endorsement of rules (proposed by the ministries of the Interior and State Domains) for peasant migration to the steppe in 1882 only served to confirm that the steppe's future was thought, at the highest levels of government, to be not only sedentary, but specifically agricultural (and also increasingly Slavic).¹³⁹ Although lip service was paid to the idea of non-interference in the lives of mobile pastoralists, in practice, the needs of agricultural colonists were strongly prioritized.¹⁴⁰

Altynsarin, both as an educator and a publicist, entered this polemic with an argument that reinforces the ambivalence of his position on mobility, identity, and progress. In a sense, mobile pastoralism would seem a logical candidate to serve as the central structuring principle of Kazakhness; every scholarly observer of the steppe during the 19th century agreed that this lifeway was an important characteristic shared among the Kazakhs and influencing their material and literary culture.¹⁴¹ (On the basis of scholarly and administrative observations from this era, admittedly compiled and published by cultural outsiders, mobility would have been a much more apparent linchpin than Islam.)

¹³⁷ Bykov 149

¹³⁸ Donald Treadgold, *The Great Siberian Migration: Government and Peasant in Resettlement from Emancipation to the First World War* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton UP, 1957) 67-70.

¹³⁹ Treadgold 75; TsGA RK f. 64, op. 1, d. 3968, sv. 253.

¹⁴⁰ See the interpretation of the Statutes on the Administration of the Turkestan Krai (1886) in Peter Rottier, "The Kazakness of Sedentarization: Promoting Progress as Tradition in Response to the Land Problem," *Central Asian Survey* 22.1 (March 2003), 69

¹⁴¹ Such arguments are still made today; see A. I. Orazbaeva, *Tsivilizatsiia kochevnikov evraziiskikh stepei* (Almaty: Daik-Press, 2005) for an argument that "traditional" Kazakh society formed as the result of processes and tendencies common to Central Eurasian nomads over the course of several millennia.

Yet Altynsarin emphasized, in his correspondence with other pedagogues, that his schools were important precisely because they introduced students to the values and habits he associated with sedentarism. Writing to Il'minskii in 1879, shortly after his appointment as director of schools, he argued that, while literacy in Russian was a desirable goal for Kazakh pupils,

“it is also necessary in [steppe schools] that students also get accustomed to sedentarism, tidiness and a healthy view of things, that, in a word, it is necessary to pay more attention to the moral-educational (*vospitatel'naia*) side of students' training... Volost schools cannot correspond to this goal.”¹⁴²

Getting accustomed to sedentarism, for Altynsarin, encompassed a host of lessons, few of them directly concerned with the acquisition of academic knowledge; the Altynsarin school was rather to be a site of socialization of pupils to sedentary habits, with the hope that, upon graduation and return to the steppe environment, they might “influence the people surrounding them with their fresh and healthy thoughts.”¹⁴³ Indeed, he later wrote to Il'minskii, requesting funding for warmer and better-furnished school buildings, that “teaching Kazakh boys about...cleanliness and the positive aspects of sedentary life, of the sort of warm rooms and etc., has in and of itself educational significance on the Kazakh steppe.”¹⁴⁴ Mobility, in this way of thinking, was unhygienic and uncomfortable; Kazakh children had to be taught that the way of life they had previously known was undesirable. This sense was reinforced by the division that Altynsarin constructed between the world of the school (where children would learn the habits and practices associated with sedentarism) and the rest of the steppe, expressing, for example, hesitancy about permitting students not boarding permanently at his schools

¹⁴² SSIA t. 3, 47-48, letter to N. I. Il'minskii, 25 November 1879.

¹⁴³ Ibid.

¹⁴⁴ SSIA t. 3, 63-64, letter to N. I. Il'minskii, 4 October 1881.

to study there, since “passing the majority of the time in the circle of their households and play outdoors, these freely-arriving children sometimes bring to the school rough mischief.”¹⁴⁵ The Altynsarin school, then, was to be the advance guard of a new moral and material order associated with sedentarism.

Russians were not, of course, the only sedentary people on the steppe, or even (before organized settlement) the most numerous – Tatars and immigrants from Turkestan also both lived predominantly in this way.¹⁴⁶ However, Altynsarin made it clear that the sedentary values to be absorbed in his school buildings were specifically Russian or European. In support of his position that a two-class school would ideally have one Russian and one Kazakh teacher, he expressed worry that “not appointing...the Russian teacher, it is possible to fear that the teacher from the Kazakhs, left alone to head all parts of the school, would introduce into the school a purely Asiatic element.”¹⁴⁷ It is unclear precisely what Altynsarin meant by this, but his formulation implies a connection between civilizational hierarchy and racial difference, if only temporary. The sense that his schools were intended to encourage students to adopt not just sedentary values, but to Russian sedentary values, moreover, comes through strongly. This sense, because of Altynsarin’s characteristic gradualism and pragmatism, was not absolute and inflexible – he noted in 1884 that food for Kazakh boarders was “adapted to the natural Asiatic taste.”¹⁴⁸ The overall intent, though, was to create as much change in the material culture

¹⁴⁵ SSIA t. 2, 136, “Otchet o sostoianii kazakhskikh shkol Turgaiskoi oblasti za 1880 g.”

¹⁴⁶ Altynsarin rarely described such immigrants by ethnic group, or even by the broad term “Sart,” referring instead to their place of origin, i.e., “people of Tashkent” (*tashkentsy*) or Bukharans. After the national delimitation of 1924, most of these people would likely have been considered ethnic Uzbeks or Tajiks.

¹⁴⁷ SSIA t. 2, 137.

¹⁴⁸ SSIA t. 2, 187, “O sostoianii narodnykh shkol Turgaiskoi oblasti za 1883 g.” By “Asiatic taste” Altynsarin may have meant that pork was excluded from his boarders’ diets; the daily menu he described included plentiful bread, tea, and kasha – none of which could remotely be considered traditional Kazakh foods – and a main meal of noodle soup with large pieces of meat.

surrounding pupils as they would accept. The two-class school building was a permanent structure, usually wooden, and furnished according to the Russian taste.¹⁴⁹ Rather than sitting on the floor, on carpets or on trunks, as would have been the case for Kazakh boys coming from a mobile pastoralist environment (and living, hence, in the traditional felt yurt or *kiiz ui*), pupils would be seated in rows of desks, in large rooms with fixed walls heated by iron, wood-fueled stoves unavailable among the Kazakhs.¹⁵⁰ Boarders might eat food adapted to their taste, but in the two-class school, they would do it with metal knives, forks, and spoons; they would sleep in separate beds and wear uniform clothes provided for them by school administrators (purchased for them, in the case of poor students).¹⁵¹ None of this corresponded to the material conditions in which Altynsarin's pupils had been accustomed to live. Metal dining tools, separate beds, tablecloths, rows of wooden chairs in a classroom – all these were markers of a European bourgeois material culture to which pupils in the Russo-Kazakh schools were asked to adapt, and of which they were asked to see the benefits.¹⁵² In this sense, the Russo-Kazakh school under Altynsarin became a place not just for learning, but for socializing pupils to the trappings of sedentary culture.

¹⁴⁹ On building materials see SSIA t. 2, 143-44, where Altynsarin lists the availability of good timber (a rare commodity on the steppe) in close proximity as one of the necessary preconditions for constructing a school building.

¹⁵⁰ On stoves see, e.g., SSIA t. 3, 283, “Raport nachal'nika Irgizskogo uezda voennomu gubernatoru Turgaiskoi oblasti po povodu stroitel'stva zdaniia dlia otrkryvaemoi v Karabutake russko-kazakhskoi shkoly.” Such stoves, Altynsarin had earlier complained, despite their increasing popularity among Kazakhs, were not manufactured anywhere on the steppe. See SSIA t. 2, 108. For school furnishings see the receipts and budgets in SSIA t. 3, for example the expenses for Iletsk uezd schools on pp. 258-60.

¹⁵¹ SSIA t. 2, 259 lists expenditures for six dozen plates, 30 knives, spoons and forks, a tablecloth, several thousand napkins, and 25 iron bedframes; for expenditures for boarders' linens and outerwear, see SSIA t. 2, 288, “Spravka o sostoianii uchilishchnogo fonda v Turgaiskoi oblasti za 1884-1886 gg.”

¹⁵² The lack of such *accountrements* was also seen as a mark of savagery, which the progressive intelligentsia had a responsibility to eradicate through education, among the pastoralists of eastern Siberia and the Arctic. See Yuri Slezkine, *Arctic Mirrors: Russia and the Small Peoples of the North* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell UP, 1994), 115-22.

Sedentarism alone, however, did not define the steppe's future; commercial, industrial, and agricultural societies can all function with the limited mobility of most of their populations, and as we have seen, a lively debate raged among colonial administrators of Altynsarin's era (and before) about which of these was most suited to the steppe biome. Within this ongoing debate, Altynsarin had maintained a clear position since the late 1860s, when his clerking duties had required him to observe the economy of the northern steppe, based on his evaluation of the physical characteristics of the region. Agriculture, according to him, had a much less promising future in the steppe than proponents of settlement claimed, even if it was not to be completely excluded. "Regrettably," he wrote, in a two-part article analyzing the causes of a famine in 1879-80 and exploring future economic directions for the Kazakhs,

"in several steppe uezds no agricultural future whatsoever is foreseen. The soil here is clayey, saline, or often sandy, all vegetation consists of bitter wormwood; the climate is unbelievably dry; rivers from year to year dry up... The only possible occupation in such uezds is animal husbandry."¹⁵³

The use of artificial irrigation made some superficially unpromising areas suitable for cultivation, but many other parts of the steppe were far from sources of fresh water, meaning that "Plowing such sections without fertilizer and irrigation, the Kazakhs can count on a harvest only with an abundance of rain and generally under favorable atmospheric conditions."¹⁵⁴ Although much of the region could not sustain agriculture, Altynsarin did not wholly reject its role in the steppe's economy, noting that Kazakhs, especially those too poor to keep livestock, had achieved some successes even in regions environmentally unsuited to it, giving "very satisfactory harvests" in Turgai uezd in the

¹⁵³ SSIA t. 2, 102, "Po povodu goloda v kirgizskoi stepi."

¹⁵⁴ SSIA t. 2, 86, "Ob oroshaemom zemledelii v Turgaiskoi oblasti."

early 1870s despite “the unproductivity of the soil...and the poor design (*ustroistvo*) of agricultural instruments.”¹⁵⁵ But the presence of vast swaths of dry grassland placed a limiting factor, for him, on the agriculturally-grounded visions of the steppe’s future on which policies of organized settlement were founded.

Rather, Altynsarin saw sedentarism as beneficial to the future economic development of the steppe along two different lines. First among these was a modified stock-rearing economy, making use of the animal capital and local knowledge already in abundance but adding what he viewed as the rationality and stability of sedentary economic systems. Rejecting the notion, after a serious famine, that the steppe could ever be made a second breadbasket (*zhitnitsa*) for the empire, he advocated instead that it remain the Russian Empire’s “stockyard” (*skotnyi dvor*), both because of the physical realities of the steppe biome and because “No prizes, no agricultural academies whatsoever will make such a herdsman as the Kazakh is.”¹⁵⁶ The experience of centuries of stock-raising was not, in other words, to be carelessly tossed aside in the rush to progress and modernization. Still, this massive stockyard was to be heavily influenced by the practices of neighboring sedentary societies, storing hay, giving it out economically (*sberezhno*), and producing animals not for subsistence, but for the market.¹⁵⁷ Moreover, the growth of urban centers around former colonial fortifications, and communication routes between them, was cast in extremely positive terms:

“Russian cities will have a completely different meaning for Kazakh life...In the intelligent (*intelligentnom*), trading and artisan population of cities the Kazakh will see a customer, supplying the steppe man with all the services of modern

¹⁵⁵ SSIA t. 2, 70-71, “Sostoianie zemledelii, senokosheniia i skotovodstva Turgaiskogo uezda za 1872 g.”

¹⁵⁶ SSIA t. 2, 105.

¹⁵⁷ Ibid.

civilization, arts, and scholarly knowledge. The influence of cities and convenient roads will be highly beneficial for the life of the Kazakh people.”¹⁵⁸

If part of the rationalization of animal husbandry was to orient it more towards the market, then Russian governance on the steppe was to provide such a market, and to provide the resources necessary for its expansion. Storing hay would require movement over a small area, and indeed regular returns to the location where it had been stored; the construction of such storage facilities (which, Altynsarin noted, some Kazakhs had already done on their own initiative) thus represented an attempt to address the problematic instability associated with mobile pastoralism without sacrificing completely an economic form well suited to the steppe biome. Partially sedentarized Kazakhs would produce better and healthier livestock; Russians clustered in urban centers would buy it.

Animal husbandry, stripped of its mobility and working symbiotically with the slow urbanization Russian imperialism brought about, was thus part of a fundamentally commercial vision of the steppe’s future. In Altynsarin’s conception, though, sedentarized Kazakhs were not forever to remain primary producers; rather, he sought to train his pupils to produce finished goods for the market, to create a generation of artisans closely linked to the products of a modernized stock-raising sector, along the lines proposed by the uezd nachalniks of Akmolinsk oblast in the early 1880s. In the first (and only) edition of *Kirgizskaia gazeta*, he complained of Kazakhs’ dependence on surrounding sedentary peoples both for manufactured goods and the processing of the raw materials they had in abundance: “our livestock gives us a huge quantity of skin, fat and hair; we, not knowing how to make anything from it, sell it in raw form to Tatar,

¹⁵⁸ Ibid., 105.

Bukharan and Russian traders.”¹⁵⁹ To Altynsarin’s mind, this lack of artisanal training, though it militated against the future prosperity of the steppe, could be corrected through state-supported educational institutions, though not the two-class uezd schools as they were originally planned. Indeed, according to his proposal for an elementary vocational school for Kazakhs in the city of Turgai, vocational students were first to study Russian in the two-class school, only subsequently devoting some of their time to skilled trades.¹⁶⁰ In planning these vocational schools, Altynsarin on one hand argued against the idea that there was anything specific or unique about Kazakhs’ educational and developmental needs; rather, he contended,

“It goes without saying that if general professional education is acknowledged as beneficial among all the long already sedentary (*osedlyi*) and more or less cultured peoples of the Russian empire, in the Kazakh people, still in a transitional state from the nomadic way of life to sedentarism, it is still more necessary for the direction of this young people, just only beginning cultured life, towards proper (*pravil’noe*) economic and moral development.”¹⁶¹

At the same time, these vocational plans were firmly grounded in the specific conditions of the steppe environment (considered a constant) and market (changing rapidly in the context of Russian expansion). The Kazakhs, he wrote, “are natural shepherds, their life and sympathies are closely joined with animal husbandry. But it is also known that they use this natural wealth only in its raw form, and as much as was required for their nomadic life.”¹⁶² Thus the program of the proposed vocational schools was focused principally on the small-scale manufacture of items that could be made from readily available materials – leather and felt from animal skin and hair, boots and

¹⁵⁹ Ibid., 108, “Kirgizskaia gazeta god pervyi (ianvar’ 1880)”.

¹⁶⁰ Ibid., 152, “Proekt ustroistva nachalnoi remeslennoi shkoly v g. Turgae” (20 January 1882).

¹⁶¹ Ibid., 193, “Zapiska na imia voennogo gubernatora Turgaiskoi obl., ‘O vvedenii professionalno-tekhnicheskogo obucheniia v dvukhklassnykh russko-kazakhskikh shkolakh’” (27 September 1884).

¹⁶² Ibid., 194.

clothing from leather and felt, and soap from animal fat.¹⁶³ Carpenters and mechanics (*slesary*) would also be necessary, to manufacture the finished goods that a sedentarizing Kazakh population would demand; women were to be admitted, eventually, to introductory classes in sewing, knitting, and weaving.¹⁶⁴ Altynsarin thus advocated a vocational program that would see the Kazakhs sedentarize, but with their economy largely independent of agriculture, focusing rather on orienting animal husbandry towards the commercial market and surviving on commercial profits. Considering his pessimism about steppe agriculture and the lack of heavy industrial development even in major Russian urban centers at the time, there could be no other option. Altynsarin's vision of a steppe populated by artisans, though, rested on an unstated assumption about the problems of the mobile pastoralist domestic economy. The idea that household skills already, for the most part, existing among the Kazakhs needed to be taught as academic subjects indicates that what Altynsarin was interested in was correcting the perceived irregularity of cottage industries. If imperial Russian ethnographic accounts from the late 19th century can be trusted, it would have been difficult to find a Kazakh woman unfamiliar with sewing or felt-making.¹⁶⁵ The idea that household tasks needed to be studied as academic subjects marked mobile pastoralist practices as needing improvement from external sources and valorized the teachings of the new trade school as rational, efficient, and scientifically approved.¹⁶⁶ Altynsarin's rejection of one common plan for

¹⁶³ Ibid., 196.

¹⁶⁴ Ibid., 195-96 and 157 ("O sostoianii uchebnoi chasti Turgaiskoi oblasti za 1882 g.," 12 January 1883).

¹⁶⁵ See, for example, the lengthy descriptions of Kazakh women's production of felt and reed mats in P. Makovetskii, "Iurta (letnee zhilishche kirgiz)" (Omsk: tip. Okruzhnogo shtaba, 1893), especially 7-10.

¹⁶⁶ Analogous discussions of the supervision and professionalization of domestic tasks have usually focused on issues of gender, rather than ethnicity. See e.g. Laura Downs, *Manufacturing Inequality: Gender Division in the French and British Metalworking Industries, 1914-1939* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell UP, 1995); Anna Kuxhausen, "Raising the Nation: Medicine, Morality and *Vospitanie* in Eighteenth-Century Russia," Diss. University of Michigan, 2006.

the steppe's economic development, then, still took place in a context that rejected mobile pastoralism as a viable plan for the future.

Although it was generally agreed, by the 1880s, that the Kazakh steppe was both in need of and capable of (as opposed to earlier, purely extractive economic visions) economic development, and further understood that mobile lifeways were opposed to "progress" in this sphere, little consensus existed among colonial administrators about *which* sedentary future best suited the region and its inhabitants. Alexander III's permission of organized peasant settlement implied a slight preponderance of agrarian visions for the steppe's future, but visions of commercial sedentarism were at the heart of some oblast-level administrative plans throughout Altynsarin's tenure as inspector of schools in Turgai oblast. The agrarian vision was also based on a significant influx of Slavic migrants, who were not as important to commercial futures of the steppe. In this context, although he rejected agrarian visions for the steppe's development, Altynsarin shared his interlocutors' assumption that sedentarization was necessary, and the schools under his supervision were designed to socialize pupils in this direction. Despite Altynsarin's subjective and independent choice of a commercial, rather than agricultural, developmental vision for the steppe, this would appear to correspond to Chatterjee's argument that subalterns are unable to escape reliance on colonizers' categories of analysis, insofar as he assessed Kazakhs' problems on the colonizer's terms. However, mobility was not central to Altynsarin's conception of Kazakhness; rather, it could be cast aside without losing what were, for him, more vital components of Kazakh identity (Islam and language) and, moreover, could be discarded without completely surrendering agency in the developmental process.

Whose Progress?

Indeed, while Altynsarin's literacy and vocational schools assumed a long period of engagement with the Russian Empire, and continued colonial governance, he also advocated for the limitation of an imperial Russian presence on the steppe. His arguments here subverted, in two respects, the colonial knowledge-gathering project. First, he ignored the pessimistic claims of some Russian anthropologists about Kazakhs' intellect and personality. Arguments that Kazakhs were intelligent and "civilizable" were also present in this anthropological literature, and while Altynsarin did not cite these directly, they substantiated his claims. Second, he used observations compiled while traveling around the northern steppe in the employ of various organs of the colonial administration as evidence that the development in which the Kazakhs were presumed to require outside help had also been happening in the absence of an influx of Slavic peasant settlers to the steppe. A hands-off, financially generous colonial administration had, in Altynsarin's view, an important role to play in shaping the steppe's future positively, but the agents of cultural and economic change were to be Kazakhs.

Kazakhs' intellectual capacity and moral characteristics were the subjects of significant disagreement among Russian geographers and ethnographers throughout the 19th century. Aleksei Kharuzin, in a two-volume anthropology of the Bukei Horde Kazakhs (published after Altynsarin's death), summarized the key arguments that had preceded him before making his own intervention to the debate. Emphasizing that seeming contradictions were, in fact, the product of a natural inclination to react differently in different circumstances, he listed what had been described as Kazakhs' "good, bad, and indifferent" qualities by a century's worth of external observers:

“suitability for intellectual development, mimicry (*pereimchivost*’), a light and versatile mind, sociability, happiness without passion, respect for elders (general opinion), hospitality (general opinion), sensitivity to insults, peacefulness, affection for Russians, occasional bravery...occasional honesty (Georgi, Lansdell, Meyer), vengefulness (Zavalishin, Georgi, Landsell, Meier), deceitfulness (Meyer, Zagriazhskii, Rychkov, Radlov, Zavalishin)...”¹⁶⁷

Though Kharuzin highlighted Kazakhs’ capacity for intellectual improvement, and implied that the majority of his scholarly predecessors agreed with him (even if he found the Bukei Horde Kazakhs decidedly underdeveloped in this respect at the time of his observation), other observers, most notably A. I. Levshin, focused on the “simple-mindedness” reflected in their cultural and economic practices, evincing less hope of their educability: “Neither their way of life, nor morals, nor religion permit the Kazakhs to be educated (*obrazovannymi*).”¹⁶⁸ A later physical anthropologist, N. Zeland, supported Levshin’s impressionistic views with data on cranial capacity, concluding, “The Kazakh of the present historical period must take a place behind cultured people not only in the amount of factual knowledge possessed, but in terms of suitability for its acquisition and cultivation.”¹⁶⁹ Moreover, any discussions of intellect, narrowly defined, were further framed through what was held, almost axiomatically, to be Kazakhs’ uncivilized moral character, reflected in their vengefulness, love of gossip, dishonesty, selfishness, and vanity.¹⁷⁰ If some anthropologists believed in the long-term prospects of Kazakhs for intellectual growth, then, this conviction was far from absolute in the

¹⁶⁷ Aleksei Kharuzin, *Kirgizy Bukeevskoi ordy: antropologo-etnograficheskii ocherk*, vyp. 1 (Moscow: tip. A. Levinsona, 1889) 216-17.

¹⁶⁸ A. I. Levshin, *Opisanie ord i stepei Kazakhov* (Pavlodar: “EKO,” 2005) 92.

¹⁶⁹ N. Zeland, *Kirgizy: etnograficheskii ocherk* (Semipalatinsk: publisher unknown, 1885) 72.

¹⁷⁰ These were five of the negative characteristics on which Kharuzin agreed with previous investigators (226). The list from which it was drawn listed only four positive traits (two of them, hospitality and respect for elders, said to be in decline) alongside thirteen negative ones and three others (curiosity, secretiveness, and versatility of mind) described as “in certain cases good, and in certain cases poor.”

scholarly community, and a range of character flaws meant, even for optimists, that this potential was far from being realized.

Early in his administrative career, Altynsarin had blamed Kazakhs' "moral underdevelopment (*nedorazvitiie*)" for troubles in implementation of the Temporary Statute of 1868.¹⁷¹ Even this relatively pessimistic perspective, though, rhetorically accommodated the possibility that development *was* occurring. Indeed, he would later describe the Kazakhs as a group to Katarinskii as "in a transitional state," and the arguments supporting his advocacy for school reform and expansion support the idea that this transition, for Altynsarin, was not just moral and economic, but also intellectual.¹⁷² Defying scholarly critiques of Kazakh morality, he noted that the pupils in his new schools were "generally distinguished by impeccable (*bezukoriznennyi*) behavior and unusual studiousness, such that it will not be their fault if they do not bring about everything useful and good that is expected from well-built school institutions."¹⁷³ This, then, was part of an argument for improving the funding and quality of instruction in Russo-Kazakh schools; their failure, were it to occur, could not be attributed to natural and inherent deficiencies on the part of their pupils. In a similar institutional context (advocating for improved and expanded schooling), Altynsarin stated his case for Kazakhs' intellectual capacity more explicitly. He encouraged the governor of Turgai oblast to levy a separate tax on every household in the province to support Russo-Kazakh schools, citing in his report "the urgent demand in any case to give the Kazakhs at once, while it is not too late, correct direction, leading to the moral and social development of

¹⁷¹ SSIA t. 2, 38-39, "O Vremennom polozhenii ob upravlenii v stepnykh oblastiiakh 1868 g."

¹⁷² SSIA t. 3, 49-50, letter to V. V. Katarinskii, 27 December 1879. This language is identical to Mukhammed-Salikh Babadzhanov's description of the Kazakhs a decade previous, but this seems merely coincidental.

¹⁷³ SSIA t. 2, 136, "Otchet o sostoianii kazakhskikh shkol Turgaiskoi obl. za 1880 g."

this people, talented and with a live wit.”¹⁷⁴ Altynsarin’s professional responsibilities required him to constantly agitate for his share of scanty financial resources, and such arguments – expressing the idea, fundamentally, that the funds disbursed would not go to waste, but serve their intended developmental purpose – were an important part of his case. In this sense, he creatively used one strain, out of several possible ones, of metropolitan scholarly discourse to shape colonial governance in the direction he preferred, even if the authenticity of these views is difficult to establish. If these attempts were not entirely successful (as evidenced by, for instance, the delays he encountered in setting up volost schools), neither were they entirely in vain. Rather, Altynsarin exerted a great deal of influence on the curricula of Russo-Kazakh schools and successfully advocated for the opening of several new educational institutions on the basis of arguments for the Kazakhs’ inherent and underdeveloped intelligence, to develop which, in his view, it was the Russian Empire’s responsibility to provide support.

This support, though, was to be institutional, financial, and administrative only; Altynsarin’s contention that Kazakhs were more intelligent and capable than some metropolitan observers believed fueled, in other forums, an argument that they were to serve themselves as the agents of change on the steppe. This point emerged most clearly after the severe winter, and subsequent famine, that struck the northern Kazakh steppe during the winter of 1879-80, immediately after Altynsarin accepted the post of school inspector. Arguing against what he believed were artificial and unnecessary “corrective” measures proposed by some commentators to prevent repeated occurrences of famine, Altynsarin warned, “The forcible shattering of the life of a whole nation (*natsiia*) is likely

¹⁷⁴ Ibid., 174-75, “O sbore sredstv s naseleniia na nuzhdy narodnogo obrazovaniia.” Report dated 20 October 1883.

to turn the nation, sometimes the most talented, into an apathetic one.”¹⁷⁵ The idea of Kazakh “talent” could thus serve either as an argument for increased or decreased governmental intervention, as needed.

Indeed, the famine of 1879-80 provoked a re-evaluation of Kazakh economic lifeways for some Russian commentators. Altynsarin was particularly interested in engaging with the arguments put forth by a certain Voronetskii in the weekly newspaper *Orenburgskii listok*, which, he noted with some regret, “[are] also not unfamiliar to our administration.”¹⁷⁶ In the wake of this catastrophe, during which food stores quickly dwindled to nothing and roads were blocked with snow, preventing the delivery of new supplies and making grain unavailable at any cost, Voronetskii was not alone, according to Altynsarin, in recommending that administrators “replace the unstable method of national wellbeing – animal husbandry –with a more stable one – agriculture and in accordance with this to turn the nomadic way of life of the people as quickly as possible to sedentary, if only by forcible measures.”¹⁷⁷ The losses borne by Turgai oblast’s Kazakhs signified, for Voronetskii and his supporters, the inherent problems of their economy, a backwardness that could only be ameliorated by Russian settler colonization, bringing *muzhiks* to the steppe who would teach agriculture to their pastoralist neighbors by example and, over time, transform them into something similar.

We have already seen that Altynsarin took a generally dim view of the prospects for large-scale agriculture in Turgai oblast, not rejecting it completely, but expressing doubt that much of its land was cultivable. Engaging with Voronetskii in particular, and plans for Russian settler colonization more broadly, though, he took a different tack,

¹⁷⁵ Ibid., 100.

¹⁷⁶ Ibid., 99.

¹⁷⁷ Ibid.

questioning instead the necessity of settlers as *Kulturtragers* on the steppe. This was a complicated argument with several layers. First, Altynsarin was at pains to demonstrate that the natural disaster that had befallen the region was not necessarily linked to pastoral mobility; rather, he claimed, “Such serious misfortunes...are apt to subject any sedentary, non-nomadic people to disaster as well. One need not go far for an example. Our city of Turgai bears adversity just the same as the Kazakhs.”¹⁷⁸ The problem was not a lack of foresight on the Kazakhs’ part (indeed, he noted, most were in the habit of making stores of food and fodder in anticipation of such disasters), but an act of God impossible to foresee or prevent.¹⁷⁹ Second, to the extent that agriculture was possible in the northern Kazakh steppe, Kazakhs were already experimenting in this field on their own initiative, rendering the artificial stimulus of settlement superfluous at best and harmful at worst.¹⁸⁰ Finally, he returned to the issue of intellectual development:

“Already now many Kazakhs living along the [ten-versta] tract know the art of agriculture no worse than the Russian *muzhik*, and with the passage of time because of the impressionability and intelligence (*smyshlennost’*) characteristic of a young people the Kazakhs, likely, will generally not lag behind lifelong farmers. Therefore we do not understand those cultural hopes that the administration of Western Siberia assigns to Russian colonization among the Kazakhs, the more since the peasant colonizers, in terms of their mental development, are no better than Kazakhs.”¹⁸¹

To the limited extent that agriculture was possible and desirable on the steppe, then, Slavic peasant settlers had no place stimulating its growth; rather, it was growing on

¹⁷⁸ Ibid., 102. Indeed, extreme cold as such was not typically considered a serious threat to pastoralists, whose greatest enemy was instead *dzhut*, an early thaw followed by a quick freeze that left all fodder grasses under a thick crust of ice, completely inaccessible to hooved animals.

¹⁷⁹ Ibid., 98-99, “O dzhute (goloditse).” This is the first part of a two-part article, whose second half is called “Po povodu goloda v kirgizskoi stepi,” cited above.

¹⁸⁰ Ibid., 99-101; note especially the claim that “the Kazakhs are already displaying striving to agriculture” (101).

¹⁸¹ Ibid., 103.

its own, for Altynsarin, and the artificial introduction of settlers from without would only serve to disrupt this natural process.

Altynsarin unreservedly agreed with the assessment of Russian colonial administrators that the steppe and its inhabitants required economic and cultural development, and that sedentarization was probably the best way to achieve this. But whereas metropolitan administrative opinion had begun to converge on the idea that settler colonization was necessary to bring sedentarization about, he contended that “the Kazakhs will themselves reach sedentarism and themselves will merge (*sol’iutsia*), sooner or later, with Russians.”¹⁸² Thus, if he worked within a similar developmental paradigm as his colleagues and superiors, he had a strikingly different understanding of what development would look like, and of how it would be accomplished. Among several competing developmental visions, Altynsarin advocated for one centered around commerce and market-oriented stock-raising as best suited to local conditions and habits, with agriculture developing organically only where environmental factors permitted it. Moreover, the two-class and volost schools ultimately relegated imperial governance to a secondary role in the creation of progress, a position of relative non-interference; it was rather “talented,” “intelligent” Kazakhs who were to point the way forward, with governmental support. Engaging with the administrative and scholarly discourse of his era, Altynsarin’s views of the future of the steppe represented a creative reworking of the colonizer’s categories, rather than being entirely derivative.¹⁸³ The wide distribution of

¹⁸² Ibid., 105.

¹⁸³ This suggests the need for a reworking of the binaries produced by post-colonial scholarship. In the context of United States expansion, see Scott Richard Lyons, *X-Marks: Native Signatures of Assent* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2010) for a praiseworthy attempt to do precisely this, articulating the distinction between programs of differentiation and separatism, the former taking place within a context of U.S. sovereignty. In so doing, he condemns both notions of assimilation and the discourse of inauthenticity that surrounds the recognition of imperial sovereignty.

his textbooks and expansion of schools on the basis of a plan he proposed suggests that he was able to influence his colleagues, subordinate and superior in rank, even as institutional opposition brought some of his other proposals to naught.

Conclusion

Perhaps it is the sheer complexity of the ideas Altynsarin developed during an administrative and scholarly career spanning almost three decades that accounts for the wide range of agendas that historians have projected on him. He has been portrayed as, variously, a stooge of Il'minskii (and facilitator of his proselytizing agenda), a great "democrat-enlightener" of the feudal and ignorant steppe, and a key progenitor of the 20th century Kazakh nationalist movement.¹⁸⁴ None of these schools of thought, however, can adequately explain Altynsarin's activity in publishing, education, and administration. His views of the Russian Empire's purpose on the steppe, and Kazakhs' purpose within it, differed sharply from most of his interlocutors, and the high position he occupied for the last decade helped these views gain political fixity; although some members of the Alash movement emerged from Altynsarin's schools, his own sense of Kazakhness was compatible with, and even depended on, an idealized vision of Russian colonial governance. This idealism was at the core of Altynsarin's ambivalent position with respect to his colleagues, and to Russian colonialism on the steppe more broadly. His conception of what development and progress might mean on the steppe was one among several with currency in Russian administrative circles, and by no means the most popular, while his insistence on the centrality of Islam to Kazakh identity, and its compatibility with Russian governance, was a drastic departure from the views of his

¹⁸⁴ Kreindler, "National Awakening," summarizes these first two (Soviet) perspectives and argues for the third.

interlocutors. In practice, though, while Altynsarin's mind may not have been colonized, Turgai oblast was, and this reality meant that the implementation of his ideas was a constant struggle, often unsuccessful. For Altynsarin, the steppe would ideally, in the future, be partially sedentarized and populated by Muslim, bilingual Kazakhs, a transformation fostered by metropolitan resources, but not large-scale colonization, but his proposals had to win the approval of administrators for whom Russification and colonization became greater priorities. Arguing for an ideal, Altynsarin often found himself hemmed in by reality.

Altynsarin was not the only Kazakh of his era to extol the virtues of an idealized form of metropolitan culture while expressing views sharply at odds with the practice of colonial governance. This ambivalent position was also characteristic of another canonical "democrat-enlightener," the poet Abai Qunanbaev, the subject of the next chapter. Abai's Russian acquaintances, however, having been exiled to the steppe precisely because of their oppositional politics, related very differently to colonial governance than did Altynsarin's. Moreover, whereas Altynsarin's views were published in scholarly journals, and written out in administrative files, Abai's evaluation of Russian imperialism was expressed in poetic forms long in use on the steppe – that is, they were addressed to an entirely different (and wider) audience, and in a form far less legible for concerned administrators. At the same time, his position distinctly outside the bureaucracy of the colonial state made it much less likely that his ideas would have any kind of political consequence. Reading the careers of Abai and Altynsarin against one another brings into clear focus the dilemma of subalternity – proximity to colonial

authority at once increased the influence of a subaltern's thinking about imperialism and constrained the ways in which it could be expressed.

Chapter 4

Exiles and *Aqyns*: The Intellectual Life of Semipalatinsk Oblast and the Meanings of Empire, 1880-1905

Introduction

Born in 1845, Abai Qunanbaev (Ibragim Qunanbai-uly) was celebrated during his lifetime and after as the finest exemplar of the art of the *aqyn* (Kazakh bard).¹ He was not the first member of his family to achieve renown throughout the steppe. His grandfather Oskenbai had been one of the most famous biys of the Middle Horde, and his father Qunanbai was both a noted orator and a long-serving senior sultan under the Russian colonial administration.² From early childhood, Abai's education was meant to prepare him to follow in the footsteps of his wealthy and respected forebears; he was first schooled at home before studying Islamic law, Arabic, and Persian at a *medresse* in Semipalatinsk. As a young adult, however, he rebelled against what he described as his father's exploitative and cruel behavior, both as senior sultan of Karkaralinsk okrug and later as an influential, wealthy herder without any official authority. In 1873, at the age of 28, he left his father's aul and went to the city of Semipalatinsk to study in the Russian school established there. The personal connections he made in Semipalatinsk, and the ideas he encountered there, resulted in an original synthesis of views concerning the problems of Kazakh society and Kazakhs' relationship to the Russian Empire. Abai, interacting with statisticians, ethnographers, and naturalists in Semipalatinsk, was not

¹ Most famously, his life has been dramatized (indeed, somewhat romanticized) by the Soviet Kazakh literary scholar Mukhtar Auezov in the multi-volume novel *Abai zholy/Put' Abaia (The Path of Abai)*.

² Zhanuzak Kasymbaev, *Starshii sultan Kunanbai Oskenbaev i ego okruzhenie*, 2nd ed. (Almaty: Izd-vo. "Kitap," 2004) 66.

himself involved with the natural sciences. Rather, the thinking of his interlocutors about Russian imperialism, which informed their scholarship, also informed the Kazakh-language poetry and polemics through which he expressed his views. Valikhanov, Babadzhanov, and Altynsarin, though original thinkers, all expressed their ideas within a cultural and institutional context defined by the metropole. Abai's writings provide an opportunity to investigate the workings of colonizing discourse in a radically different cultural context, further from the control of colonial authorities.

The complexity of Abai's views about Russo-Kazakh relations has made it comparatively easy for them to be simplified and expropriated for political purposes. In the post-Stalin era of Soviet historiography, privileging ethnic Russians and narratives about inter-ethnic cooperation, Abai's interest in Russian ideas and criticism of Kazakh society made him a useful figure; he appears in most Soviet accounts as an "enlightener" of the steppe, and his friendship with a group of "progressive" Russians is celebrated.³ Since the fall of the Soviet Union and the creation of an independent Republic of Kazakhstan, a new narrative has emerged, describing Abai as a great patriot and connecting him with the nationalist Alash movement that emerged in the early 20th century.⁴ While neither of these sets of arguments was created from whole cloth, they are both flawed. Abai's calls for unity in the Kazakh people fall short of nationalism, in the sense of self-determination, because of the enormous role he saw for Russian imperialism in transforming the steppe and its inhabitants. Emphasizing Abai's interest

³ On shifts in the writing of history in the Soviet Union towards a narrative favoring ethnic Russians see David Brandenberger, *National Bolshevism: Stalinist Mass Culture and the Formation of Modern Russian National Identity* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard UP, 2002); for the pro-Russian narrative on Abai see especially Mukhtar Auezov, *Put' Abaia* (Almaty: Izd-vo. "Ana tili", 1997) 4 vols., translator unknown.

⁴ See e.g. M. K. Kozybaev, ed., *Istoriia Kazakhstana s drevneishikh vremen do nashikh dnei v 5-ti tomakh*, t. 3 (Almaty: Atamura, 2000) for a claim that "The analysis of the state of Kazakh society, criticism of the deficiencies and weaknesses of a colonized people, begun and expressed in writing by Abai, prepared the entry to the historical stage of the Alash reformers" (13).

in Russian ideas, on the other hand, can obscure the extent to which his thinking about Kazakhness and colonial governance was original. Abai not only engaged creatively with the ideas of his interlocutors, but reflected in his writings a subjective blend of the multiple narratives of Russian imperialism available to a resident of Semipalatinsk oblast.

Indeed, Semipalatinsk oblast was a liminal space in the Russian Empire. After the promulgation of temporary regulations governing state-sponsored peasant resettlement in 1882, it became, increasingly, a place where the land of Kazakh pastoralists was seized for the benefit of Slavic peasants. Its government was, at times, deeply suspicious of locals and arbitrary in its use of coercive power against them. It also, however, served as a primary site of exile for political oppositionists. Fyodor Dostoevsky, who met Chokan Valikhanov during a stay in Semipalatinsk following his release from the “house of the dead” in Omsk, is the most famous of these exiles, but there were tens more throughout the second half of the nineteenth century, living in Semipalatinsk under the observation, secret or otherwise, of the tsarist gendarmerie. Among them were both followers of Chernyshevskii and participants in the failed Polish revolution of 1863. In a context where governmental organs lacked sufficiently educated bureaucrats, these educated, but politically “unreliable” people often carried out state-sponsored research concerning Semipalatinsk oblast. The most important organ for support and organization of such research was the Semipalatinsk Statistical Committee, under the auspices of the Ministry of Internal Affairs; the city also boasted a museum and public library, on which some of the exiles had significant influence, and from 1901 on, was home to a subdivision (of the West Siberian division, based in Omsk) of the Imperial

Russian Geographical Society.^{5,6} Abai's intellectual milieu, in short, was not limited to the walls of the Russian-language school, and came with a wide range of perspectives on the policies of the tsarist state. Abai encountered Russians in the provincial capital not as a unitary mass, but as martinets and radicals, supporters of the status quo and proponents of major reform.

Consideration of Abai's production, and the multiple contexts in which it was produced, reveals the instability of "subaltern" as a category of analysis in the Russian Empire. If one can only agree with Gayatri Spivak's complaint that subaltern has become "just a classy word for oppressed, for Other," in this case her formulation that "everything that has limited or no access to the cultural imperialism is subaltern – a space of difference" is also inadequate.⁷ This chapter will demonstrate that the state and non-state institutions of Semipalatinsk oblast created a social and discursive space in which a Russophone Kazakh and oppositionally-minded Russians influenced one another's views. To the extent that Abai's influence depended on his learning Russian and participating in metropolitan institutions, Spivak's argument holds.⁸ But these Russians, while still having linguistic and educational access to cultural imperialism, criticized the practice of imperialism, and had been physically removed from the Empire's centers of politics and culture. In the Russian Empire, within the categories of cultural imperialism, substantial

⁵ Every province of the Russian Empire had its own statistical committee, generally staffed by any available educated volunteers, although the Semipalatinsk branch seems to have maintained a particularly active agenda of research and publishing.

⁶ There was substantial overlap between the memberships of the Semipalatinsk Oblast Statistical Committee and this subdivision of IRGO, and the start of publication of the latter's *Zapiski* in 1903 corresponds with a sharp decline in content of the former's main annual publication, the *Pamiatnaia knizhka Semipalatinskoi oblasti*. I have not, however, been able to find any more concrete connection between the two.

⁷ Leon de Kock, "Interview with Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak: New Nation Writers Conference in South Africa," *ARIEL: A Review of International English Literature* 23.3 (1992) 45.

⁸ C.f. Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak, "Can the Subaltern Speak?" Cary Nelson and Lawrence Grossberg, eds., *Marxism and the Interpretation of Culture* (Urbana, IL: University of Illinois Press, 1988), 271-314.

variation reigned, and ethnicity was not the only grounds for exclusion from power. Nor were cultural spaces outside the language of the metropole uniform in their responses to imperialism. The chapter closes with an investigation of a group of Kazakh bards, most famously Shortambai Qunay-uli, Dulat Babatai-uly, Abubakir Kerderi, and Murat Mongke-uli, known as the “*zar zaman*” (“bad times”) poets.⁹ Their oral poetry was something closer to Spivak’s cultural “space of difference,” and Abai, as an *aqyn*, sought credibility in this space as well. However, while all the bards discussed in this chapter concurred that Kazakh society was in the throes of crisis, Abai’s diagnosis of the cause of the problem, and potential solutions to it, differed markedly from his poetic contemporaries. Among imperial Russian observers, discussions of Kazakh poverty and primitivism inspired arguments in favor of the reform or the maintenance of imperial policy. Among Kazakh poets, similar language inspired arguments for the necessity of colonial governance (albeit reformed, and differently than the oppositional exiles wished) or lamentations about its presence. In both cases, it is better to speak of multiple subalternities and multiple cultural imperialisms, some permitting dialogue with others, others not.

Steppe Life in the Eyes of Non-Semipalatinsk Scholars

In the late 19th century Russian Empire, the ethnographic and anthropological discourses surrounding Kazakhs were extremely negative; the oppositional *kraevedy* of Semipalatinsk were nearly unique among their contemporaries in their generally sanguine

⁹ Western scholars, to the extent that they have commented on these poets at all, have adopted the term wholesale. See, for example, Shirin Akiner, *The Formation of Kazakh National Identity: From Tribe to Nation-State* (London: Royal Institute of International Affairs, 1995) 31 for a brief discussion.

appraisal of Kazakhs' character, morality, and economic lifeways.¹⁰ While there were exceptions, the vast majority of anthropological observers of Kazakh populations viewed their subjects as dirty, ignorant, childlike, and primitive, far removed from the standards of Western civilization. The stark contrast between the majority of Russian scholarly discourse about Kazakhs in the late 19th and early 20th centuries and the materials emerging from the exiled Semipalatinsk scholars suggests two important points. First, it implies that there was something unique in the general line of argument these local organizations pursued in their work; it is significant that the educated Kazakhs of the oblast gravitated towards these scholars rather than towards those who portrayed them as ignorant children on the verge of being overtaken by a superior civilization. Second, and more important, it also provides circumstantial evidence (which gains further strength upon consideration of the available memoir literature) that the interactions between Russians and Kazakhs that the scholarly organizations of Semipalatinsk oblast fostered were mutually influential. They did not, in other words, only result in Kazakhs who could translate Pushkin, but Russians with a more nuanced and sensitive view of Kazakh life and culture as well.

While working as a doctor in Zaisan uezd of Semipalatinsk oblast, V. D. Tronov carried out anthropological measurements of 49 Kazakhs of the uezd (in an effort to determine their “physical type”), as well as “observations both of their daily life...and

¹⁰ The word *kraevedenie* and its variants are difficult to translate directly into English. They refer, roughly, to the ethnographic and historical study of a region within the political boundaries of the Russian Empire (“*krai*” was the term for a large administrative unit consisting of several provinces in the Catherinian era, and preserved the less-specific meaning of “region” in later usage), and imply that this study is not necessarily done by professional scholars. Because of the difficulties of a concise translation, I will use *kraevedenie* and *kraeved* (one engaged in such study) without translation in this chapter.

their physical and moral nature.”¹¹ Over the course of these observations, he formed fantastically low opinions of Kazakh morality and “development” in the cultural and economic sense. In a short article for the Russian Geographical Society, he developed and justified these subjective views by grounding them in the purportedly objective data he had gathered during his fieldwork. Muscular strength among the Kazakhs, he argued, despite physical appearances to the contrary, “is little developed, owing to the little-active way of life and little work with the hands.”¹² Syphilis, with which Tronov had observed “whole households, whole auls” to be infected, stood as a sign for him that “in general the Kazakhs’ understanding about morality is very low, and they do not demand much of it”; he attributed this licentiousness to the allegedly widespread practice of marrying young girls without consent to men 60 years their senior, unable to satisfy them sexually.¹³ Syphilis, a sign of moral decay, was also taken as a sign of underdevelopment more broadly:

“Standing on a very low step of development, representing a transition from wild men to a more or less cultured nation, the Kazakhs, in the struggle for existence, must yield a place to their neighbors, more cultured. Both the impoverishment and the degeneracy (*vyrozhdenie*) of the Kazakhs conditions this, as a consequence of which [they suffer from] all possible infectious diseases. In the first rank of these latter stands syphilis.”¹⁴

Indeed, Tronov described the Kazakhs as little better than animals, their actions motivated only by lust and hunger. He attributed the impoverishment of the Kazakhs he observed to “above all their wildness, ignorance, phenomenal laziness, the absence of any

¹¹ V. D. Tronov, “Materialy po antropologii i etnologii kirgiz,” *Zapiski IRGO po otdeleniiu etnografii*, t. XVII, vyp. 2 (1891), 45-46.

¹² *Ibid.*, 51.

¹³ *Ibid.*, 52. Laura Engelstein has demonstrated that the discourses surrounding syphilis in the late-imperial era were linked to critiques both of the morality of the urban and rural poor of Russia and of the social conditions (poor housing and education) some physicians considered conducive to endemic syphilis. See Engelstein, “Morality and the Wooden Spoon: Russian Doctors View Syphilis, Social Class, and Sexual Behavior, 1890-1905,” *Representations* 14 (Spring 1986): 169-208.

¹⁴ Tronov 52.

interests beyond purely digestive ones.”¹⁵ Elsewhere he dehumanized his subjects even more directly, explaining that Kazakhs “live a lower animal life” devoid of intellectual pursuits, organized industry, or any concerns beyond remaining satiated at all times while expending as little work as possible.¹⁶ This lack of intellectual development was expressed for Tronov not only by economic indicators, but cultural production as well:

“The Kazakh is at a very low step of development, therefore his fantasies are very poor, his forms not poetic. Singing of nature, the Kazakh sings thus: ‘What a mountain, what a valley! In this valley one can pasture a thousand head of horses, on this mountain one can pasture a thousand sheep.’”¹⁷

Language and underdevelopment alike limited the Kazakhs in this arena, in Tronov’s view, since “the poor Kazakh language cannot express all the shadings of thought.”¹⁸ While he made no argument that the Russian Empire had a particular responsibility to civilize the Kazakhs, Tronov’s line of argument militated against any conception of the steppe as a region where colonizers and colonized alike had interests requiring protection.

Even the few positive traits Tronov attributed to the Kazakhs he observed made them out to be a part of the natural environment, more animal than human. Although “nature [had] rewarded the Kazakh with a quite developed brain,” in practice this only meant that their sense organs and powers of observation were abnormally keen; “nature itself proper, in its higher phenomena,” Tronov claimed, “is little accessible to a

¹⁵ Ibid., 53.

¹⁶ Ibid., 60.

¹⁷ Ibid., 60. This claim, significantly, was repeated word for word in 1914, in the Main Administration of Land Settlement and Agriculture’s three-volume collection *Aziatskaia Rossiia*. Ideas about cultural inferiority had a long life in scholarly and bureaucratic circles, and could be put to surprising uses – in 1914, after the peak of the Russian Empire’s era of resettlement, such claims served as justification for the expropriation of land from Kazakh pastoralists. See *Aziatskaia Rossiia, t. 1: liudi i poriadki za Uralom* (St. Petersburg: izdanie Pereselencheskogo upravleniia, 1914) 162.

¹⁸ Ibid., 63.

Kazakh's mind.”¹⁹ The rough conditions in which they spent their lives, he continued, inured them against physical hardship and discomfort to a degree that Russian colonists were unable to match:

“The Kazakhs, as a people standing at the very lowest level of culture, should react differently to all external influences of nature than a more cultured people. The tolerance of the Kazakhs to cold and hunger is notable, and equally his tolerance of physical pain. The Kazakh's body quickly responds to all physical trauma, thus all wounds among the Kazakhs heal up very quickly, and huge wounds of parts of the body often heal without suppurating. Therefore the Kazakhs relate very indifferently to various wounds of the body and do not give them special significance.”²⁰

These seemingly positive attributes ultimately served, for Tronov, as further evidence of Kazakh underdevelopment. The sense organs were developed because of Kazakhs' constant proximity to the natural world; they tolerated extremes of cold, heat, hunger and thirst because, in his formulation, they lacked the intellectual and emotional capacity to react to such stimuli other than indifferently. Standing on the lowest rung of human civilization, Kazakhs were, for Tronov, interesting research subjects and perhaps a source of some minor humanitarian concern, but wholly separate from the political and cultural life of the empire and doomed to remain so.

N. Zeland, collecting anthropological data about the Great Horde Kazakhs of Semireche oblast, came to conclusions consonant with Tronov's, though less acerbic about the causes of Kazakh poverty. Like Tronov, he contended that the Kazakhs had an inhuman tolerance of physical discomfort, and connected this observation to their low standing on the hierarchy of world civilizations: “The Kazakhs, like many primitive (*pervobytnye*) peoples, can go hungry for a long time. Not having eaten for three or four

¹⁹ Ibid., 54.

²⁰ Ibid., 63.

days, the Kazakh does not weaken, and to gallop a whole day... means nothing to him.”²¹ The animal husbandry by which almost all Kazakhs of the oblast fed themselves was also “primitive,” since “in essence it consists of the heads of household using the animals – their movement and feeding represent little trouble to them. Even in the winter animals are obligated to fetch their own food, that is, last year’s grass.”²² He described domestic life as similarly disordered: “Yurts are located wherever they fall, from far away one may take them for stacks of hay. Near them horses neigh, dogs bark, camels trumpet, and naked or half-naked children play.”²³ Zeland thus presented the Kazakhs of Semireche as the antithesis of the purportedly hard-working, well-organized settlers arriving to the region from the inner provinces of the Russian Empire after Alexander III’s approval of temporary regulations governing resettlement in 1882. However, he was more willing than Tronov to point out the role of Russian settlement in the Kazakhs’ gradual impoverishment, noting that “on one hand they are really somewhat constrained by migrants and Cossacks, to whom they gave broad plots [of land].”²⁴ Still, though, the overriding reasons for this phenomenon lay, for Zeland, in the Kazakhs’ natural childishness, in their overly credulous dealings with unscrupulous middlemen who proposed to “help” them to pay taxes and in the fact that “the Kazakhs themselves (men, at least) are lazy and carefree.”²⁵ The new physical realities of Russian immigration had some effect on the Kazakhs’ increasingly parlous state, in this view, but their lack of intellectual development and sophistication was the chief determinant of those realities’ consequences.

²¹ N. Zeland, *Kirgizy – etnograficheskii ocherk* (Semipalatinsk: n.p., 1885) 19.

²² *Ibid.*, 22.

²³ *Ibid.*, 20.

²⁴ *Ibid.*, 25.

²⁵ *Ibid.*, 25.

For all these reasons, Zeland held out little hope for Kazakhs' intellectual betterment (and, hence, advancement up the hierarchy of world civilizations) in the future, the efforts and expenditures of tsarist administrators notwithstanding. Though he noted, with Tronov, Kazakhs' superior "memory of objects surrounding them, of people and places" relative to "men of culture," he disparaged their linguistic capacity, and still more their ability to grasp and remember abstract concepts.²⁶ Although Kazakh boys had studied at the Omsk and Orenburg *kadetskie korpusy* for more than 50 years by the time he wrote, he argued that this effort had "not brought forth any significant fruit," because Kazakhs "must take a place behind cultured peoples not only in their amount of factual knowledge, but in terms of suitability for its acquisition and cultivation."²⁷ In the aftermath of the Meiji Restoration of 1868, Japan became for many Western commentators the yardstick by which other Asian civilizations were to be measured; for Zeland, Kazakhs fell far short in the comparison. Whereas in Japan, he argued, "there had developed independently such work ethic, inquisitiveness, and understanding of life that it was enough for Europe to touch them and they revived," Kazakhs had "produced very little themselves," making it difficult to imagine that contact with a European civilization would immediately change a situation that he and other commentators imagined was backwards and stagnant.²⁸ It was impossible to revive, according to this line of thinking, what had never been lively before. The steppe, in Zeland's view, was destined to forever remain a cultural and economic dead zone.

²⁶ Ibid., 71.

²⁷ Considering the accomplishments of Chokan Valikhanov (a product of the Omsk *kadetskii korpus*) and Mukhammed-Salikh Babadzhanov (Orenburg), this statement seems incredible, but the "rediscovery" of Valikhanov's work was more than a decade away at the time Zeland wrote his sketch.

²⁸ Ibid., 72.

The result of decades of Russian ethnographic observation of the steppe was a consistently contemptuous understanding of the Kazakhs as a people. Disagreements among such scholars occurred only by degrees and were centered around specific character traits. While some were willing to concede a small role for Russian colonialism in what they were convinced was Kazakhs' profound backwardness, the main reason they offered for the poverty and illness they observed was Kazakhs' essential lack of intellectual development. No amount of administrative effort, they believed, nor of expenditures would quickly rectify this fundamental flaw. Since Zeland, Tronov, and scholars who sided with them did not foresee the withdrawal of Russian power from the steppe, this conviction begs a question about the role that power was meant to play there, one they never answered. The 1880s, when both authors wrote, saw the passage of multiple regulations governing peasant resettlement to the steppe and the expansion of the Russo-Kazakh educational system. In this context, arguments about the negligible anticipated benefits of such measures for the colonized signified a view of Russian imperialism emphasizing the economic exploitation of the steppe and aggrandizement of metropolitan prestige. Semipalatinsk's liberal scholars, on the other hand, believed that well-considered regulations, developed on the basis of an increasingly large set of data, could raise Kazakhs to a cultural level whereby they could participate in the political and economic life of a multi-ethnic state.

Kraevedenie and the Politics of Dissent

The political exiles of Semipalatinsk oblast were in an awkward position with respect to the tsarist state, as this state was with respect to them. Sent to a remote province in an attempt both to punish them and reduce the potential harm of any future

political activity on their part, many of them did not abandon the struggle for reform (whether from outside or within the state apparatus proper). Low- and mid-level governmental institutions in the province, meanwhile, were chronically short-staffed, desperate for educated personnel, and usually eager to accept the services of men who, in more propitious circumstances, would have been disqualified as politically unreliable. Statistical, geographical, and ethnographic study of Semipalatinsk oblast by these exiles under the auspices of state or state-sponsored institutions, in a sense, resolved this tension. From the perspective of the imperial state, attentive study of its borderlands reinforced the power and efficacy of its governance; in retrospect, it was also a means of exerting discursive power over forms of knowledge that had previously obtained there. Political exiles, on the other hand, were given the opportunity to gloss strong criticism of the consequences of colonial misrule as factual scholarship, and useful to the state that had sponsored it. The publications of the Semipalatinsk Statistical Committee reflect this duality, balancing the prerogatives of a rationalizing imperial state with those of writers who were often on site because of their opposition to that state. The argument that predominates in its unofficial materials identifies, like other scholarly observers, serious problems among the Kazakhs of Semipalatinsk oblast; unlike Tronov and Zeland, however, members of the Semipalatinsk Statistical Committee suggested that Russian imperialism might be the root cause of these problems.

The Semipalatinsk Statistical Committee was funded by and reported to the Ministry of Internal Affairs, and many of its surviving files attest that, to a large extent, it served state interests both discursively and in a more concrete sense. It was responsible, for example, for gathering data that would ultimately enter the regular reports

(*vsepoddaneishie otchety*, literally “most-all-subject reports”) of the military governor of the oblast to the tsar.²⁹ The Committee’s report of its activities for 1899 gives a sense of the scope and breadth of the tasks the MVD charged it with:

“On the request of the Central Statistical Committee [of the MVD], information was gathered about the size of land areas sown with grains of various types and plants, and about the harvest in the year under review of grasses and spring and winter grains; on the request of the supervisor of excise taxes of okrug no. 5 of Tomsk guberniia and Semipalatinsk oblast was reported detailed information about factories existing in Semipalatinsk oblast in 1898, about the quantity of livestock, about fires and the number of violent and accident deaths in that same year.”³⁰

Scores of other files attest to the Committee’s role in reporting population statistics, harvest data, information about the state of various business enterprises, and other such desiderata to provincial authorities and the Central Statistical Committee in St. Petersburg. In this sense, its role in imperial governance is clear – it gathered fundamental data intended to inform the decision-making processes of civil and military administrators at the local and national levels alike, and it was not exceptional in doing so. At times the Committee’s work even extended to direct recommendations about the settler movement from the black-earth provinces of Russia and the Ukrainian steppes, as in the *Vsepoddaneishii otchet* of 1896:

“In general, it is impossible to yet call the position of migrant settlements in the oblast completely stable, despite all the efforts of the administration... The most important question of the peasant economy here is the establishment of artificial irrigation of fields, without which local agriculture will never attain the desired stability and fixity.”³¹

²⁹ See TsGA RK f. 460, op. 1, dd. 29 and 48 and for materials pertaining to the compilation of the *vsepoddaneishie otchety* for 1896 and 1908, respectively.

³⁰ TsGA RK f. 460, op. 1, d. 54, sv. 4, l. 2, “Otchet Semipalatinskogo Statisticheskogo Komiteta za 1899 g.,” undated.

³¹ TsGA RK f. 460, op. 1, d. 29, sv. 3, ll. 2ob.-3, “Po sostavlenii Vsepoddanneishogo otcheta za 1896 g.,” 15 January 1898.

No less significant than the real and substantial help the Committee lent to tsarist administrators in managing the material and human resources of a colonial borderland was the discursive level on which its work simultaneously functioned. Russian surveyors and administrators had complained from the first moment of the steppe's political incorporation into the Russian Empire of the lack and poor quality of information about, among other things, the wealth and population of steppe nomads.³² This criticism contrasted the alleged murk and irrationality of the steppe with the coming rationality of the tsarist state, which displayed its power and the level of civilization it claimed to have achieved by developing the ability, over time, to gather such data. When the Committee requested that information about births, deaths, places of residence, and available livestock in each Kazakh volost of the province be submitted to it on a standard form for compilation in Semipalatinsk (and subsequently in St. Petersburg), it drew the nomads inexorably deeper into the state's administrative apparatus and signaled to them that indigenous ways of knowing and managing such information were less desirable, less civilized than those employed by the Committee.^{33,34} This data appeared not only in files

³² For example, Meier complains in his description of the steppe of the Orenburg Department that because of Kazakhs' distrust of the idea of a census, "Books about weddings, births, and mortality are not kept. As a consequence of such a position of affairs, we do not have any data, not only to define, even approximately, growth and loss of population, but even to receive any sort of precise understanding, in general, about its number." See L. Meier (sost.), *Materialy dlia geografii i statistiki Rossii, sobrannye ofitserami generalnogo shtaba: Kirgizskaia step' orenburgskogo vedomstva* (SPb: tip. E. Veimar i F. Person, 1865) 86. This was a trope applied to all regions of the Russian Empire in the 1860s and '70s; its application to the steppe was a particular manifestation, with particular rhetorical baggage, of a larger critique.

³³ See TsGA RK f. 460, op. 1, d. 13, sv. 1, "Delo so statisticheskimi svedeniami po kirgizskim volostiam Ust-Kamenogorskogo uezda za 1909 g." The file is a compilation of tens of standardized surveys, all completed by volost administrators; there are many similar to it in the Committee's *fond*. Simon Franklin, in a forthcoming article, describes such standardized blank forms as "the bureaucratic document-template *par excellence*," a significant factor in the attempt to extend administrative authority to all corners of the empire. See Simon Franklin, "Mapping the Graphosphere: Cultures of Writing in Early 19th-Century Russia (and Before)," *Kritika: Explorations in Russian and Eurasian History* 12.3 (Summer 2011), forthcoming.

³⁴ It also, not incidentally, deprived nomads of the protection from excessive taxation that such uncertainty provided; along similar lines, some observers claimed that Kazakhs feared population censuses above all

intended for the private use of administrators, but also at times in published form, as in the gargantuan collection *Statistika Rossiiskoi imperii*, or the new small-scale (40 verstas per inch) map of “Asiatic Russia.”³⁵ To see the purportedly formless chaos of Semipalatinsk oblast standardized, summarized, and rendered immediately comprehensible in a series of tables or points on a map was to powerfully experience the claims of civilizational superiority embedded in the Russian Empire’s continued presence on the steppe.

Yet a startlingly different perspective on civilizational difference appears when exploring the “non-obligatory” work of the Semipalatinsk Committee, the chief fruit of which was the annual *Pamiatnaia knizhka Semipalatinskoi oblasti*. From 1898-1902, the PKSO combined the usual functions of such *pamiatnye knizhki* (directory-style information about local administrators and businessmen, as well as a calendar of important events) with lengthy articles about Kazakh culture, the history of the Kazakh and settler populations of the province, and its flora, fauna, agriculture, and animal husbandry, among other subjects.³⁶ Presented as curiosities, many of these articles also

because they suspected that they would lead to the imposition of the troop duty borne by the peasants of European Russia. While most administrators considered this to be an unwise step, proposals to incorporate Kazakhs into the armed forces were occasionally made, so such fears were not entirely groundless. Indeed, the forcible calling of Kazakhs to the tsarist army in 1916 is generally considered to be the direct cause of their rebellion that year. See TsGA RK, f. 380, op. 1, d. 1, ll. 49-49ob, “Raport komanduiushchego voiskami Turkestanskogo voennogo okruga Kuropatkina i drugie materialy po vosstanovleniiu kazakhov v 1916 g.” All this lends itself to the idea that vague data about population and household possessions was in some sense a “weapon of the weak,” a means by which Kazakhs could resist the most onerous impositions of the colonial state, and of which the Committee’s work attempted to deprive them. (For the original usage of the phrase “weapons of the weak” in the sense it is intended here, see James Scott’s book of the same name.)

³⁵ *Statistika Rossiiskoi imperii XXVII, vyp. 5: Semipalatinskaiia oblast’. Volosti i naseleennye mesta* (St. Petersburg: Central Statistical Committee, V. Bezobrazov and co., 1895). This book is also available at TsGA RK f. 460, op. 1, d. 53, sv. 4, where I accessed it. On the compilation of the 40-versta map, see TsGA RK f. 460, op. 1, d. 41, sv. 4, “Perepiska Semipalatinskogo oblastnogo statisticheskogo komiteta o sostavlenii spiska naseleennykh mest oblasti,” dating to 1905.

³⁶ Publication of the PKSO continued, apparently, until 1913 (the latest year I was able to locate in Russian and Kazakhstani collections), but long-form articles of the type I will discuss in this section disappear

contained stinging criticism of imperial policy and pretensions in the oblast. The military governor of the oblast, A. F. Karpov, was disturbed enough by the frequency and strident tenor of anti-imperial commentary appearing in the PKSO that he threatened to ban it.³⁷

Though the PKSO's contributors supported the continued presence of the Russian Empire, in some form, in Semipalatinsk oblast, many of them were unstinting in their condemnation of what they interpreted as the misrule they saw around them.

Superficially, the Kazakhs of Semipalatinsk oblast appeared in the PKSO in terms no more positive than those characterizing imperial Russian ethnographies contemporary to it; the difference lay in the uncertainty of contributors to the journal that Kazakh primitivism was immutable and inherent. Some sketches did present the violence of their subjects and the disorder in which they were said to live in primeval terms. V. K. fon-Gern, for example, describing the Kazakh custom of *barymta* (ritualized horse theft, usually done to compel legal resolution of some complaint), indicated that it was not just unjust, but symptomatic of a larger deficiency in Kazakh lifeways:

“Horse thieves by trade and their families are not accustomed to the work of an agriculturalist or tradesman and consider such work humiliating for them. Further, the habit of inactivity and adventures tied with their trade little supports the development among them of convictions about the usefulness of the intense work of the agriculturalist.”³⁸

Although fon-Gern was speaking here of gangs of horse thieves in the employ of wealthy *bais*, he considered the opposition between nomadic inactivity and adventure and

almost entirely after 1902, when it began to be published irregularly and was limited to the basic calendar and directory data described above.

³⁷ Khabizhanova, Gulnara, et. al., *Ruskaia demokraticeskaiia intelligentsiia v Kazakhstane (vtoraia polovina XIX-nachalo XX vv.)* (Moscow: “Ruskaia kniga,” 2003) 77. Khabizhanova and her co-authors attribute the military governor's displeasure to the Semipalatinsk Statistical Committee's “truthful and objective illumination of several economic and political problems of the steppe from the position of the interests of the core population.”

³⁸ V. K. fon-Gern, “Kirgizskoe udal'stvo: ugon skota,” *PKSO na 1898 g.*, 63-64.

sedentary work habits to be more broadly applicable.³⁹ Moreover, in a subsequent article concerning Kazakhs' character and morals, fon-Gern depicted his subjects as superstitious children, in thrall to amulets, spells, and half-remembered customs, easily deceived by more sophisticated outsiders.⁴⁰ Tying his observations together, he stated that as the Kazakhs remained "half-wild" even at the dawn of the 20th century, they "[knew] only how to respect energy and persistence" from those who ruled them.⁴¹ Whereas most contributors to the *PKSO* argued that Russian governance could and should educate Kazakhs and increase their economic productivity, while protecting them from the worst consequences of settler colonization, Fon-Gern implied that the only responsibility of Russian governance on the steppe was to compel obedience. Other contributors, though, while similarly critical of their Kazakh subjects, argued that the Russian Empire could and should educate Kazakhs, increase their economic productivity, and protect them from the consequences of settler colonization.

Such were the attitudes of the author appearing most frequently in the *PKSO*, the political exile, journalist (editor of *Semipalatinskii listok*) and erstwhile politician (joining the Kadets later in life), N. Ia. Konshin. Despite his oppositional politics, in a series of travel narratives, Konshin too constructed a hierarchical difference, grounded in ethnicity, between himself and those he observed. Kazakhs, he reminded his readers, were almost unspeakably dirty: "The towel by which they wipe [their dishes] can remind you of anything you like, only not a towel. And beyond this the lady of the house, pouring, for

³⁹ See his article "Paly" in *PKSO na 1898 g.*, where he decries the damage caused by pastoralists attempting controlled burns of sections of steppe to encourage the growth of fodder there.

⁴⁰ V. K. fon-Gern, "Kharakter i navy Kirgizov-Kazakov," *PKSO 1899* 3-5. Fon-Gern's description of amulets and spells as signs of Kazakh primitivism is strikingly similar to the French reports on Algerian religious practices cited in George R. Trumbull, IV, *An Empire of Facts: Colonial Power, Cultural Knowledge, and Islam in Algeria, 1870-1914* (New York: Cambridge UP, 2009) 177-180.

⁴¹ fon-Gern, "Kharakter," 6. He adds the caveat that such forceful administration should occur "within the limits of justice," but it is unclear what such "justice" might have entailed in his view.

example, tea, is not ashamed to blow her nose in the most primitive manner and so forth.”⁴² Indeed, he unambiguously considered the culture of newcomers from the inner provinces of the Russian Empire to be superior to that of the pastoralists they settled among:

“However much they talk about the ignorance of our simple people, when you go around the Kazakh auls, you will quickly feel and understand that between the most shabby migrant and experienced Kazakh there is “a vast distance”...Our duty, of course, is to destroy it [the distance].”⁴³

Konshin would have agreed with fon-Gern and other authors emphasizing Kazakh primitiveness that colonizer had achieved a higher level of civilization than the colonized. But for him and other oppositionally-minded authors in Semipalatinsk, this implied a series of economic and cultural responsibilities on the part of the former that he depicted in the *PKSO*, in both travel notes and scholarly articles, as consistently unmet.⁴⁴

Konshin’s commentary on the on the clash of lifeways between sedentary agriculturalists migrating to Semipalatinsk oblast in ever-increasing numbers in the 1890s and Kazakh mobile pastoralists shares similar themes. He establishes for his reader the superiority of the colonizers’ culture while, in the same argument, offering a nuanced analysis of the consequences of resettlement for Kazakh pastoralists and a series of cautious policy recommendations for aiding the latter. Among the factors disrupting Kazakhs’ practice of

⁴² N. Ia. Konshin, “Po Ust’kamenogorskomu uezdu. Putevye zametki,” *PKSO na 1900 g.*, 36. The contrast between colonizer and colonized is drawn all the more strongly in this passage when Konshin continues, a few sentences later, that at least in (Russian) migrant settlements, even poor ones, he at least “[knows] that there...can somehow relax and eat a little,” whereas among Kazakhs only “accustomed people” can do this.

⁴³ *Ibid.*, 36.

⁴⁴ Konshin’s case represents an unusual refinement of the conquest/anti-conquest dichotomy established by Mary Louise Pratt in *Imperial Eyes: Travel Writing and Transculturation* (New York: Routledge, 1992). By “anti-conquest,” Pratt understands a strategy of representation whereby a European bourgeois travel writer at once asserts passivity and hegemony over the landscape (7). Konshin, though, was both an active interpreter of the steppe landscape and, by his political convictions, self-consciously separate from the specific kind of hegemony the Russian Empire was exerting on the steppe. Indeed, by exiling him, that same empire had placed him in a category separate from its “reliable” subjects.

mobile pastoralism, he lists “the inevitable influence of the collision of the wild men (*dikarei*)-nomads with order and structure, entirely alien for their lives.”⁴⁵ This imperial order is implicitly contrasted with the pre-colonial state of affairs:

“The steppe of the Irtysh region long served as the abode of nomadic Kazakh clans, which under their eternal struggles with each other and with neighboring clans, could not, of course, create the conditions necessary for the settled way of life. The borderless expanse (*privol’e*) of the steppe gave the possibility to begin animal husbandry here on the most extensive basis.”⁴⁶

Mobile pastoralism is for Konshin, then, a lifeway both intimately connected to and, in fact, produced by internecine strife, lawlessness, and violence; sedentary agriculture, in turn, is equally connected discursively with peace, legal regulation, and rationality. Within this framework, Konshin damns mobile pastoralism even with the faint praise he offers it; noting that Levshin, Zavalishin, and other Russian scholars have testified to the Kazakhs’ former material prosperity, he continues, “Of course, from the European point of view, this was a coarse and ‘uncultured’ life, but the nomads, in their own way, were rich and satisfied.”⁴⁷ If by this comment Konshin demonstrates a degree of relativism, he also strongly indicates to his readers who on the steppe he considers to represent progress, and who backwardness.

Yet at the same time, Konshin notes in detail the problems created by Russian resettlement for Kazakh pastoralists, and attributes them to a series of specific failings on the part of the government. Colonial administrators had, for example, drawn volost boundaries without attention to the connections of common lineage by which Kazakhs organized their economic and social lives, for example, and declared Kazakh lands to be

⁴⁵ N. Ia. Konshin, “K voprosu o perekhode kirgiz Semipalatinskoi oblasti v osedloe sostoianie” *PKSO na 1898 g.*, 34.

⁴⁶ *Ibid.*, 30.

⁴⁷ *Ibid.*, 35.

state property.⁴⁸ These lands, set aside for Cossack and peasant use, permitted settlers to extract disastrously high rents from Kazakhs to use pastures they had formerly grazed livestock on free of charge, exacerbating the situation.⁴⁹ If these earlier policies had destabilized Kazakh economic life, mass resettlement, Konshin argued, threatened a death blow.⁵⁰ Although Konshin shared with the most vocal supporters of settler colonization the assumption that “sooner or later, the nomadic life should change to sedentary,” he also argued that this transition should occur gradually; the forced sedentarization engendered by peasant settlement struck him as unnatural, dangerous, and inhumane.⁵¹ Backwardness, in this view, was not rightlessness; the fact that the Kazakhs could, in his mind, change over time implied a responsibility to secure their wellbeing in advance of a later economic transition.

Indeed, Konshin contented that the transitional state of the Kazakh economy made it necessary for the government to “come to meet this movement [to sedentarism] and take all possible measures that would assist this transition” – which, he argued, it had systematically failed to do in law and practice.⁵² His policy recommendations on this score attempted to create a positive incentive for Kazakhs to sedentarize while protecting them from the worst consequences of the transition. Konshin proposed, first, liberation of Kazakhs from the compulsory military service expected of peasants until full sedentarization; second, a 10-15 year delay in payment for any rental lands allotted to

⁴⁸ Ibid., 30-1. This latter was one of the most telling points of the Provisional Statute of 1868.

⁴⁹ Ibid., 38. Konshin expresses this point most directly in a 1901 article: “Debts are passed down from father to son, percentages are added to the principal, and as a result, the Kazakh becomes an eternal *batrak* (hired laborer) of the Cossack; having paid or, often, worked off the old debt, the Kazakh needs to take on new debts for covering his expenses, and this is without end...” See N. Ia. Konshin, “Ocherki ekonomicheskogo byta kirgiz Semipalatinskoi oblasti,” *PKSO na 1901 g.*, 178.

⁵⁰ Konshin, “O perekhode kirgiz,” 39.

⁵¹ Ibid., 50.

⁵² Ibid., 50.

Kazakhs from the Administration of State Properties; third, the creation of installment plans for the payment of existing state and private debts; last, distribution of free timber from state forests and low-interest loans for the purchase of seeds and agricultural equipment, as had been done for peasant settlers from the western and central provinces of the Empire in earlier years.⁵³ This was not commentary fully outside the hegemonic ideas of the late 1890s, since Konshin was not arguing for the cessation of resettlement, but his insistence that Kazakhs be treated on an equal basis with settlers and permitted to develop with the state's assistance demonstrates the significant variation possible within the putatively uniform category of "cultural imperialism." Resettlement as practiced by the Russian Empire on the steppe was based, in large part, on the idea that land should be put into more productive use than inefficient, primitive pastoralists could make of it. Konshin's understanding of Kazakh inferiority as a temporary phenomenon, though, created obligations, rather than opportunities, for the Empire.

Although Konshin was by far the most frequent contributor to the PKSO, other authors shared his cautious attitude towards resettlement and insistence on Kazakhs' right to protection as it was implemented. An anonymous sketch of agriculture and grain cultivation around the oblast noted that

"Despite the more primitive character of agricultural equipment and working of the soil among the Kazakhs, the harvest among this part of the population of the oblast almost year by year and for the decade is higher than harvests gathered on the fields of the sedentary population. There is no doubt that the reason for the greater harvest of grains among Kazakhs lies in the system of field irrigation practiced by them."⁵⁴

Against the claims of settlement's most ardent proponents, then, the Kazakhs already living in Semipalatinsk oblast were more economically productive than the

⁵³ Ibid., 52.

⁵⁴ X, "Zemledelie i khlebnaiia proizvoditel'nost' Semipalatinskoi oblasti," *PKSO na 1898 g.*, 12-13.

Russian and Ukrainian peasants migrating there, thus undercutting the idea that mass settler colonization was necessary. Indeed, the anonymous author argued, making Semipalatinsk oblast the new breadbasket of the empire was short-sighted; rather, “the soil and climactic conditions of the oblast not only give the possibility, but make positively necessary the harmonic combination of more or less rationally constituted animal husbandry with agriculture.”⁵⁵ Even so, he maintained, agriculture was developing among the Kazakhs of Semipalatinsk oblast, albeit slowly; the role of administrators from the Ministries of Agriculture and State Properties under the circumstances was to “ease the transition to more rational systems of animal husbandry for part of the nomadic population of the oblast and the transition to a sedentary agricultural way of life for the other.”⁵⁶ Although he further argued that limited sedentarization was necessary, since it was connected with “the successes of material culture and civil order (*grazhdanstvennost*)” in the oblast,” and that only a serious rupture in Kazakh life could immediately compel such a transition, he also insisted that settler colonization as practiced in the 1890s was harmful to the mobile pastoralists of Semipalatinsk oblast.⁵⁷ If administrators did not take careful measures to ease Kazakhs’ transition to agriculture, as they had not done at the time of writing, he argued that “the curtailing of pasture territory will inevitably call forth still more impoverishment and even the pauperization (*obnishchanie*) of the mass of the Kazakh population,” harmful for Kazakh and state interests alike.⁵⁸ Thus, for the author of this anonymous note, statistical observation of the Kazakh population of Semipalatinsk oblast offered an

⁵⁵ Ibid., 17.

⁵⁶ Ibid.

⁵⁷ Ibid., 21.

⁵⁸ Ibid., 27.

effective idiom for arguments in favor of reforming colonial administrative practices in a direction more favorable to the colonized. Although the author of this analysis did not envision the withdrawal of Russian administrative power from the steppe, he argued that its role was to protect the interests of the colonized population, rather than exploiting it.

The general editorial line of the PKSO clearly established the primitiveness of the Kazakhs of Semipalatinsk oblast, but did not construct the civilizational difference between colonizer and colonized as permanent, and criticized governmental failures to protect the interests of its non-Russian subjects there. Although dissenting voices occasionally appeared in its pages, it is unnecessary to resolve these apparent contradictions. Rather, as Felix Driver has argued for Britain's Royal Geographic Society, the Semipalatinsk Statistical Committee was not a group of strictly like-minded people, but rather functioned as an informational exchange, capable of accommodating a wide range of views under the general heading of collecting and distributing useful information.⁵⁹ This should not obscure the larger trend of criticism of colonial policies and officials observable in the PKSO, but does serve as a useful reminder that the Semipalatinsk Statistical Committee was, ultimately, in some sense a creature of the tsarist administration; the absence of chauvinist or state-minded voices in its publications would thus be surprising. Still, the reform-minded authors who filled most of the pages of the PKSO, by arguing that Kazakhs could change – indeed, were changing – attempted to reform and reshape extractive colonial policies. Within the sphere of cultural imperialism, arguments about civilizational difference and the superiority of metropolitan

⁵⁹ See Felix Driver, *Geography Militant: Cultures of Exploration and Empire* (Malden, MA: Blackwell, 2001).

culture could serve a variety of purposes. After 1902, a new institution in Semipalatinsk oblast, less affiliated with the state, would take up similar arguments.

***Kraevedenie* and Anti-Colonial Attitudes**

The *Zapiski* of the Semipalatinsk subdivision (*pod'otdel*) of the West-Siberian division of IRGO maintained continuity with the *PKSO* in personnel and content alike. The scholars who contributed to this journal vociferously contested policies that harmed the Kazakh population of the oblast and, at times, subverted the civilizational hierarchies on which the expropriation of land from Kazakhs for settlement was based. Though they did not argue against the continued presence of Russian colonial authority on the steppe, they demonstrated that Russian governance there over the previous century had been harmful, and would continue to be so without significant reform. The crisis these authors identified on the steppe stemmed not from the Kazakhs, but improper administration; the solutions they identified were also centered on administrative reform. Portraying the pastoralists of Semipalatinsk oblast as rational and civilizable, they argued that the economic and cultural decline the Kazakhs were undergoing was the result of previous colonial policies, rather than the justification for expansion and expropriation.

In the first volume of the Semipalatinsk subdivision's *Zapiski*, for example, the *kraeved* B. Benkevich described Kazakh mobile pastoralism as the most rational means of economic production in the steppe biome. Rejecting ill-considered generalizations about Kazakh character and morals in comparison to those of agriculturalists from the inner provinces of the Russian Empire, he contended:

“The reasons for [the predominance of nomadism] lie not in some sort of addictions and sympathies of the Kazakhs, in their...laziness and so forth; it is only a direct adaptation to the characteristics of climate, soil, vegetation, and irrigation of the steppes, the natural environment of which was so formed that

animal husbandry and nomadism supply the population better and more reliably than anything else.”⁶⁰

Otherwise, he argued, the Kazakhs, “an understanding and practical people,” would long since have independently gone over to sedentary grain cultivation.⁶¹ Demonstrating that agriculture was poorly suited to the steppe oblasts, he also demolished claims about the connection between economic organization and cultural development, arguing that pastoral, animal-rearing economies continued to play an important role in the Americas (Argentina) and Europe (Switzerland) alike.⁶² Benkevich, in sum, destabilized most of the important claims that proponents of peasant settlement made; rather than elevating the culture and economy of Semipalatinsk oblast, resettlement, in his view, was ruining a productive economic sector managed by people who understood it well. Benkevich, however, also described mobile pastoralism as practiced by the Kazakhs as in decline and needing improvement on the basis of financial and institutional support from St. Petersburg. He criticized some aspects of Kazakh animal husbandry, noting that they “factually rarely knew the true number of [their] livestock” and chose stud animals with insufficient foresight.⁶³ The Kazakhs were experienced animal herders and knew the local environmental conditions better than anyone else, but, Benkevich continued, “although many acknowledge the deficiencies of their current position, all the same they do not have a sufficient quantity of information and suitable help for this.”⁶⁴ To remedy this, he proposed a significant outlay of capital and increase of state intervention for the sake of rationalizing animal husbandry, asserting

⁶⁰ B. Benkevich, “Kirgizskoe stepnoe skotovodstvo i mery k ego uluchsheniiu,” *Zapiski Semipalatinskogo pod’otdela Zapadno-Sibirskogo otdeleniia Imperatorskogo russkogo geograficheskogo obshchestva* (hereafter *ZSP*) 1 (1903): 1.

⁶¹ *Ibid.*, 5.

⁶² *Ibid.*, 6-7.

⁶³ *Ibid.*, 17 (on counting issues) and 23 (on stud animals).

⁶⁴ *Ibid.*, 8.

the necessity of establishing model farms, setting up insurance for livestock lost in dzhuts, giving significant supervisory authority to uezd-level agronomic and veterinary boards, among other measures.⁶⁵ The sources of the “indications and help” he considered necessary to make the Kazakh “a more professional and modernized (*usovershenstvovannyi*) animal herder were, in all ten of his recommendations, dependent on the legislative power of the tsarist state or the creation of new quasi-governmental institutions.⁶⁶ Benkevich thus envisioned a strong role for Russian governance in the economic life of the steppe oblasts, and his concern for the improvement of mobile pastoralism was framed mostly in terms of the benefits it could bring to the empire as a whole.⁶⁷ Yet at the top of the list of his proposals to improve animal husbandry on the steppe was “Significant restriction of colonization, so as to preserve pastures for animal husbandry,” sharply counter-indicating one of the main policy priorities of the tsarist state. Approaching the stock-herding population of the oblast as rational, adaptable, and capable of improvement, Benkevich argued that its economic interests deserved protection not just for their own sake, but for the Russian Empire’s sake, and that changed policy priorities could achieve this outcome. The statist aspect of this argument is a useful reminder of the author’s connections with colonial authority and the discourse surrounding it; the distinctness of his recommendation from what was, after 1900, an ever-growing concern for tsarist administrators is an equally useful reminder of the multiplicity of that discourse.

Four years later, in a historical sketch of the settlement of the valley of the Bukhtarma River (a right tributary of the Irtysh near the border with China) by peasant

⁶⁵ Ibid., 23-4.

⁶⁶ Ibid., 22.

⁶⁷ Ibid., 7.

settlers from the inner provinces of the Empire, E. Shmurlo took Benkevich's critique of settler colonialism still further. This area had been transferred from Chinese to Russian control by the Treaty of Chuguchak of 1864, and two Cossack pickets immediately proposed and established there; subsequently, its settler population grew quickly.⁶⁸ Such population growth, Shmurlo noted, "inevitably called forth the question of land allotment"; the allotment that ensued was disadvantageous to the Kazakhs formerly resident in the Bukhtarma *krai* at every turn.⁶⁹ Faced with a choice between satisfying the land claims of Cossacks and irregular peasant settlers or halving the land allotments of the former, thus easing the restrictions faced by the Kazakh mobile pastoralists of the region, the tsar's Cabinet protected the interests of sedentary migrants, permitting Kazakhs only to the Kulundinsk steppe with the calculation that its million desiatinas of land would suffice for nomadic survival.^{70,71} Resettled from their ancestral lands, crowded out by Russian settlers whose increasing numbers made a mockery of any protections of Kazakh land holdings existing in law, these Kazakhs found themselves in "an inescapable position," unable to remain where they had previously lived or to move about freely to new pastures.⁷² The region also proved far from providential for the irregular and Cossack settlers who had arrived there; colonization without an advance land survey meant that many were left with "useless (*nikuda ne godnye*)" lands, just as it

⁶⁸ E. Shmurlo, "Russkie i kirgizy v doline Verkhnei Bukhtarmy (materially dia istorii zaseleniia Bukhtarminskogo kraia)," *ZSP* 3 (1907): 18.

⁶⁹ *Ibid.*, 21.

⁷⁰ Shmurlo notes that G. A. Kolpakovskii, Governor-General of Semipalatinsk oblast, objected strongly to this decision and voiced concern for the well-being of Kazakhs under his authority, but was overruled by higher-ranking officials in St. Petersburg.

⁷¹ The Kulundinsk steppe is a region between the Ob' and Irtysh rivers located in the present-day Altai *krai* (Russian Federation) and Pavlodar oblast (Kazakhstan).

⁷² For the "inescapable" language, see *ibid.*, 43; on legal protections and their evasion, see *ibid.*, 31. Shmurlo contends that the Altai mountain *okrug* had been formed on the condition that non-Russians indigenous to the area not be constrained and, since no relevant new acts had followed the 1822 *ukaz* that resulted in the Altai *okrug*'s creation, the Kazakhs had every right to use the land around the Bukhtarma.

became clear that the Kazakh population had no more to give.⁷³ In all, the unsuccessful colonization of the Bukhtarma *krai* represented, for Shmurlo, “the dark and negative sides of the collision of the two cultures,” making a mockery of the supposed goals of settler colonization.⁷⁴

At the same time, though, Shmurlo’s article reads as a critique of one instance of settlement, not denying the possibility of “positive results” in future years.⁷⁵ He criticized governmental policy not in its essence, but for faulty application of existing laws and lack of planning and foresight. He sharply censured the administration of Tomsk guberniia, for example, for its seeming desire to “quickly remove all the Kazakhs, whatever came of it,” in contradiction to existing laws that should have, he argued, prevented such an outcome.⁷⁶ The core problem he identified with the settler movement to the Bukhtarma *krai* was that it was “spontaneous” (*stikhiino*), running well in advance of any reconnaissance or land surveys, forcing more agriculturalists into the region than it could ever have supported.⁷⁷ Once settlers arrived, the Tomsk administration’s decision to give authority in land disputes to “local volost and rural authorities,” that is, Shmurlo noted, to the very peasants in whose interests expelling the Kazakhs was, meant that Kazakhs were deprived of administrative and legal protection.⁷⁸ In a remote (*glukhii*, literally “deaf”) region, equipped with a “clumsy and cumbersome” administrative apparatus, Shmurlo claimed that irregular settlers did more or less as they pleased with the land; “the battle,” he argued, “was far from being carried out under equal

⁷³ Ibid., 65-66.

⁷⁴ Ibid., 2.

⁷⁵ Ibid., 2.

⁷⁶ Ibid., 37-8

⁷⁷ Ibid., 1.

⁷⁸ Ibid., 37-38.

conditions.”⁷⁹ Shmurlo’s history of settlement in the Bukhtarma valley, in short, was a call for more active and informed administration, for increased regulation, for the sake of securing the rights and wellbeing of colonizers and colonized alike. Russian power in the steppe oblasts, even in this extreme case of malfunction, required reform rather than abolition.⁸⁰

N. Ia. Konshin, the frequent contributor to the PKSO, submitted articles evaluating imperial policies and goals to the ZSP as well. Most notable, in this respect, was a sketch of the causes and outcomes of a serious dzhut of the early 1840s, during the early years of Russian administration in the steppes. In this narrative, he sharply critiqued the responses of tsarist officials of the era to the disaster, arguing that their ignorance of conditions on the steppe and callous attitude towards the local Kazakh population significantly exacerbated an already bad situation. Although reliable local reports had indicated that the Kazakhs of Semipalatinsk oblast suffered incredible losses in the winter of 1840-41, the head of the Ayaguz okrug prikaz, Portniagin, according to Konshin’s analysis, “drew the position of the Kazakhs in completely untrue colors...[finding] that very little help should be rendered, and exclusively in grain.”⁸¹ Against a proposal from the Border Administration that the growing ranks of starving Kazakhs should be supplied with a *pood* of flour per person per month, “Portniagin decided on his own authority to replace the [flour] with alfalfa, ‘since the Kazakhs do not use flour in their food,’” and indicated that the famished people were to use it as

⁷⁹ Ibid., 11.

⁸⁰ Indeed, for Shmurlo, Kazakh land relations in the pre-Russian era, wherein “there ruled complete indefiniteness and disarray (*bezuriaditsa*)” (5) were also to blame for the lamentable state of affairs in the Bukhtarma *krai*. Russian imperialism may, in this view, have had horrifying consequences, but was also the only source of rational administration even potentially available.

⁸¹ N. Ia. Konshin, “Zametka ob odnom kirgizskom dzhute,” *ZSP* 2 (1905), 7.

economically as possible.⁸² Beyond a small supply of grain sent to Karkaralinsk, most was stored up by local administrators, and the same Portniagin

“categorically forbade the establishment in Kokpekty of Treasury grain sales, and the Ayaguz prikaz, to the inquiry made to it about this, explained that in Ayaguz there is no need for such sales, because with the exception of the northern part of the okrug, the Ayaguz Kazakhs not only do not need purchased grain but, the opposite, having significant sown lands, themselves sell it to Russians; for the northern Kazakhs it will be more convenient to buy grain on the Line [of Cossack fortifications] than to go to Ayaguz for it.”⁸³

Low-level officials (*tolmachi* and senior sultans) had reported significant losses in several areas, but their superiors considered them inaccurate and exaggerated “first because the Kazakhs always exaggerate their loss and second, because many migrate in such a way that neither sultans nor aul elders know where they really are currently.”⁸⁴ In Konshin’s history of this natural disaster, ugly stereotypes about nomadic character and habits combined with a lack of administrative resources to the detriment of the colonized population. The dzhut of 1840-41 stood out for him as an example of the havoc that arrogant and ill-informed colonization, without consideration of the needs of the colonized, could wreak. One of the arguments mobilized by advocates of peasant settlement was that dzhut was a disease of the mobile pastoralist economy, and that sedentarization (accompanied by Russian governance) would protect Kazakhs from such disasters; in this sketch, Konshin demonstrates that Russian rule could be held accountable for the consequences of at least one serious episode of dzhut.⁸⁵

⁸² Ibid., 13-14.

⁸³ Ibid., 16-17.

⁸⁴ Ibid., 5, paraphrasing the administrator Lukoshkov.

⁸⁵ Indeed, one of the officials Konshin cites in his article, Lukoshkov, concluded a report on the dzhut and subsequent famine by noting, “If the past winter was, on one hand, calamitous for the Kazakhs, on the other it produced the salutary action of convincing them by bitter experience of the need to do hay cutting and cultivate fields – thus the Kazakhs everywhere responded to [proposals] to them to store up hay for winter and sow grain.” (7-8)

Like the PKSO, beneath the surface of the ZSP's scholarly articles on local history, ethnography, and economic life ran a set of consistent arguments about imperial Russian colonizers, Kazakh colonized, and the role of Russian governance in the steppe. No contributor was willing to countenance the withdrawal of Russian administrative and political power from Semipalatinsk oblast and its surroundings; indeed, they considered a reformed variant of the Russian empire to offer the best way forward for the steppe and its people. At the same time, they described in detail the serious negative consequences that more than fifty years of administrative abuses and reckless, unregulated colonization had exerted on the steppe oblasts. Approaching the Kazakhs not as stereotypes, but as rational individuals with a right to defend their own interests, they argued that regulation, more complete information, and better laws could vouchsafe common economic and cultural progress on the Central Asia. More importantly, though, this subsphere of imperial culture, more convinced than chauvinist commentators about the possibility of progress among and by the Kazakhs, permitted a degree of dialogue with Russophone Kazakhs about the empire and their place within it. The intercultural encounters occurring within it were mutually influential; in Semipalatinsk oblast, the oppositional variant of imperialism was not impermeable to all subalterns.

Loci of Cultural Exchange

Both the Semipalatinsk Statistical Committee and the subdivision of IRGO the city later housed, in their textual and physical incarnations alike, acted as meeting points for Russophone Kazakhs and reform-minded administrators and exiles. In scholarly articles and in-person discussions, Kazakhs and imperial Russians participated in a long-term encounter that forged strong affective ties and shaped both groups' conceptions of

one another and of the meanings and purposes of imperial rule. Among the Kazakhs who moved in these circles (others, especially Alikhan Bokeikhanov and Iakup-Mirza Akpaev, will be discussed in the following two chapters) was the celebrated bard Abai Qunanbaev. In such liberal *kraevedy* as E. P. Mikhaelis, N. Ia. Konshin, S. S. Gross, and others, the Russian Empire presented a face to Abai sharply distinct from the arbitrary coercion of military administrators. Although neither reformist nor conservative viewpoints affirmed the possibility of withdrawing Russian authority from the steppe oblasts, Abai, along with other leading Kazakh intellectuals of the late-imperial era, recognized vital differences within what is too often represented as a monolithic metropolitan viewpoint. The long-lasting encounter between Abai and the liberal exiles of Semipalatinsk oblast shaped the way both thought of Russian governance on the steppe, and the way both conceived of Kazakhs' place within the empire.

The Kazakhstani historian V. Z. Galiev has referred to the founding of the Semipalatinsk Statistical Committee and the oblast's subdivision of IRGO as "clear examples of the participation of political exiles in scientific work," and at the direct invitation of more conservative administrators.⁸⁶ Galiev is most interested in listing what he refers to as the "revolutionary *raznochintsy*" who participated in these organizations, including E. P. Mikhaelis, N. Ia. Konshin, I. I. Dolgopolov, and others.⁸⁷ However, the Semipalatinsk Statistical Committee was also a key site of intercultural exchange. In the account of its work for 1899, on a list of current and active committee members, among

⁸⁶ V. Z. Galiev, *Ssylnye revoliutsionery v Kazakhstane (vtoraia polovina XIX veka)* (Alma-ata: Izd-vo "Kazakhstan," 1978) 82.

⁸⁷ Galiev 88. His use of the term "revolutionary" is acceptable in the sense that many of the Semipalatinsk *kraevedy* had been exiled for putatively anti-governmental activities; in the sense that they were forerunners of Leninist revolution, a claim that plagues much Kazakhstani writing of the Soviet era on this topic, it is less tenable.

the names cited above, Abai Qunanbaev is named with a note that he was accepted as a member on 4 May 1886.⁸⁸ Although he did not publish in the *PKSO*, it is reasonable to infer that he was familiar with its content; the parallels between the assumptions and arguments of the more liberal articles in the *PKSO* and *ZSP* and the critiques of Kazakh society and Russian imperialism in Abai's poetry are, as we shall see, both striking and suggestive.

The best-known of Abai's personal connections with the *kraevdy* of Semipalatinsk oblast is his long-standing friendship with the exiled revolutionary E. P. Mikhaelis. The historian Abish Zhirenchin reports a story, possibly apocryphal, according to which the two met when Abai requested a novel by L. N. Tolstoy from the Semipalatinsk city library that Mikhaelis was reading at the time.⁸⁹ Regardless of the provenance of this anecdote, the strength of their friendship and its importance for both men is well-attested. Abai himself is reported to have said that Mikhaelis "opened [his] eyes to the world."⁹⁰ In a 1907 obituary, Alikhan Bokeikhanov attributed to Mikhaelis (and S. S. Gross) "a huge influence on Abai's education and enlightenment. Both of them...stayed with Abai on the steppe and acquainted him with Russian literature."⁹¹ Seven years later, an obituary of Mikhaelis made a more extreme version of the same argument, contending that "Mikhaelis raised Abai – a simple, uneducated Kazakh – to such a height that Abai later remembered Evgenii Petrovich with tangible love and tears."⁹² Kazakhstani historians, too, credit Mikhaelis and the circle of political exiles

⁸⁸ TsGA RK f. 460, op. 1, d. 54, l. 1ob.

⁸⁹ Abish Zhirenchin, *Abai zhane orystyng uly revoliutsiashyl demokrattary* (Almaty: Qazaq memleket baspasy, 1957) 187.

⁹⁰ *Ibid.*

⁹¹ Alikhan Bokeikhanov, "Abai Qunanbaev – nekrolog," *ZSP* 3 (1907): 4.

⁹² B.G., "Pamiati Evgeniia Petrovicha Mikhaelisa" in *ZSP* 8 (1914): 6.

with which he was associated with acquainting Abai with a range of Russian litterateurs and political philosophers, from Pushkin and Lermontov to Belinskii and Dobroliubov.⁹³ Rather than simply introducing Abai to the world of metropolitan ideas, though, Mikhaelis and others in his circle, in their life and work, embodied an attitude about Russian governance on the steppe that had a profound influence on Abai's view of what Russian colonialism was and could become for Kazakhs.

Born into a middling bureaucratic family in St. Petersburg in 1841, E. P. Mikhaelis studied mathematics and natural sciences at the Imperial St. Petersburg University from 1859-1861. Over the course of his university studies, he became closely acquainted with a group of political radicals including N. G. Chernyshevskii and N. A. Dobroliubov.⁹⁴ In September 1861, together with a few colleagues, he distributed around St. Petersburg a proclamation described by one contemporary as a "direct call to rebellion," and later in the same month led a protest against new laws restricting students' rights.⁹⁵ Mikhaelis was among five students exiled for their actions in this protest; in 1863 he was exiled first to Olonetsk guberniia, and from there to the town of Tara in Tomsk guberniia, where he lived under strict police observation. In 1869 he was permitted to move to Semipalatinsk, and obtained a position in the oblast administration the same year. He spent the remaining 40 years of his life within Semipalatinsk oblast, ultimately settling in Ust-Kamenogorsk. There he carried out a wide-ranging program of

⁹³ Zhirenchin 187-188.

⁹⁴ According to Mikhaelis' sister, L. P. Shelgunova, he was particularly interested in Dobroliubov's ideas. See N. V. Shelgunov, *Iz dalekago proshlago: perepiska N. V. Shelgunova s zhenoi* (St. Petersburg: tip. Ministerstva Putei Soobshcheniia, 1901) 109.

⁹⁵ S. E. Chernykh, *S beregov Irtysha* (Alma-ata: izd-vo. "Kazakhstan," 1981) 29. The material in this paragraph draws heavily on chapter 2 (pp. 28-73) of Chernykh's work, "Drug Abaia," devoted to Mikhaelis.

scholarly research, while simultaneously advocating for the establishment and expansion of a wide range of social institutions (including museums and public reading rooms).

Some of Mikhaelis' surviving scholarly work, though highly regarded by academics of his day, is of little relevance for an analysis of his views about Russian governance in the steppe oblasts; such, for example, is his research on the mollusks of the steppe *krai*.⁹⁶ Other articles, however, reveal him to have been a committed technocrat, who strove by his scholarly activity to make the social and economic life of the steppe oblasts more efficient, safe, and productive.⁹⁷ In 1882, he published a short guide to navigation on the Black Irtysh and Lake Zaisan, noting for interested parties the locations of challenging rapids and shoals, areas suitable for settlement, and the terms on which assistance could be obtained from local Kazakhs.⁹⁸ This was a fairly comprehensive guide to navigating the main water artery of Semipalatinsk oblast, with the tacit aim of supporting and improving commerce in the region. Years later, he confronted the problem of the ever-increasing drifting (*zanos*) of sand caused by the strong winds to which the city of Semipalatinsk was frequently subjected, proposing that, in addition to paving all of the city's roads, the city administration make a nature reserve (*zapoved*) of all vegetation between the main channel of the Irtysh River and the city proper.⁹⁹ His argument for going to the considerable expense necessary to undertake such measures was rooted in senses of economic expediency and civic pride: "Semipalatinsk is growing

⁹⁶ E. P. Mikhaelis, "Opisanie novykh i maloizvestnykh molliuskov iuzhnogo Altaia i severnoi Dzhungarii" (St. Petersburg: tip. Imperatorskoi Akademii Nauk, 1892).

⁹⁷ In this respect, Mikhaelis' career reflects what George Fischer termed the "small-deeds liberalism" (14-15) of the reform era. See Fischer, *Russian Liberalism: From Gentry to Intelligentsia* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard UP, 1958).

⁹⁸ E. P. Mikhaelis, "Usloviia sudokhodstva po Tikhomu Irtyshu i oz. Zaisanu" (Semipalatinsk: tip. Semipalatinskogo Oblastnogo Pravleniia, 1882).

⁹⁹ E. P. Mikhaelis, "Pesachnyi zanos v g. Semipalatinske," *ZSP* 6 (Semipalatinsk: P. Pleshcheev and co., 1906).

quickly and its growth promises to significantly strengthen when the railroad is built to it. Such a city should not be buried in the sand.”¹⁰⁰ His concern with the economic viability of Semipalatinsk oblast was reflected both in descriptions of available fossil-fuel resources and in his development of a new, apparently superior type of beehive, designed with the extreme weather conditions of the steppe in mind.¹⁰¹ “Unsatisfied by any existing hives,” he wrote, “we [including the famous beekeeper A. N. Fedorov] decided to invent a new one ourselves... We tasked ourselves with the goal of achieving the most productive apiary work possible, if at the cost of complicating the hive.”¹⁰² Developed on the basis of observations made during his service in the oblast administration, this hive won a silver medal at the All-Russian Exposition in Nizhnii Novgorod; one commentator after his death described it as an answer to “the primitive state of the Altai *krai*’s beekeeping.”¹⁰³ Mikhaelis’ career, in short, was founded on the principle that careful study could increase the well-being of all residents of the steppe oblasts. The vision of governance that underlay his work was grounded in the apparently sincere belief that the combination of knowledge and time could make Russia’s imperial presence in the region he had been exiled to tenable.

The political exiles with whom Abai Qunanbaev maintained close relations articulated a distinct argument through their scholarship about the Russian Empire’s purpose on the steppe.¹⁰⁴ Formerly opposed to autocratic government, often to the point

¹⁰⁰ Ibid., 3.

¹⁰¹ On fossil fuels, see E. P. Mikhaelis, “Otyskanie mestorozhdenii mineralnogo topliva v Zaisanskom pristavstve,” *ZSP* 8 (Semipalatinsk: Semipalatinskaia oblastnaia tipografiia, 1914). On beehives, see Mikhaelis, “Kakoi ulei vybrat’?” in the same volume.

¹⁰² Mikhaelis, “Kakoi ulei?” 1.

¹⁰³ B. G., “Evgenii Petrovich Mikhaelis (nekrolog),” *ZSP* 7 (Semipalatinsk: P. Pleshcheev and co. 1913) 4.

¹⁰⁴ In this respect, the intellectual life of Semipalatinsk oblast showed parallels with other sites of exile within the Russian Empire; see e.g. Bruce Grant, *In the Soviet House of Culture: A Century of Perestroikas*

of nihilism, in Semipalatinsk oblast Mikhaelis and his comrades directed their efforts simultaneously towards maintaining and reforming imperial power. Their careful research, they felt, could be used to increase the economic productivity of the region, which in turn would spare the colonized Kazakhs the penury and suffering caused by ill-conceived and arbitrary imperial policies. If they believed in the superiority of the culture they represented and identified deficiencies in Kazakh society and culture, they also deployed such categories towards drastically different ends than more aggressive colonizers and scholarly observers expressing notions of immutable racial difference. For some Kazakh thinkers, as well as people who did not leave behind textual evidence of their views on Russian imperialism, this distinction would have been meaningless – they faced land loss, sedentarization, and undesirable cultural change under either formulation. It was vitally important, however, in the mind of Abai Qunanbaev. Observing an alternative vision of imperial governance, and socializing with Russians who saw him as a potential intellectual equal rather than the childlike barbarian of so many ethnographic sketches, Abai became convinced that the crisis he observed on the steppe could be resolved by making use of the resources Russian rule offered. At the same time, by his own intellectual trajectory he presented evidence to reformist exiles that Kazakhs had the potential to equal their colonizers in cultural and intellectual development. Through Abai, ideas about civilizational progress, imperial governance, and scientific knowledge in the oppositional subsphere of Russian cultural imperialism were creatively adapted in the subaltern space of Kazakh poetic admonition.

Modernity, Empire, and Kazakhness in Abai's Poetry

(Princeton, NJ: Princeton UP, 1995) and Yuri Slezkine, *Arctic Mirrors: Russia and the Small Peoples of the North* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell UP, 1994).

The poetry of Abai Qunanbaev should be read as the intersection of the long-lasting and sometimes warmly affectionate interactions described above with other, subaltern cultural influences and his own personal subjectivity. While he was the inheritor of centuries-old Kazakh poetic forms, much of his work was also deeply informed by imperial Russian culture as he experienced it in Semipalatinsk. Like other aqyns of the late 19th century, he sensed a profound crisis in Kazakh culture and lifeways, viewing the era through which he lived as a struggle for survival; unlike them, however, he diagnosed the cause of this crisis as internal. Abai expressed his views on this matter most fully in his *Qarasozder (Black Words)*, a collection of 45 commentaries on the state of life among the Kazakhs and how it might be regenerated, although these polemical pieces often recapitulate themes found in his early, more lyrical work. Moderately critical of the excesses of Russian colonial policy, Abai also lamented a moral and spiritual crisis among the Kazakhs, rooted in ignorance and laziness. He presented education, especially literacy in Russian, and scholarship much along the lines of his comrades from the Semipalatinsk Statistical Committee as ways out of this malaise. His appeals for unity fall well short of nationalism, especially in the narrow sense of aspiring for autonomous political control of the steppe; rather, Abai promoted a renaissance in Kazakh life abetted by the Russian Empire. While he had experience of the paranoia and coercion of more conservative bureaucrats, Abai also experienced a different version of imperial culture in Semipalatinsk, that of the exiles and liberals who formed his closest circle, and this latter experience was vital to his creation of a unique synthesis, valorizing and defending Kazakhs and their culture while arguing that alliance with the colonizer was the surest road to their regeneration.

Early in the *Qarasozder*, Abai situates Kazakhs in the broader milieu of Central Asia, comparing their response to Russian expansion to that of other groups. The comparison is mocking and highly unfavorable. Despite what he recalls as the former pretensions of his kinsmen concerning Sarts, now, he argues,

“I see – there is no plant, which the Sart would not grow, there is no krai, where the Sart trader would not be, there is no thing that he would not master. They live harmoniously, do not seek conflict. When there were not Russian merchants, the Sarts delivered to Kazakhs clothing for the living and shrouds for the dead, bought up herds of livestock, which the father and son could not divide among themselves. Now, under the Russians, the Sarts earlier than others, adopted innovations. Famous *bais* [rich men], literate mullahs, and craftsmanship, and luxury, and urbanity – the Sarts have all these things.”^{105,106}

Abai thus connects the Sarts’ comparative success after the Russian conquest both to internal characteristics supposedly common to them (love of work, entrepreneurial spirit, disdain for violence) and, more importantly, to their response to the newcomers, eagerly adopting their innovations. Their strength, he continues, lies in the way they “study trades relentlessly, work, and do not spend time in humiliating disputes among themselves.”¹⁰⁷ Kazakhs, on the other hand, “hire out (*batrachim*) to their *bais* for little pay (*propitanie*). They drive our *bai* from their homes: ‘Hey, Kazakh, the floor was not put there so that you could tread on it with your dirty boots.’”¹⁰⁸ The positioning of this comment in the middle of a longer enumeration of Sarts’ achievements and traits implies

¹⁰⁵ Abai Qunanbaev, *Qara soz. Poemalar/Kniga slov. Poemy*, ed. and trans. K. Serikbaeva and R. Seisenbaev (Alma-ata: “EL,” 1992) 141 (#2). This is a dual-text (Kazakh-Russian) edition; although I consulted both versions, and the *Qarasozder* were originally set down in Kazakh, my translations come from the Russian except where noted.

¹⁰⁶ “Sart” is a category that had wide-ranging and shifting definitions for imperial Russian scholars and administrators. Most often, the term was used to denote Central Asia’s sedentary population, and could in this most expansive definition encompass the peoples we know today as Uzbeks, Tajiks, and (sedentarized) Kazakhs, although many contested such usage. For an enlightening discussion of the difficulties tsarist administrators encountered in classifying Central Asian ethnicities, see Adeeb Khalid, *The Politics of Muslim Cultural Reform: Jadidism in Central Asia* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1998), 199-209.

¹⁰⁷ *Qarasozder* 141 (#2)

¹⁰⁸ *Ibid.*

criticism of Kazakhs for failing to work hard, failing to use the opportunities provided by the Russian advance. Russians came in for even greater praise than the Sarts who had adapted to them: “There can be no words about the Russians. We cannot even be compared with their servants.”¹⁰⁹ Abai thus presents the Russian conquest of the steppe in a fairly positive light, depicting it as an opportunity for enlightenment and enrichment. That colonization had occurred was, in this schema, a symptom of larger problems in Kazakh society, rather than their cause. Failing to adapt to their new circumstances, Abai argued, Kazakhs deprived themselves of the benefits they offered.

To fully comprehend Abai’s view of the potential advantages of Russian colonialism, it is necessary first to discuss the problems of Kazakh society as he understood them and, more importantly, as he depicted them in the polemical text of the *Qarasozder*. His critique may be divided into three intertwined components – economic stagnation, cultural stagnation, and personal failings. The first two components, in particular, have much in common with the way reformist exiles viewed the steppe; although the failings of character he enumerates superficially recall depictions of wild, primitive Kazakhs made by Russians deeply committed to the imperial project, they are fundamentally different, referring not to permanent and essential deficiencies rooted in Kazakh ethnicity, but a temporary state of spiritual decline. He exhorts the Kazakhs to change, rather than providing a rationale for Russian settlement; the Russian Empire, in this view, is to provide support for an essentially internal, personal process of renewal and development, one that Kazakhs have always been capable of, rather than bringing enlightenment to a part of the world that would be permanently benighted without its

¹⁰⁹ Ibid., 10. I use the original Kazakh here since the Russian translation adds two qualifiers – “enlightened and knowledgeable (*prosveshchennye i znatnye*) Russians” absent from the Kazakh text.

assistance. The distinction is vital – Abai urges the Kazakhs to use the Empire’s resources not to Russify simply for the sake of doing so, but to become better Kazakhs. Calls for unity and religious revival under the auspices of a reformed Russian imperialism are central to Abai’s exhortations, while they are absent from the developmental schemes of oppositional *kraevedy*.¹¹⁰

Indeed, Abai depicts the crisis of Kazakh society in the era of Russian imperialism as fundamentally moral, excoriating other Kazakhs for their “insincere words, laziness, and love of power (*vlastoliubie*).”¹¹¹ In the third *Qara soz*, Abai links what he considers the various personal failings of those around him (especially of the wealthy and powerful) with mobile pastoralism, the lifeway by which almost all Kazakhs supported themselves. “These defects [cowardice, laziness, selfishness, ignorance, and many more],” he writes,

“come from the fact that people are concerned with only one thing – to keep as much livestock as possible and to acquire by this means honor from those surrounding them. If they would have taken up agriculture and trade, striven towards science and art, this would not have happened.”¹¹²

He describes a chain of events stemming from such materialism which, he implies, is unique to mobile pastoralist lifeways. When one family’s herds grow too large for its own land, he claims, it uses its influence to buy up or simply seize surrounding lands, “constraining neighbors or forcing them to leave their ancestral places.”¹¹³ Under such circumstances, he argues, whereby one person’s impoverishment is directly to the

¹¹⁰ For calls to unity see e.g. *Qarasozder* #39, where Abai lists unity as a positive quality possessed by Kazakhs’ ancestors before the conquest and now in short supply. Considering Abai’s poetry as a whole, these arguments lack a political program, but function more as calls for the cessation of internecine strife. See e.g. V. A. Rozhdestvenskii, ed., *Abai: stikhotvoreniia i poemy* (Moscow-Leningrad: Sovetskii pisatel’, 1966) for an untitled poem from 1886 lamenting that “there is no unity or honor, discord is everywhere” (60) owing to the greed and machinations of a few unscrupulous magnates, corrupting their followers.

¹¹¹ *Qarasozder* 143 (#3).

¹¹² *Ibid.*

¹¹³ *Ibid.*

advantage of another, people can hardly be expected to show kindness to one another.¹¹⁴ Elsewhere, he connects “thievery and swindling” to the steady growth of the Kazakh population relative to its livestock, asking rhetorically if under the circumstances, “they will really make peace (*utikhomiriatsia*) before they destroy one another.”¹¹⁵ Abai thus depicts mobile pastoralism as a vital part of the vicious circle of moral decline, exacerbating the consequences of human greed by requiring enormous amounts of land for its expansion; agriculture and trade, he implies, would lead to outcomes far less grievous for the poorer inhabitants of the steppe. Agriculture and trade also, he argued, would provide an alternative for the losers of the zero-sum game of mobile pastoralism, if only they would work hard rather than choosing sides in the internecine struggles of *bais* who cared little for their wellbeing, “selling themselves, vegetating (*proziabaia*) in poverty and dishonor.”¹¹⁶ Mobile pastoralism was not the root cause of the steppe’s crisis, in Abai’s view, but hastened and deepened its moral decay. In this sense, he shared his Russian interlocutors’ assumptions as he urged his audience to consider the benefits of sedentarism.

Abai saw the economic crisis triggered by Kazakh moral failings, in turn, as deeply intertwined with a crisis in culture and education. A lack of basic material resources, he argued, naturally conditioned the development of theft and violence, but, “If there will be livestock, it means the belly will be full. And then inclinations towards learning and trade will appear.”¹¹⁷ Moreover, the education that was available even to

¹¹⁴ Ibid., 144. Abai reasons that the poorer landless Kazakhs grow, the cheaper they will hire themselves out to the rich, out of desperation, thus rich families have an incentive not to provide for their well-being (as had formerly been the expectation), but to exploit them as fully as possible.

¹¹⁵ *Qarasoẓder* 184 (#24).

¹¹⁶ *Qarasoẓder* 144 (#3).

¹¹⁷ *Qarasoẓder* 185 (#25).

those families with the means to afford it was worthless at best, harmful at worst, under the new circumstances brought about by the Russian conquest:

“It is bad that many parents, having badly raised their children, then give them to the care of mullahs, for there is no benefit from this study. Children corrupted (*razvrashchennye*) from their earliest years cannot have interest in knowledge and religion or reverence towards their mentors; they will not become complete human beings (*polnotsennye liudi*), conscientious mullahs, or true Muslims.”¹¹⁸

Abai thus does not wholly devalue Islam or the educational institutions associated with it (along the lines of Chokan Valikhanov), but rather criticizes what he understands as their perversion. He derides mullahs as “the opponents of learned men” and mocks the ignorance of Kazakhs completing the *medresse* from which, he argues, “our youth leave ignorant, irrational, and not adapted to work...[and] in the future [they] will live by swindling and lies.”¹¹⁹ Worse still than the stale orthodoxy of the *medresse*, he argued, were the teachings of itinerant Sufi *ishans*, “false and pernicious...and harmful even for a pseudo-religion.”¹²⁰ Stagnation in the *medresses* and undue credence lent to Sufi charlatans, Abai contended, had made even educated Kazakhs ignorant of their religion and unable to use the economic changes the Russian conquest had wrought to their advantage.

For Abai, scholarship and religious revival were intimately connected. “First of all,” he contended, “it is necessary to love Allah. It is known that Knowledge is one of the attributes of the All-High, therefore love for knowledge is a sign of humanity and integrity,” with the caveat that it was an honorable calling only when not pursued to satisfy personal pride.¹²¹ He later expanded on this important qualifier:

¹¹⁸ *Qarasozer* 214 (#38).

¹¹⁹ *Qarasozer* 226, 227 (#38).

¹²⁰ *Qarasozer* 228 (#38).

¹²¹ *Qarasozer* 215 (#38).

“And only those who strive to comprehend Allah commensurately with reason, who seek the prime cause of all phenomena and objects, are worthy of the name of scholar. They achieve truth, justice, good in the interests of humanity, for them no joy or satisfaction exists in life besides their work.”¹²²

True scholarship, then, was imbued with the significance of religious devotion, and religious stagnation closely linked with ignorance of the natural world. Thus Abai considered educational reforms necessary both in the pragmatic sense and as part of reviving what he viewed as the fallen morality of the steppe.

Abai’s vision of educational reform had two important components, one rooted in the Turkic and Islamic world, the other conceivable only as a part of the Russian Empire. While he criticized the present state of Kazakh *medresses*, he noted that there was nothing inherently and irreparably wrong with such institutions:

“In our times methods of teaching in the *medresse* have become hopelessly old, turned out to be not only useless but even harmful. Because of this in Turkey there have already been opened new school institutions, where alongside theology are taught military discipline and other sciences.”¹²³

Abai refers here to the educational reforms of the Tanzimat era in the Ottoman Empire, whereby the government created a centralized system of public schools that included secular subjects alongside the traditional Islamic curriculum.¹²⁴ The Ottoman example demonstrated, for Abai, that modern science and Islam were not necessarily incompatible, and that the two could even help to sustain one another. It was not, however, the only example of a curriculum merging Islamic education with secular studies; indeed, the Russo-Kazakh schools that began to appear in the steppe during

¹²² *Qarasoẓder* 225 (#38).

¹²³ *Qarasoẓder* 226 (#38).

¹²⁴ See Selçuk Akşin Somel, *The Modernization of Public Education in the Ottoman Empire, 1839-1908: Islamization, Autocracy and Discipline* (Leiden: Brill, 2001). On connections between the Ottoman and Russian Empires during Abai’s (and İbrai Altynsarin’s) lifetime, see Kemal Karpat, *The Politicization of Islam: Reconstructing Identity, State, Faith and Community in the Late Ottoman State* (New York: Oxford UP, 2001), especially Chapter 13.

Abai's lifetime counted this among the signal features of their curricula. Abai considered study in such institutions, as he himself had undertaken, to be of paramount importance:

“It is necessary to study Russian literacy. The Russian language holds in itself spiritual riches, knowledge, art and other innumerable secrets. So as to avoid Russian defects, adopt their achievements, it is necessary to study their language, comprehend their science. Because Russians, having learned other languages, familiarizing themselves with world culture, became as they are. The Russian language will open our eyes to the world.”¹²⁵

The Russians were a telling example, in Abai's view, for reasons that went beyond their current political ascendancy. In his understanding of Russian history, centuries of stagnation were overcome only when Peter the Great opened Muscovy to the influence of Western Europe, with results that were now plain to see.¹²⁶ If Russians had studied foreign languages to familiarize themselves with the achievements of other nations, thus overcoming their putative backwardness, Abai argued, the door was open for Kazakhs to do the same. “Russian science and culture,” he continued, “are the keys to the world's treasures. Whoever has these keys will gain everything else without particular effort.”¹²⁷ The friendships and affiliations he developed with liberal *kraevedy* – men committed to thorough study of Semipalatinsk oblast and its inhabitants while opposing the abuses of Russian colonialism – were instrumental in developing this understanding of metropolitan culture and scholarship.

Russian literacy and secular education were not only means of Kazakh advancement, in Abai's view, but also important tools of resistance against abusive administrators and a legal system that placed Kazakhs at a disadvantage before colonizers.

¹²⁵ *Qarasojder* 185 (#25).

¹²⁶ This was a fairly common interpretation of Russia's historical trajectory in the 19th century among “Westernizer” critics. Such views were common among politically-liberal students of the era and it is both unsurprising and suggestive that, conversing regularly with political exiles, Abai evinced familiarity with them.

¹²⁷ *Qarasojder* 186 (#25).

He continues his injunction to study Russian literacy, “Strive to teach children by honorable and rational labor to earn their bread, let others follow their good example; then we will not bear the arbitrariness of Russians putting on airs (*vel’mozhnichaiushchikh*), while they do not have one law for everyone.”¹²⁸

Understanding the Russian language was vital when confronting a legal and administrative system that functioned, at its highest level, exclusively in Russian. Abai’s argument here depends on acceptance of the political realities of the post-conquest steppe. The Kazakhs, he notes, now live in the “dar al-kharb,” where their language and legal customs no longer enjoy particular relevance.¹²⁹ The Russian language, considering that this situation was unlikely to change, could at least be used instrumentally, as a means of representing Kazakh interests in the only language in which they could gain a hearing. This is a view both grounded in and opposed to imperial prerogatives; highlighting the injustices of the colonization of the steppe, and insisting on change in tsarist policies, Abai also makes no apparent effort to contest the fundamental fact of Russian governance. The Russian Empire, reformed along the lines suggested by the exiled dissidents he counted among his friends, was not, in his view, necessarily incompatible with the flourishing of Kazakh culture and economic well-being. If, as such reforms implied, the several ethnic groups of Semipalatinsk oblast were to have equal status before the law,

¹²⁸ *Qarasozder* 186 (#25). Abai was personally acquainted with the arbitrariness of some administrators in Semipalatinsk oblast, having faced, among other things, a spurious investigation for bribery in 1877 (see TsGA RK f. 15, op. 1, d. 2047, sv. 108, especially ll. 20-25, “Ob obrazovanii volostei Semipalatinskogo uезда”) and equally ill-grounded accusations in 1903 of collaboration and correspondence with a purportedly anti-Russian mullah from Kokshetau (Petropavlovsk, according to some sources) uезд, Shaimerden Koshchygulov (see Kasymbaev 86-93 on this incident. Originals at TsGA RK f. 64, op. 1, d. 938, “Spiski lits, zanimaiushchikhsia protivopravitelstvennoi agitatsiei, svedeniia o chisle prozhivaiushchikh kirgiz i tatar, o chislennosti litseev i mechetei v Akmolinskoi i Semipalatinskoi oblastiakh: opisanie poselkov Kokchetavskogo uезда.”)

¹²⁹ “Dar al-kharb” is a transliteration of the Arabic “dar al-harb,” or “house of war,” referring to countries where Islamic law is not in force.

Kazakhs could renew their economy. Until such reform was enacted, in Abai's view, education in colonial schools could help Kazakhs to defend their own interests.

Abai's critique of colonial administration, in turn, is focused personally on Kazakhs serving as its lowest level, but also suffused with concern about the atmosphere of corruption that sustains it; he writes of the authority wielded by volost administrators, senior sultans, and biys, "Power earned by obsequiousness or purchased for money is not worth much."¹³⁰ Elsewhere he is even more scathing:

"Having reached power by cleverness and swindling, volost administrators do not note the quiet and modest, but try to establish relations with people like themselves – slippery and grasping (*ukhvatistymi*), counting on their support, and...fearing their hostility."¹³¹

Abai saw the solution to what he argued was a widespread problem of local administration – elections being won by bribery and threats – in requiring volost administrators to have some Russian education (and, thus, a smattering of Russian literacy), or having them appointed by the *uezd nachalnik* if no suitable candidates were available. The reasoning he gives for such a measure implies a tacit belief in the inherently transformative power of such an education: "This would be beneficial in many respects. First, vainglorious Kazakhs would begin to give their children for education; second, volost administrators would not depend on the whim of local nobles, but would submit only to the higher authorities."¹³² The same vainglorious Kazakhs, in other words, would be reined in, made more just and attentive to the needs of their electors, by the experience of study in a Russian institution. Such claims were closely linked to Abai's own experience of Russian education in the steppe, as well as of the

¹³⁰ Qarasozer 180 (#22).

¹³¹ Qarasozer 144 (#3).

¹³² Qarasozer 145 (#3).

reformist products of metropolitan schools. In a sense, the trajectory he implied in placing educational restrictions on low-level administrative posts was how he understood the narrative of his own life, moving from corruption and misrule to enlightenment by means of a Russian education, while Mikhaelis, Gross and other exiles served as examples of the correlation between scholarship and opposition to arbitrary and unjust government.^{133,134}

Abai's views of Russian colonialism on the steppe, though not derivative, were strongly influenced by the reformist arguments of the exiled liberal scholars with whom he was closely connected. He saw among the Kazakhs of Semipalatinsk oblast simultaneous economic and moral crises deeply interlinked with one another, but did not attribute them wholly to settler colonization and corrupt colonial administration. Rather, while he spoke out against certain excesses of tsarist rule, he believed that the fundamental causes of the decline he was convinced Kazakh society had entered were rooted within it. Russian governance, theoretically offering educational opportunities, access to the achievements of other prominent world civilizations, and greater economic productivity, represented for Abai a plausible path out of this crisis. This was an idealized view of Russian colonialism; many administrators saw the steppe oblasts as a region only to be exploited, and their inhabitants as unsuited for education or even low-level political participation. Interacting with reform-minded scholars, Abai became convinced that the Russian Empire could potentially offer a framework for the betterment

¹³³ Many of Semipalatinsk's political exiles had been sent to the steppe as a result of "anti-governmental" activities during their university careers. The case of Mikhaelis is described above in some detail; Konshin, too, was exiled for such activity while a student in Yaroslavl' in 1886.

¹³⁴ Mikhaelis, at least, acted as a public servant while in exile, as a councilman (*glasnyi*) of the Ust-Kamenogorsk city social administration from 1891-1895 and an representative for two consecutive terms from 1895-1903. See TsGA RK f. 15, op. 3, d. 3, "Perepiska po dostavleniiu svedenii o lichnom sostave gorodskikh obshchestvennykh upravlenii Semipalatinskoi oblasti."

of the steppe, even if tsarist governance had thus far deepened its crisis. Other aqyns of the colonial era, however, were far less sanguine about the effects of the Russian conquest; disconnected from Semipalatinsk's circle of reformist exiles, they viewed Russian governance as the primary cause of the steppe's crisis, rather than a means of ameliorating it. An intermediary figure between imperial and steppe cultures, Abai offered understandings of Kazakhness and Russian imperialism selective between, and distinct from, both.

Bad Times: *Zar Zaman* Bards and the Empire

Other than Abai, Kazakh oral poets in the era following the Russian conquest of the steppe viewed that event, unambiguously, as a cause for lamentation. The aqyns of the late 19th century, including most prominently Shortanbai Qunai-uly (1818-81), Murat Mongke-uly (1843-1906), and Dulat Babatai-uly (1802-71), were first described by Abai's literary biographer Mukhtar Auezov as the "*zar zaman*" (troubled times) poets.¹³⁵ Although these bards have been the subjects of literary scholarship, they have usually been excluded from or marginalized in historical narratives of Russian imperialism in Kazakhstan.¹³⁶ This omission stems from an overly vitriolic and simple characterization of the group as "ideologues of the powerful people of the feudal order (*feodal'noi verkhushki*)," owing to which they "related negatively to everything new in the economy, politics, and culture of Kazakh society of the era."¹³⁷ The *zar zaman* poets, conflicting

¹³⁵ K. Madibaeva and K. Zhunistegi (sost.), *Shortanbai: tolghaular, aitystar, dastan* (Almaty: "Aiqap" baspasy, 1993) 4.

¹³⁶ They go unmentioned, for example, in college-level textbooks from both the Soviet and post-Soviet eras. See E. Bekmakhanov, *Sobranie sochinenii v semi tomakh, t. 4: Istoriia Kazakhstana (uchebnik i uchebnye posobiia)* (Pavlodar: EKO, 2005), originally published 1959; K. Ryspaev, *Istoriia respubliki Kazakhstan* (Almaty: "Bilim," 2002).

¹³⁷ I. T. Diusenbaev, ed., *Istoriia kazakhskoi literatury v trekh tomakh, t. 2: dorevoliutsionnaia kazakhskaia literatura* (Alma-ata: izd-vo. "Nauka" Kazakhskoi SSR, 1979) 57. The only substantive English-language treatment of these bards makes similar claims that they, especially Shortanbai, sought salvation in "the

with a retrospective narrative pertaining to the “enlightenment” of the steppe by a few Russophone intermediaries, have simply been discarded from the narrative. This is a mistaken approach. Rather, these poets’ production, orally distributed widely around the steppe, represent an alternative view of the relationship between Kazakhs and the Russian Empire, one which, judging by its “broad popularity,” was likely shared by many.¹³⁸ The poetry of these bards contains many similarities to Abai’s critique of the economic and moral crisis of the steppe; at the same time, however, none of them had Abai’s connections to exiled reformers, and their interpretations of both the root causes of this crisis and possible solutions to it, if any, differed substantially from his. Abai criticized Kazakh and Russian representatives of tsarist administration, but still believed in its potential (or that of an idealized, reformed version of it) to extricate Kazakhs from the problems they faced. The *zar zaman* poets, on the other hand, associated nothing positive with the Russian conquest of the steppe, nor with imperial Russian governance in the region. The troubled times they decried in their poetry consisted in economic decline, religious backsliding, and loss of homeland, all caused precisely by imperial rule. As a group, they did not envision a time when the problems they identified would be resolved.

Biographical information concerning the *zar zaman* poets is scanty and, at times, contradictory; beyond their dates of birth and death, and areas of greatest activity, little is written. Dulat was born in eastern Kazakhstan in the early 19th century and took lessons in the art of oral poetry from the poet and biy Aqtailaq; Shortanbai, according to Winner, “studied widely,” and according to other sources received some religious education near his birthplace in southern Kazakhstan; Murat was born in western Kazakhstan and, like

return to the tribal patriarchal society of the past” (96). See T. G. Winner, *The Oral Art and Literature of the Kazakhs of Russian Central Asia* (Durham, NC: Duke UP, 1958).

¹³⁸ Diusenbaev 59.

Dulat, was mentored by a series of older orators and poets.¹³⁹ There are no indications associating any of the three with colonial educational institutions. Their lives, though, spanned an era of significant reconfiguration of the relationship between colonizer and colonized – each experienced multiple administrative reforms, the abolition of the title of “khan” in the Middle Horde, and multiple failed anti-colonial rebellions (those of Isatai Taimanov in the 1830s, Kenesary Qasimov in the 1840s, and one in response to the introduction of the Provisional Statute of 1868). They also witnessed the complete military conquest of the steppe by Russian forces and, especially in Murat’s case, accelerated peasant resettlement to the region. Aqyns of the 18th century had favored heroic themes, but using the same poetic forms, this group of bards considered lamentation more appropriate to their circumstances.¹⁴⁰ Abai experienced Russian colonialism as a tragedy and an opportunity, but the *zar zaman* poets experienced it only as a tragedy, expressed in all aspects of Kazakh life.

Claims on the steppe as a region belonging properly to Kazakhs alone were particularly characteristic to the work of Murat and Dulat. Murat, in arguably his most famous poem, describes the region bordered by the Volga and Irtysh rivers, and containing the Mangystau peninsula, as an ancestral homeland, “to which our Kazakh ancestors/moved and settled” after the disappearance of other peoples from the area.¹⁴¹ Dulat speaks of the former glories of “Turkistan/your birthplace,” and extols the beauty and abundance of Saryarqa, the uplands and lakes of the northern steppe.¹⁴² The wistful

¹³⁹ Short biographical data on each poet can be found in Z. Akhmetov, ed., *Qazaq adebieti entsiklopediia* (Almaty: “Bilik” baspa uii, 1999), 208-09, 696, and 488 respectively; see also Diusenbaev 57 and Winner 96.

¹⁴⁰ This sentence draws on Winner 95.

¹⁴¹ S. Dautov (sost.), *Zar zaman: zhyr-tolghaular* (Almaty: “Zhalyn,” 1993) 138. This poem’s title, “Ush qian,” is now the name of a weekly Kazakh-language news magazine.

¹⁴² *Ibid.*, 8, 35.

memorializing of places on the steppe connoted an affective connection to its environment; the listing of genealogical ties to the land established claims to the land which were invalidated by the Russian conquest. This loss of homeland, further, was framed explicitly in terms of its effect on the mobile pastoralist lifeways Kazakhs had formerly practiced. For example, Dulat complained that as a result of the complicity of a few Kazakh authority figures with Russian officials, “[Kazakhs’] long pastures grew short/and broad pastures grew small.”¹⁴³ The crisis engendered by the Russian conquest, in this view, was at once a loss of ancestral homeland and the economic forms it sustained. Both formulations did not permit the creation of common ground with a colonial administration that declared steppe land to be state property and, increasingly, saw the future of the region as sedentary.

All three aqyns, further, identified Islam as a central component of Kazakhness, and unlike Abai did not consider it possible to create an Islamic revival with the assistance of imperial institutions. Islamic themes were particularly common in the work of Shortanbai, who in several poems framed the events around him as significant of a coming apocalypse, necessitating submission to Allah.¹⁴⁴ Even outside of this eschatological framework, Shortanbai described the conquest of the steppe by Russians in terms more religious than ethnic, lamenting in separate poems that “These days the unbelieving Russian/is defeating the Muslim” and that “Yellow hair and blue eyes/came ruling without religion.”¹⁴⁵ Murat, too, complained that “people of a different religion/are ruling the people,” while Dulat cast the weakness that had permitted the Russian conquest in the first place as fundamentally moral and religious: “You [Kazakhs]

¹⁴³ Ibid., 15.

¹⁴⁴ See e.g. the long poem “Atamyz Adam paighambar” (“Our ancestor is the prophet Adam”), *ibid.*, 74-85.

¹⁴⁵ Ibid. 72, 120-21.

abandoned the way of sharia/and brought the country into sin.”¹⁴⁶ The opposition between Kazakh religious identity and the colonizer was, according to all three poets, so absolute that no reconciliation was possible. While they would have agreed with Abai that the steppe, under Russian rule, was part of the dar al-harb, they viewed the implications of this shift much differently. The crisis they identified was both economic and cultural, and, in their view, inescapable on both counts.

Describing a period of time as a crisis implies the existence of another, better time with which to contrast it, and indeed, the *zar zaman* bards tended to depict the pre-colonial steppe as an idyllic place of unspoiled natural beauty, plenty, and honor. Dulat, before launching a scathing criticism of contemporary social conditions, began, “Oh, the ridges of these mountain heights, oh, the steppe pasture of our ancestors/Where the grass was always soft at dawn and in the evening dew/Where streams of water raged, where there were so many trees in the foothills/and broad valleys for pasture!”¹⁴⁷ Murat also wrote nostalgically of this idealized, almost fantastically abundant steppe, profoundly connected to the achievements of the Kazakhs as a people, where “herds were like clouds on the foothills/and hooves rang out like rain/you couldn’t count the herds of horses.”¹⁴⁸ The steppe, as Murat portrayed it, gave birth to all this abundance, “gave heroic (*bogatyrskaiia*) strength and courage to the steppe people (*stepniakam*)/precision to the eye and tenacity to the hands.”¹⁴⁹ Depicting the life of former times as uniquely good, the *zar zaman* bards made their portrayal of the catastrophes they were forced to live through appear all the more stark and negative.

¹⁴⁶ Ibid., 148, 7.

¹⁴⁷ M. M. Magauin (sost.), *Poety Kazakhstana* (Leningrad: “Sovetskii pisatel,” 1978) 182. Dulat describes the steppe as the “heritage (*nasledie*) of our ancestors,” now wasted and corrupted.

¹⁴⁸ Ibid., 253.

¹⁴⁹ Ibid.

At times, the *zar zaman* bards, echoing their idyllic and nostalgic descriptions of the pre-colonial steppe, made this comparison directly. Dulat, concluding the poem cited above, asked, “Really are the heights of the mountains beautiful/if there are no pastures there for the livestock/if in the valleys under the slopes there is no thick uncrushed grass? Really is the river beautiful when/there is no aul (village) on the bank?”¹⁵⁰ The beauty of the steppe, in this view, was destroyed by the suffering caused by a few powerful Kazakhs and the Russian colonizers. The steppe’s former abundance, Dulat argued, had been squandered and hoarded. While it had formerly given the Kazakhs “everything,” he claimed, “other years have arrived...The rich man always pushes you around/swindling elects the volost administrators.”¹⁵¹ It is not coincidental that Dulat criticizes the wealthy and low-level Kazakh administrators in consecutive lines, for in the view of the *zar zaman* poets, the exploitative behavior of both groups was strongly similar; indeed, sufficient wealth for paying bribes, Dulat implied, was the only way to advance in the colonial administration. This trope of dishonesty, of a moral crisis intertwined with and abetted by Russian colonialism, was palpable in the works of all three *zar zaman* bards analyzed here. Murat complained that it was impossible for a “clanless” (*bezrodnyi*) child to become a *biy*, and that around him “they all take bribes, as one/and the Muslim lives/giving his life over to evil.”¹⁵² Shortanbai, too, concluded a meditation on the endless difficulty of life and the collapse of filial piety among the Kazakhs with a warning that, while it might still be possible to become wealthy under colonial rule, “If you got your wealth by thieving/by clever swindling and lying besides/You will be

¹⁵⁰ Ibid., 196. This passage also heightens the sense that, for the *zar zaman* bards, pastoralist lifeways were a significant part of the crisis brought about by Russian imperialism; the idyll of the past was, explicitly, a pastoral idyll.

¹⁵¹ Ibid., 183.

¹⁵² Ibid., 255.

judged before God.”¹⁵³ This diagnosis of a moral crisis among the supposed leaders of the steppe, as well as Dulat’s complaint that “Wise people have fallen in worth/and fools have doubled in price,” are all strongly reminiscent of Abai’s critique of the decline of Kazakh society, suggesting that while he was influenced by the liberal exiles he counted among his friends, he was also participating in a polemic of much longer standing, and influenced by the oral art of *aqyns* who came before him.¹⁵⁴

Yet crucially, the *zar zaman* bards differ from Abai in attributing the causes of Kazakh decline exclusively to Russian colonialism. Criticizing a local khan for his greed and corruption, Dulat continued, “You cherished evil and grew it everywhere/at once you became sweet to the tsarist bureaucrats,” implying that these bureaucrats were a significant part of the “evil” for which the khan was responsible.¹⁵⁵ Shortanbai, though, was by far the most vehement of the *zar zaman* bards in his criticism of Russian governance. “The Russians,” he said, “are the eagle (*berkit*), we the fox”; conquest had brought predator and prey together, with predictable results.¹⁵⁶ His description of precolonial idylls was as vivid as Murat or Dulat’s, but he connected their disappearance more explicitly with the Russian conquest than either. Formerly, in his depiction, “thousands of horses were driven/yellow *qazy* was eaten/*qymys* was poured like water/and drunk to drunkenness.”¹⁵⁷ Now, however, “After the good times (*dauren*) left.../After the Russians came, driving us out/There is no way whatsoever, Kazakhs/out of your trap now.”¹⁵⁸ The tsar, he claimed, “exploited the people/the rich men counted

¹⁵³ Ibid., 210.

¹⁵⁴ Ibid., 189.

¹⁵⁵ Ibid., 191.

¹⁵⁶ Dautov 111.

¹⁵⁷ Ibid., 111. “Yellow” in this case implies that the *qazy*, a type of horse-meat sausage, was particularly rich and fatty; *qymys*, or fermented mare’s milk, was and remains a favorite Kazakh beverage.

¹⁵⁸ Ibid.

their profits,” and the “Russian unbeliever (*kapir*) people/got rich from taxes.”¹⁵⁹

Russian colonialism, in *zar zaman* poetry, appears exclusively as a cause of tragedy, as a source of exploitation, enriching a few while leading the vast majority of the steppe into poverty. Far from being a potential solution to the crisis Kazakh society faced, as Abai argued, Russian governance was its single most important cause, and the fact that colonial power appeared to be firmly in place for the foreseeable future boded, in the minds of the *zar zaman* poets, unwell.

Further, the *zar zaman* bards argued that the future promised nothing better for the Kazakhs. Repeating the refrain, “My poor people, what is there to do,” Shortanbai envisioned no solutions to the crisis he decried.¹⁶⁰ Rather, the era of moral and economic decline on the steppe would only worsen, in his view. Filial piety, already on the wane, would only fade further from view: “In the coming future time/sons will not respect fathers/daughters will not respect mothers.”¹⁶¹ After the above-cited listing of material abundance in the pre-colonial era, he warned that, in the future, most Kazakhs would likely be left bereft of meat, and connected this directly to the “offense” (*qorlyq*) brought by the Russians.¹⁶² Murat, too, envisioned a future where “attack after attack awaits us/and time waves good-bye to us.”¹⁶³ For the *zar zaman* poets, there was no sign that the colonial era would soon come to an end, and, consequently, they did not anticipate a return to material abundance and moral correctness; only poverty and the destruction of traditional values awaited the Kazakhs.

¹⁵⁹ Ibid., 113 (first quotation) and 112 (second quotation).

¹⁶⁰ Ibid., 120.

¹⁶¹ Ibid.

¹⁶² Ibid., 111.

¹⁶³ Magauin 254

Both Abai and the *zar zaman* bards believed the steppe to be in a period of crisis, developing a moral critique of its economic and cultural decline. All shared a fundamentally moral critique of the state of Kazakh life, filled with revulsion at what all claimed was the corrupt behavior and consequence-free exploitation of masses of poor herders by a few wealthy magnates. The *zar zaman* bards, though, saw nothing good in Russian governance, with Russian colonialism the principal and continuing cause of the poverty and immorality they observed, nor any available means of alleviating the crisis. Their lamentations about the conquest of the steppe approached the eschatological, as in the words of Shortanbai: “Wonder left the holy/Justice left the tsar/The end times (*aqyrzaman*) drew near.”¹⁶⁴ This framing differed substantially from that of Abai, who decried the abusive behavior of tsarist administrators, but also saw some value in Russian colonialism as a means for Kazakhs to extricate themselves from the moral and economic turpitude he claimed was prevalent among them. He interpreted this troubled era, further, largely as the result of processes occurring within Kazakh society, rather than processes imposed on it from without. The oral culture of the late 19th-century steppe, in short, was characterized by multiple understandings of Russian imperialism and its implications. Abai, negotiating between metropolitan and steppe cultural influences, argued for a resolution to the troubled times he observed by using Russian governance to Kazakhs’ benefit; for the *zar zaman* poets, on the other hand, such compromises would signify the loss of land and pastoralism – the essence of Kazakhness.

Conclusion

During the last years of the 19th century, Semipalatinsk oblast was a site of multifaceted cultural exchange. Low in population density, it was widely considered a

¹⁶⁴ Dautov 112.

propitious area for settler colonization; remote from metropolitan universities and political centers, it was also a common destination for political exiles. These political exiles, many of them highly educated, played a very significant role in the statistical and ethnographic study of the oblast. While the research they carried out aided the expansion of imperial power, it also provided an idiom through which they expressed views of the colonized and the project of imperial governance that were uncommon in Russian letters at the time. Such arguments were based on an understanding of the Kazakhs of the oblast as rational, civilizable, and in need of protection and development from the state, rather than barbaric targets of expropriation. This understanding, in turn, opened space for dialogue with a few interested Russophone Kazakhs, whose presence in scholarly organizations served the oppositional *intelligenty* of Semipalatinsk as proof that their inclinations about Kazakh civilizability were correct. One such Kazakh, Abai Qunanbaev, was not a scholar but a literary figure, distributing poetry and polemics in the Kazakh language, and his work represents an unprecedented and creative re-appropriation in the subaltern sphere of oppositional ideals about empire. Other *aqyns*, however, completely outside the empire's discursive frame, expressed drastically different views of Kazakhness and the Russian conquest. The interaction between Abai and the exiled *kraevedy* of Semipalatinsk was thus an interaction among liminal figures, one not wholly (or differently) subaltern, the other not wholly (or differently) imperial.

As it happened, however, the expansion of Russian settler colonialism on the steppe, and protests against it, did not occur on the basis of an intellectual middle ground. The "liberal alternative" that interactions among exiled reformers and Russophone Kazakhs in Semipalatinsk represented was contrary to the state's interest in colonizing

the steppe, an interest that was continually on the rise under Alexander III and Nicholas II; because of this, it was never likely to come to fruition.¹⁶⁵ Nor, as the work of the *zar zaman* bards indicates, were many Kazakh pastoralists interested in pursuing compromises with an empire that had seized land they considered theirs and threatened to change the only way of life most had ever known. On both sides of the colonizer/colonized divide, a relatively small number of liminal figures created alternatives in which the majority of their interlocutors were uninterested, hence the regular failure of the “third ways” they proposed to catch on. Intransigence was a feature of large subsections of subaltern and imperialist thought alike.

Yet almost until 1917, the story of Kazakh intermediaries within the Russian Empire is the story of a series of attempts to creatively define a compromise between Kazakh economic interests and cultural identity and Russian imperialism. Indeed, other Russophone Kazakhs contemporary to Abai, some of whom also participated in the reform-minded scholarly organizations of Semipalatinsk oblast, pursued such compromises by engaging with the very institutions that were to organize and expand peasant resettlement. The largest attempt the Russian Empire ever made to survey its steppe oblasts for the purposes of settlement, the Shcherbina expedition of 1896-1903, counted Kazakhs among its authors, statisticians, translators, and surveyors. The leaders of this expedition, too, were often members of oppositional political parties, and the idea of mathematically precise and regulated colonization represented a middle ground on the

¹⁶⁵ The term “liberal alternative” was originally applied by David Wolff to the far eastern city of Harbin, in Manchuria; in the case Wolff describes, local administrators and high-level ministers alike self-consciously decided to create an urban environment incorporating a broad range of ethnicities and political views. Semipalatinsk oblast’s status under military administration and as a zone of extensive Slavic peasant settlement gave it very different significance in ministerial circles. See Wolff, *To the Harbin Station: The Liberal Alternative in Russian Manchuria, 1898-1914* (Stanford, CA: Stanford UP, 1999).

basis of which Russophone Kazakhs and oppositional scholars could cooperate with the state. In the aftermath of this colonial interlude, though, rifts between the sponsors of the expedition and those who carried it out, as well as, later, between Kazakh intellectuals and imperial Russian liberals, would become apparent.

Chapter 5

Colonial Interlude: The Shcherbina Expedition of 1896-1903 and its Aftermath

Introduction

The last decades of the 19th century witnessed a radical shift in Russian policy towards Central Asia. Whereas earlier colonial administrators had prioritized non-intervention, even punishing unauthorized peasant migrants to the steppe (*samovol'tsy*), from the 1880s onward, peasant settlement gained broader official sanction.¹ In the minds of many administrators, Russian peasants, idealized as hard-working and thrifty, would secure the productivity and success of the steppe colony and demonstrate the benefits of sedentarism to the mobile pastoralist Kazakhs.² Underlying such arguments was a fundamental assumption about the superiority of sedentary agriculture, standing unambiguously above mobile pastoralism on the hierarchy of world civilizations, regardless of ecological conditions. Although tsarist officials were not unanimous in their support of organized colonization, most favored it, and the project moved forward with the approval of Alexander III in 1882.³

¹ Daniel Brower, *Turkestan and the End of the Russian Empire* (New York: RoutledgeCurzon, 2006) 127-131. See also George Demko, *The Russian Colonization of Kazakhstan, 1896-1916* (Bloomington, IN: Indiana UP, 1969) 75-78.

² This belief in the intellectual and moral strength of the peasantry was never universal among imperial Russian thinkers, but widespread enough to form a key part of arguments for resettlement by the 1890s; if peasants were not ideal colonizers, they were widely agreed to at least represent a cultural and economic improvement on Cossacks and Kazakhs in the steppe oblasts.. See Cathy Frierson, *Peasant Icons: Representations of Rural People in Late Nineteenth Century Russia* (New York: Oxford UP, 1993). For an ethnographic account demonstrating that this conviction was still not a given during the resettlement era, see O. P. Semenova Tian-Shanskaia, *Zhizn' "Ivana": ocherki iz byta krest'ian odnoi iz chernozemnykh gubernii* (Moscow: Lomonosov, 2010).

³ TsGA RK f. 64, op. 1, d. 3968, sv. 253, l. 11. This file, a collection of documents related to settler colonization, is entitled "Delo o zaselenii kirgizskoi stepi russkimi pereslentsami."

However, as peasant settlers arrived to the steppe oblasts, despite preliminary research indicating the suitability of some areas for agriculture, local administrators had tremendous difficulty accommodating them, and harvest failures caused many settlers to return to their original places of residence. As a result of this, in 1889, even with relatively few settlers arriving, an administrator from Akmolinsk oblast recommended to the Steppe Governor-General a moratorium on peasant settlement to the steppe, “until it is known whether settlers can survive on the established areas, and until it is clarified whether the three-year period of harvest failures is an exception or a normal phenomenon.”⁴ This proposal was accepted in 1891, less than ten years after temporary regulations permitting settlement to the steppe had been promulgated. Meanwhile, the administrative pull of peasant settlers to the steppe oblasts that characterized the 1880s was, by the 1890s, met by an equally strong push out of the inner provinces, where land shortages were increasingly prevalent. In these agricultural regions, severe drought and famine in 1891-92 worsened an already difficult situation, prompting many to flee.⁵ In the first years of the 1890s, in short, the policy of peasant settlement had reached an impasse, which it was widely agreed necessitated further study of the steppe.

The capstone of this research effort, and the apotheosis of what Willard Sunderland has termed “correct colonization,” was the Shcherbina Expedition of 1896-1903.⁶ Sponsored by the Siberian Railroad Committee and the Ministry of Agriculture and State Properties, it worked in twelve uyezds of Semipalatinsk, Akmolinsk, and Turgai

⁴ TsGA RK, f. 64, d. 3968, sv. 253, ll. 176-176 ob.

⁵ This famine, felt strongly in both the black-earth provinces and south of the Urals, was the result of the infelicitous combination of a particularly strong worldwide El Nino event in 1891 and the disastrous tax offensive of Finance Minister Vyshnegradskii, who remarked, “We may not eat enough, but we will export.” See Mike Davis, *Late Victorian Holocausts: El Nino Famines and the Making of the Third World* (New York: Verso, 2002) 125-6. For explicit use of the “push-pull” language, see Demko 52-58.

⁶ Willard Sunderland, *Taming the Wild Field: Colonization and Empire on the Russian Steppe* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell UP, 2004) 179-80.

oblasts. Led by the statistician F. A. Shcherbina, the Expedition's task was to determine with certainty the amount of steppe land required for the nomads' subsistence, and the amount that could safely be allotted for the use of newly-arrived agriculturalists. By measuring the land that Kazakhs used and counting the livestock they owned, the Expedition derived statistical norms for the land requirements of an average Kazakh household, after which a simple calculation gave the amount of "surplus" land available for settlers in each uezd. In its conception, the Shcherbina expedition provided the framework for the mathematically perfect agricultural colonization of the steppe; in practice, it proved an imperfect servant of imperial goals.⁷

The Shcherbina expedition has mostly attracted brief and informational comment from Western historians.⁸ Although it would seem possible to view this as a Foucauldian enterprise, using imperial power to count, classify, and constrain the inhabitants of the steppe for the sake of the metropole's prerogatives, such an interpretation is also absent from Russian-language historiography.⁹ Rather, the Kazakhstani historian Gulnara Khabizhanova notes that while the Shcherbina helped to further settlement to the steppe oblasts, specific aspects of its praxis and the membership of most of its participants in what she calls the "democratic Russian intelligentsia" indicate no wish to harm the Kazakhs, and further argues that "The activity of the democratic Russian intelligentsia on

⁷ The idea of mathematically perfect land use was a widely shared ethos in late imperial Russia. See David Darrow, "From Commune to Household: Statistics and the Social Construction of Chaianov's Theory of Peasant Economy," *Comparative Studies in Society and History* 43.4 (October 2001), 788-818. In the steppe oblasts, the connection between lifeways generally considered inefficient and membership in a non-dominant nationality group (that is, Kazakhs) made this ethos highly compatible with settler colonization.

⁸ Peter Rottier does note that Shcherbina "saw a virtue in the sedentarization of the nomads." (70) See his "The Kazakness of Sedentarization: Promoting Progress as Tradition in Response to the Land Problem," *Central Asian Survey* 22.1 (March 2003): 67-81.

⁹ The *locus classicus* of such arguments is Michel Foucault, *The Order of Things: An Archaeology of the Human Sciences* (New York: Vintage Books, 1994).

the agrarian question in the *krai* bore, on the whole, a positive character.”¹⁰ I will argue that the Shcherbina expedition was far more complex than this – a massive exercise of imperial power that also sought to place limits on settler colonization. The final goal of the Expedition was to support the growth of sedentarism and peasant settlement in the place of mobile pastoralism and the Kazakhs who lived by it; the same advocates of peasant colonization who sponsored research of the steppe oblasts later used Shcherbina’s findings to accelerate settlement. Yet most of the Expedition’s participants held moderately to strongly oppositional political views; Shcherbina himself, for example, was later a member of the Popular Socialist party. Other key members of the Expedition included T. I. Sedel’nikov, a *trudovik*, and Lev Chermak, exiled to the steppe oblasts for anti-governmental activity.¹¹ The Kazakhs who assisted it (notably Alikhan Bokeikhanov and Iakup-Mirza Akpaev), held a wide range of views on the Russian Empire’s purpose in the steppe, with Bokeikhanov’s liberal views emerging most strongly in its texts.¹² The civilizational hierarchies and ideologies of empire that emerged in its writings were complex, conditional, and did not always strictly privilege sedentarism and Russian migration.

Early Notes on Steppe Agriculture

The Shcherbina expedition was hardly the first attempt made in the Russian Empire to assess the suitability of Central Asian lands for agriculture in general, and peasant settlement (*pereselenie*) in particular. Indeed, this concern is reflected, if unsystematically, in a variety of travel accounts and scholarly monographs dating to the

¹⁰ Gulnara Khabizhanova *et al.*, *Ruskaia demokraticheskaia intelligentsia v Kazakhstane (vtoraia polovina XIX-nachalo XX vv)* (Moscow: “Ruskaia kniga,” 2003) 200.

¹¹ On Sedelnikov, see Khabizhanova *et al.*, 79

¹² On Akpaev, see Mukhtar Qul-Mukhammed, *Zhakyp Akpaev: patriot, politik, pravoved: politiko-pravovye vzgliady Zh. Akpaeva* (Almaty: Atamura, 1995).

1850s. I. Kazantsev, in his *Opisanie Kirgiz-kaisak*, writes of the “rich lands, lying many centuries without development” of the steppes of the Tobol and Ishim rivers, later envisioning a future wherein “the Kazakh steppes, just like the Bashkir lands, inhabited by their nomads, with the progress of civilization, will be transformed into sedentary lands not in three, but in one century and will form of themselves three times as many guberniias as Bashkiria.”¹³ If the agent of such civilizational change was left implicit in Kazantsev’s account, it became much clearer in, for instance, the writings of N. A. Severtsov. Stopping in Tashkent during his journeys around Turkestan (part of which, Semireche oblast, was later administratively classified among the steppe oblasts), Severtsov compiled for the Governor-General of Turkestan, Konstantin fon-Kaufman, a note

“on places suitable for Russian colonization...[taking] into account two main conditions: 1. that these places were free, and that colonization would be carried out without constraint of the core local population; 2. that these places corresponded to Russian economic customs, that is, would be provided with forest and rain for agriculture.”¹⁴

The agricultural potential of the lands of Central Asia, then, was long a substantive concern for scholarly Russian travelers in the region (more often than not sponsored by governmental institutions).¹⁵ Their assessments, though not particularly detailed, were generally positive, pointing to the existence of vast swaths of fertile land that could be profitably worked by colonists and natives alike. Such descriptions of Central Asia were long taken as authoritative, and there is little doubt that their optimistic

¹³ I. Kazantsev (sost.), *Opisanie Kirgiz-kaisak* (St. Petersburg: tip. Tovarishchestva “Obshchestvennaia Pol’za,” 1867) 46-7 and 61.

¹⁴ N. A. Severtsov, *Puteshestviia po Turkestanskomy kraiu i izsledovanie gornoj strany Tian-Shania* (St. Petersburg: tip. K. V. Trubnikova, 1873) 93.

¹⁵ Severtsov, for example, depended heavily on Russian military forces for aid during his travels (Severtsov, *Puteshestviia*, pp. 4-5), and the equally renowned N. M. Przhevalskii received vital support from the General Staff. See N. M. Przhevalskii, *Ot Kiakhty na istoki zheltoi reki* (Moscow: Geografiz, 1948) 23.

views had a strong influence on the development of a more systematic policy of state-sponsored settler colonization.¹⁶

Beyond the realm of scholarly and travel literature, the archival record demonstrates that the decision to permit migration to the steppe oblasts was made with some care, and with concern about the lands available to settlers.¹⁷ Initial responsibility for researching and defining sections of land suitable for settlement fell on the uezd nachalniks, the military administrators of the sometimes enormous counties of the steppe oblasts. Such efforts did not always prove successful; the nachalniks of Karkaralinsk and Pavlodar uezds reported that, owing to the stony, clayey soil of the uezds under their authority, it was impossible to project any migrant settlements.¹⁸ Even while praising the lands of Ust-Kamenogorsk uezd, “rich in forest...and sources of water for irrigating fields,” the head of the survey division Dorofeev was forced to note that Kazakhs in the region already suffered from a lack of suitable lands, as demonstrated by their rental of additional plots from the local Cossacks.¹⁹ Under such conditions, he noted, it was difficult to envision Russian settlement even on these more promising lands, assuming the government continued to prioritize non-interference in the Kazakhs’ lives. Yet, despite the less than propitious conditions observed by surveyors, sections were designated, and settlers began to arrive to the steppe in increasing numbers, both the

¹⁶ These works continued to be cited as authoritative well into the 20th century. Responding to a 1911 request from the head of the Resettlement Administration for assistance in compiling a map of “Asiatic Russia” indicating, among other things, available lands for settlement, the manager of Semireche settler region, S. N. Veletskii, based his report on the findings of P. P. Semenov-Tian-Shanskii, I. V. Mushketov, V. V. Sapozhnikov, and L. S. Berg, among other scholarly explorers. See TsGA RK f. 19, op. 1, d. 267, sv. 41, l. 14. The title of the file is “Perepiska s pereselencheskim upravleniem o dostavke etnograficheskikh i drugikh svedenii po Semirechenskoi oblasti.”

¹⁷ TsGA RK f. 64, op. 1, d. 3968, sv. 253, ll. 14-14ob. has the opinion of State Secretary Valuev that colonization of the Kazakh steppes is premature, among many other opinions testifying to its desirability.

¹⁸ TsGA RK f. 64, op. 1, d. 3968, sv. 253, l. 101ob., from a journal presentation of the Semipalatinsk Oblast Administration of 26 April 1884.

¹⁹ TsGA RK f. 64, op. 1, d. 3968, sv. 253, ll. 105-105ob., from the same journal presentation.

unauthorized *samovol'tsy* (principally from Tomsk and Tobol'sk guberniias) and settlers from the black-earth provinces and Ukraine, with the blessing of the state.

A report presented to the chancery of the Steppe Governor-General five years later indicates that this was an unmitigated disaster. Studying 18 settlements in Akmolinsk oblast, the unnamed surveyor who presented this report divided them into three categories: giving hope for the possibility of existence, hopeless, and doubtful, the majority falling into the latter two categories.²⁰ Painting a lamentable picture of the state of peasant settlements, the author was also reluctant to assign blame for this to anyone in particular, noting that “[the settlers’] love of work is boundless, morality above any question; drunkenness does not exist, there are taverns in no settlements, and from the time of establishing settlements, there have not been cases of crime in any of them,” and that oblast and uezd authorities had done everything possible to aid them.²¹ Rather, the blame fell squarely on the natural conditions of these areas, insufficiently known and hindering the peasants’ efforts to establish agriculture. Peasant settlers had been subjected to unduly harsh conditions, and had either fled in response or threatened to do so:

“From their very settlement peasants populating these sections were subjected to disasters from harvest failures and the severity of the climate...Soil of poor quality predominates on the whole area occupied by peasant settlements. Further, lack of lands: mowing lands, forest and water of good quality, and also especially the three last years of harvest failure, brought the settlers to a very lamentable state in the economic respect.”²²

²⁰ TsGA RK f. 64, op. 1, d. 3968, sv. 253, l. 164, from the report “Zapiska o poselencheskom voprose v Akmolinskoi oblasti”.

²¹ TsGA RK f. 64, op. 1, d. 3968, sv. 253, ll. 166-166ob., from the same report.

²² Ibid, ll. 163-163ob.

Though the author of the report is sanguine about the efforts of the government to help settlers after their arrival, he strongly criticizes its “purely Cabinet” view of colonization,

“without the appropriate advance research of the productive strength of the *krai*, quality and characteristics of the soil, without observations supported by the indications of experience, of climactic conditions of the steppe, without attentive study of the Kazakh people in relation to its economy and daily life, and also of the morals, custom, character and inclinations of the nomads.”²³

Under such circumstances, the author notes that it is hardly surprising that the administration’s visions of colonization have not been borne out, and recommends a temporary halt in authorized settlement to ascertain whether or not they can be realized at all. Although skeptical of the program of colonization, he concludes that further and more detailed study is necessary if it is to be carried out.²⁴

Following on this, in 1895, the same year that the necessity of the Shcherbina expedition became widely acknowledged in government circles, V. A. Ostaf’ev, a well-known agronomist, published in the journal of the West-Siberian *otdel* of the Russian Geographical Society (located in Omsk) his calculations of the amount of free land for settlement in Western Siberia and Central Asia.²⁵ He begins the piece with a fabulous claim: if one assumes that Kazakhs will go over to sedentary agriculture (and accept the allotment, 15 desiatinas per male soul, given to peasant settlers), it is theoretically possible to settle almost 20 million people, a quarter of the whole population of the Empire, in the provinces of western Siberia (Tomsk and Tobol’sk) and the steppe

²³ Ibid. ll. 173-173ob.

²⁴ Ibid., ll. 174ob.-175, for one example of skepticism: “I also cannot fail to note that the Kazakhs too, as yet, will hardly start to take up grain cultivation, because they better know their lands, suitable only, with few exceptions, for animal husbandry.”

²⁵ V. A. Ostaf’ev, “Vozmozhno li pri sushestvuyushchikh znaniakh i dannykh o Sibiri opredelit’ kolichestvo svobodnykh, godnykh i udobnykh zemel’ dlia kolonizatsii?” *Zapiski Zapadno-sibirskogo otdela RGO*, kn. XVIII, vyp. 2 (Omsk: tip. Okruzhnogo shtaba, 1895).

oblasts.²⁶ However, it soon becomes clear that Ostaf'ev is arguing Socratically: he cites a ridiculous figure only to demonstrate its ridiculousness. Citing a lack of the resources necessary for sedentary life (fresh water, hay mowing lands, etc.), he concludes,

“of the sum of lands counted and indicated by the Administration as free, convenient and suitable for settlement, with great stretching and exaggeration one may acknowledge only 50% (the settlers' brigade *de facto* acknowledges only 25%), to which it is possible to settle with migrants without harm for their future agricultural life.”²⁷

Ostaf'ev rails not only against the exaggerated totals publicized by the Administration of State Domains, but also the inconsistency with which previous studies have been carried out, permitting great variation in the amount of land deemed necessary to a single unit of livestock, or to a single Kazakh. Such errors, he writes, have “discredited the business of land measurement (*mezhevoe delo*) in the peasants' eyes to the utmost degree”.²⁸ Rather, it was necessary to “become acquainted in detail with the country we wish to settle and which is for us terra incognita in all regards” before proceeding with settler colonization, to research millions of desiatinas in relation to their climate, soil and topography.²⁹ Not disputing the necessity of settler colonization, he argues that human concern for the fate of the colonists and the enormous expense to the state entailed by organized settlement necessitate much more attentive study of the steppe oblasts than previously done, and calls the scholars of the Empire to his cause.³⁰ Ostaf'ev, in sum, makes no claims beyond the rhetorical for the amount of suitable land available for settlement in the steppe oblasts, but harshly criticizes all previous efforts made at assessment in this direction.

²⁶ Ostaf'ev, “Vozmozhno li?” 2.

²⁷ Ostaf'ev, “Vozmozhno li?” 12.

²⁸ Ostaf'ev, “Vozmozhno li?” 19.

²⁹ Ostaf'ev, “Vozmozhno li?” 25.

³⁰ Ostaf'ev, “Vozmozhno li?” 31-32.

Shcherbina and the researchers under him represented the steppe as a region intrinsically hostile to scholarly research. Such assertions functioned both to explain the failings of previous expeditions and mark the subjects of the Expedition's research as essentially inferior to those who studied them. Describing the Steppe Governor-Generalship as a little-known borderland, Shcherbina explained the deficiencies of earlier studies by the enormous area they had to cover, the necessity of using translators to question Kazakhs, and the general lack of knowledge of the region among scholars and administrators.³¹ The practical obstacle of travel distance, he argued, was only made worse by the Kazakhs' nomadic lifestyle, making it difficult to keep them in one place for study, and uncomfortable for researchers accustomed to more refined accommodations. He was disdainful of the Kazakhs' usual dwellings, claiming, "The yurt, presenting certain conveniences in summer in warm weather, badly defends those living in it in stormy, cold weather... Because of the phenomenal Kazakh dirt, covering the whole property in a thick layer, the Kazakh has nothing to sit or write on."³² He grouched that translators were often unreliable, and that land use among mobile pastoralists defied statistical analysis.³³ Kazakhs frequently used the land without anything the statisticians recognized as a border, and where borders existed (most commonly around *kstau*, winter camps) they were highly variable; the measurements used among Kazakhs, Shcherbina claimed, were as imprecise and variable as their borders, meaning that "the indications of

³¹ MPKZ t. 1, 1.

³² MPKZ t. 1, 3. The trope of nomadic dirtiness was a significant part of Russian travel literature concerning Central and Northern Asia. See, for example, the writings of Nikolai Przhevalskii: "The first thing which strikes the traveler in the life of the Mongol is his excessive dirtiness: he never washes his body, and very seldom his face and hands." N. M. Przhevalskii, *Mongolia, the Tangut Country, and the Solitudes of Northern Tibet*, v. 1, trans. E. Delmar Morgan (London: Sampson Low, Marston, Searle, and Rivington, 1876). On the civilizational hierarchies embedded in this trope, see John L. and Jean Comaroff, *Ethnography and the Historical Imagination* (Boulder, CO: Westview Press, 1992) 216.

³³ MPKZ t. 1, 4.

the Kazakhs on areas and distances can have relative meaning, as only comparative signs.”³⁴ In the face of these allegedly daunting obstacles, the participants of the Shcherbina expedition offered their expedition as the best possible solution, and the embodiment of a rational and civilized worldview opposed to the chaos they claimed was rampant on the steppe.

Though goodness, not exactitude, was the claim made for the Expedition’s practices, its participants also argued that more than just increased manpower and financial means would make their study an improvement on previous research.³⁵ Such claims were often made explicitly; of the discrepancy between the Expedition’s figure for the population of Kokchetau uezd and the figure in the *Vsepoddanneishii otchet Akmolinskoi oblasti za 1895 g.*, Shcherbina writes that the Expedition’s larger number “is wholly explained by the quality and greater exactitude [of its data].”³⁶ In an exhaustively detailed methodological introduction, the statisticians lay out a plan to divide the land according to its actual use (rather than working according to arbitrary administrative units) and common environmental characteristics, conducting censuses of people and livestock in each region, measuring the land within it and classifying it as suitable for agriculture, suitable for mobile pastoralism, or unsuited to human habitation.³⁷ Using “intelligent translators” in interviews, the Expedition sought to make use of local knowledge of the

³⁴ MPKZ t. 1, 6 and 9 (quote).

³⁵ MPKZ t. 1, 29, for a caveat on the difficulty of counting livestock, the perennial bane of steppe researchers in academic and administrative circles. Still, Shcherbina also writes on p. 32 that “such inexactitudes should not have substantive significance for the final outputs.”

³⁶ MPKZ t. 1, 25. The *Vsepoddanneishii otchet* (literally “Most-all-subject report”) was compiled regularly for reading by the tsar by provincial governors on the basis of reports from uezd nachalniks and other lower-level officials.

³⁷ This methodological introduction can be found at MPKZ t. 1, 13-25. On the problems of using official volost boundaries, see p. 13 of the same volume. Such boundaries indeed changed frequently and could be drawn on the basis of economic, environmental, or political considerations. See TsGA RK, f. 15, op. 1, d. 479, sv. 25, “O razdelenii Chuiskoi volosti na dve: Chuiskoi i Sarybulakskoi volostei, v svyazi s rodovoi bor’boi kazakhskogo naseleniia” for one particularly contentious case.

flora, fauna, and soil of each region, for the sake of classifying them more accurately.³⁸

In the end, complex statistical calculations would determine how much land the average Kazakh household needed for its survival, how much land in the region was surplus to native requirements, and of that number, how much of it was suitable for agriculture.

Methodologically, the Expedition came as close as possible to correcting the deficiencies of earlier studies, potentially laying the foundation for a perfect colonization of the steppes. In practice, though, it would prove an imperfect servant of imperial goals.

Histories for the Empire

The statisticians of the Shcherbina expedition were acutely aware that the land and people they observed were not frozen in a single moment in time. Rather, their observations were conditioned by historical processes that had been in effect for centuries and had not yet reached their completion. The past, both recent and distant, was vital to the conclusions the Expedition drew; Russian settlement had already occurred on the Kazakh steppe for almost a century, and part of its task was to evaluate the influence of this earlier migration, so as to ascertain the possible consequences of state-sponsored colonization on a wider scale. The past that the Expedition constructed for the steppe, although full of conflict, moved in a single direction, unfriendly to the survival of mobile pastoralism, and Russian settlers, whether Cossack or peasant, were identified as the most prominent agents of change in this arena. Although many of its statisticians had misgivings about settler colonization, the Expedition's presentation of Kazakh sedentarization in the wake of Russian colonization as an inevitable fact was consonant with and supported the views of the most extreme proponents of peasant settlement.

³⁸ On "intelligent translators," see MPKZ t. 1, p. 4; this could include both Kazakhs and Cossacks knowing the Kazakh language. On the value of local knowledge, see MPKZ t. 1, p. 36.

In describing the population of an individual uezd, and establishing its link to the land it occupied, the Expedition's authorial collective was at times forced to look even further back than the Russian conquest. Some Kazakh land claims, in these descriptions, date back more than 200 years (Omsk uezd).³⁹ Others, however, were of significantly more recent provenance, mainly because of internal changes in the steppe caused by the rebellion of Kenesary Qasymov in the 1830s, as described for Akmolinsk uezd:

“Kazakhs who did not agree with Kenesary had to, saving themselves from his pursuit, abandon their accustomed places and migrate to the north, closer to the Russian line. The steppe aroused (*vzbudorazhennaia*) by Kenesary did not quickly return to normal. Many of the Kazakh clans completely abandoned the territory of the uezd, and others appeared in their place.”⁴⁰

According to this version of events, steppe land was, in historical perspective, not something to be firmly possessed, but subject to constant contestation and changes in ownership. The Expedition's understanding of the significance of usufruct rights gave further sanction to such a view. This understanding was placed in the clearest possible terms for Kustanai uezd: “The primitive nomads, migrating from north to south at a distance of hundreds of verstas, being in constant movement, do not have any attachment

³⁹ F. A. Shcherbina and V. Kuznetsov, *MPKZ t. 11: Akmolinskaia oblast, Omskii uezd* (Omsk: tip. Shtaba Sibirskogo voennogo okruga, 1902) 23-4.

⁴⁰ F. A. Shcherbina and E. Dobrovolskii (eds.), *MPKZ t. 3: Akmolinskaia oblast, Akmolinskii uezd* (Chernigov: tip. G. M. Veseloi, 1909) 87. Though abundantly treated in Russian- and Kazakh-language historiography, the Kenesary rebellion has only recently gained the attention of Western scholars. See Steve Sabol, “Kazakh Resistance to Russian Colonization: Interpreting the Kenesary Kasymov Revolt, 1837-1847” in *Central Asian Survey* 22.2-3 (June/September 2003): 231-252. 19th-century Russian scholarship presents a distinctly negative view of the revolt, seeing Kenesary as bloodthirsty and exploitative, as in the introduction to E. T. Smirnov, *Sultany Kenisara i Sadyk* (Tashkent: tip.-lit. S. I. Lakhchina, 1889). Kazakhstani scholarship has taken the opposite tack, interpreting Kenesary as a hero of anti-colonial resistance, and head of a “national-liberation movement.” Sabol argues that reading nationalism so far into the history of the steppe is tendentious, though he agrees that the revolt was directed against colonization and the changes it had created. See M. K. Kozybaev et. al., *Natsionalno-osvoboditelnaia borba Kazakhskogo naroda pod predvoditelstvom Kenisary Kasymova: sbornik dokumentov* (Almaty: “Ghylym,” 1996) and the work of E. B. Bekmakhanov.

to the land, to any particular place.”⁴¹ Thus, the Kazakhs appear as migrants themselves in some sense, not tied to any specific land, and the impermanence of the mobile pastoralist population becomes one of the predominant features of the steppe. In fact, Kazakh clans had not been a permanent fixture within the steppe oblasts, but rather drove off the Kalmyks who had occupied these lands before them.⁴² But such emphasis on their impermanence and mobility meant that Russian settlers could be viewed as simply new contestants in an age-old battle; rhetorically denying the Kazakhs a permanent connection to particular pieces of land was necessary before pastures long-used on usufruct rights could be seized as surplus, allotted to settlers, and new lands given to the Kazakhs in their place.

Indeed, Russian settlement represented a new, distinct and final stage in the history of the steppe for members of the Expedition. The steppe’s past, prior to the Russian conquest, in the Expedition’s materials is rendered formless and chaotic; if changes, ruptures and migrations were commonplace in the pre-Russian era, in this view, the essential nature of the steppe was unchanging. Thus the rebellion of Kenesary Qasymov was described as “like (*kak by*) the last act of a whole epoch in the history of the *krai*, an epoch of raids and rough seizures by strong neighbors.”⁴³ This era was directly juxtaposed against the “comparatively peaceful period” after the pacification of Kenesary’s rebellion, when Russia ruled the steppe indirectly, through senior sultans; the promulgation of the Provisional Statute in 1868, in turn, was said to represent a new

⁴¹ F. A. Shcherbina, *MPKZ t. 5: Turgaiskaia oblast, Kustanaiskii uezd* (Voronezh: tip.-lit. V. I. Isaeva, 1903) 83.

⁴² See Michael Khodarkovsky, *Where Two Worlds Met: The Russian State and the Kalmyk Nomads, 1600-1771* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell UP, 1992) and *Russia’s Steppe Frontier: The Making of a Colonial Empire, 1500-1800* (Bloomington, IN: Indiana UP, 2002).

⁴³ *MPKZ t. 3*, 91.

period of life in Akmolinsk uezd (and, by extension, the steppe oblasts in general).⁴⁴ The post-1868 era was described as “a period of fundamental rupture in the life of the Kazakhs – the destruction of the old structure, founded on clan leadership and common law, and the...[appearance] of Russian settlers.”⁴⁵ Colonization, even without state sponsorship, was thus depicted as part of a larger process of change effected from without, encompassing economic, legal, and cultural spheres.

The process of historical change, for the Expedition, was evolutionary, irreversible, and moved in a single direction, with consequences for the Kazakhs that could be discovered through research.⁴⁶ These consequences were reflected most concretely in changing understandings, among the Kazakhs, of private property and land use. As Shcherbina and his co-authors explained, Kazakhs’ conception of land “in its primary and most primitive form stems from understanding about the land as a vast pasture, on which each nomad can pasture livestock.”⁴⁷ This conception, and the era to which it belonged, was linked directly to mobile pastoralism, with migration in some uezds described as “a survival of gray antiquity.”⁴⁸ Such pastures were not without restriction, of course, but the restrictions were seasonal, based on clan ties, and did not prevent multiple groups from using a single piece of pasture at different times of year. The arrival of settlers (first Cossacks, then unauthorized peasants), as well as natural population growth among the Kazakhs, changed this state of affairs, forcing Kazakhs to

⁴⁴ Ibid., 93-94.

⁴⁵ Ibid., 93.

⁴⁶ On the “historical necessity” of Russian colonization as described by the Shcherbina expedition, see Richard Pierce, *Russian Central Asia 1867-1917: A Study in Colonial Rule* (Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 1960), 124.

⁴⁷ MPKZ t. 1, 6.

⁴⁸ F. A. Shcherbina and E. Dobrovolskii, *MPKZ t. 12: Akmolinskaia oblast, Petropavlovskii uezd* (Chernigov: tip. G. M. Veseloi, 1908) 139. The same volume describes purely pastoral lifeways as “archaic” (173), strongly indicating that they are exclusively the province of the past.

more jealously guard lands that, as they became scarce relative to the population, grew increasingly valuable.⁴⁹ This was an evolutionary process, for the Expedition's contributors, culminating inevitably in "the gradual individualization of land property," and noted particularly around winter camps.⁵⁰ This location was highly significant, since temporary settlement in winter camps was perceived as the first step on the path to sedentarization: "*Kstau* represents the cell, from which a purely sedentary population should develop with time."⁵¹ Russian settlement in general, increasing demand for land and raising its price, was a strong spur to the development of concepts of private property among the Kazakhs, and the construction of the Orenburg-Tashkent railroad line, constraining migratory routes and bringing ever more peasant settlers, pointed to "the inevitability of fast and profound changes in the animal-rearing way of life of the Kazakh population."⁵² The end of communal land use among the Kazakhs, and the sedentarization so closely linked to it, came to be viewed as foreordained:

"It is impossible, for the sake of permitting nomadic Kazakhs to migrate long distances, to forbid cultivated fields or the emergence of new forms of settlement along their travel routes. This would mean placing a prohibition on cultural development, on the growth of forms of economy already established."⁵³

The genie of sedentarization, in other words, was said to be already out of the bottle, and the Expedition's view of history as a multi-stage, teleological process meant there was no returning to "primitive" communal land use and mobile pastoralism.

⁴⁹ F. A. Shcherbina, *MPKZ t. 2: Akmolinskaia oblast, Atbasarskii uezd* (Voronezh: tip.-lit. V. I. Isaeva, 1902) XI, for one example. Such discussions are *passim* throughout all 13 volumes, but the connection to Russian settlement is made most explicitly at *MPKZ t. 12*, p. 89. In general, constraint in land was held to inevitably foster both the development of private land property and the abandonment of mobile pastoralism.

⁵⁰ F. A. Shcherbina and L. Chermak, *MKPZ t. 6: Semipalatinskaia oblast, Karkaralinskii uezd* (St. Petersburg: tip. "Obshchestvennaia pol'za," 1905) 28.

⁵¹ *MPKZ t. 1* 33.

⁵² F. A. Shcherbina, *MPKZ t. 7: Turgaiskaia oblast, Aktiubinskii uezd* (Voronezh: tip.-lit. V. I. Isaeva, 1903) IV.

⁵³ *Ibid.*, III.

Describing settler colonization as a natural and inherent process, the Expedition also tacitly sanctioned it.⁵⁴

While the Expedition noted that agriculture was part of the steppe's past prior to Russian colonization, it also marked the agriculture brought by peasant settlers as new and distinct from what had existed prior to it. Atbasar uezd, for example, though a predominantly animal-raising area, contained disused "fields with irrigation canals...and remains of irrigation equipment grandiose in size."⁵⁵ Irrigation, learned from immigrants from the oases of Turkestan, was the primary marker of difference between indigenous and Russian farming, but not the only one. Further (in Akmolinsk uezd), "Fields among the Kazakhs do not occupy such uninterrupted, continuous areas as among the sedentary agricultural population, but are scattered in pieces in different places. And only gradually these strips merge into a common parcel."⁵⁶ Agriculture – indeed, agriculture taught and mostly practiced by immigrants – was thus made an inherent part of the steppe's history, and Russian settler colonization simply a new phase within it.⁵⁷ Reminding readers that grain cultivation had long been practiced on the steppe, however, was only halfway to rationalizing its practice by Russian migrants; the new stage also needed to be an

⁵⁴ The concept of private property among the Russian peasantry was, of course, a deeply fraught one after Alexander II's emancipation of the serfs, and the right of individual land use was only endorsed in law by Stolypin's "wager on the strong" in 1906. Its introduction for irregular peasant settlers in Semireche oblast was proposed and rejected in the early 1870s (TsGA RK f. 64, op. 1, d. 3, sv. 1, "Raport voennogo gubernatora Semirechenskoi oblasti o vvedenii v krae chastnoi pozemel'noi sobstvennosti.") Clearly, then, the participants of the Shcherbina expedition could conceive of agriculture in the absence of private land property; in the Kazakhs' case, though, they noted that the moves from common to individual land property, and sedentarism to agriculture, paralleled one another. Alberto Masoero has noted the transformative value which officials of the Siberian Railroad Committee, which sponsored the Shcherbina expedition, associated with the establishment of private property in Siberia and the steppe. See Masoero, "Layers of Property in the Tsar's Settlement Colony: Projects of Land Privatization in Siberia in the Late Nineteenth Century," *Central Asian Survey* 29.1 (2010), 9-32. Shcherbina himself, as a populist, would have favored communal forms of landholding, but his sponsors thought differently.

⁵⁵ MPKZ t. 2, XII.

⁵⁶ MPKZ t. 3, 128.

⁵⁷ MPKZ t. 1, p. 132, attests to the existence of any agriculture before the occupation of the steppe *krai*.

improvement on what had gone before it, and on this score the opinions of the Expedition's authorial collective were mixed.

Further, the study of history, as practiced by the Expedition, was imbued with hierarchical notions, valuing the knowledge produced by Europeans more strongly than that which could be gleaned from Kazakhs. Though the Expedition valued local knowledge, and employed translators to gather as much of it as possible, it was considered to have little utility on its own. Kazakh oral sources were consistently glossed as legends, and in using them to ascertain whether or not Kazakh settlements had existed on the banks of the Irtysh River before Russian Cossack colonization, the authors noted that "one should relate to all these stories and indications with extreme caution."⁵⁸ In a later volume, describing the settlement of Omsk uezd, the oral histories of settlement transcribed from interviews with Kazakhs were accepted as reliable since they "[did] not contradict the known historical facts concerning the history of the *krai*."⁵⁹ The dialectical pairing of Kazakh oral histories and "known historical facts," apparently meaning written histories tied to some sort of archival documentation, indicates that the Expedition was pursuing knowledge (historical and otherwise) of a particular sort, and that Kazakh history fell inherently short of its disciplinary standards.⁶⁰

The understandings of the history of the steppe embedded in the written works of the Expedition, evolutionary, teleological, and privileging Russian sources over all others, tended to destabilize Kazakhs' presence in the steppe oblasts, and to present peasant

⁵⁸ F. A. Shcherbina, *MPKZ t. 4: Semipalatinskaia oblast, Pavlodarskii uezd* (Voronezh: tip.-lit. V. I. Isaeva, 1903) 52.

⁵⁹ *MPKZ t. 11*, 26.

⁶⁰ On the conflict between "mythic" histories and those grounded in European historiography and methods, see Partha Chatterjee, *The Nation and its Fragments: Colonial and Postcolonial Histories* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton UP, 1993), 76-94. Chatterjee emphasizes that such "mythic" narratives were considered deficient not only by British colonial officials, but also by early Bengali nationalists educated in British schools.

settlement and the end of mobile pastoralism as inevitabilities. Such understandings, in turn, were interwoven in complex ways with hierarchies of civilization and lifeways. The notion of sedentarism's inevitable triumph went hand in hand with promoting it as a superior way of life; mobile pastoralism was doomed, many in the Expedition agreed, because of a set of specific failings on its part with respect to sedentary agriculture.

Civilizational Hierarchy and the Promotion of Settlement

The teleology of steppe land use assumed in the Expedition's writings was rife with value judgments, depicting the transition from mobile pastoralism to sedentary agriculture as a move from inefficiency to rationality, filth to hygiene, and grinding, uncertain poverty to stable prosperity. Russian settlement, in this view, both brought positive cultural values with it to the steppe and, further, effected change for the better simply by virtue of the economic changes it wrought. Settler colonization, then, was shown to represent nothing essentially new in the history of the steppe, but rather a new and particularly desirable phase in the life of its population.

Drawing a stark picture of life among mobile and semi-sedentary pastoralists made the future of Kazakh agriculturalists seem all the more hopeful in comparison. The appendix to volume 1, for instance, described winter dwellings in terms so bleak as to draw the reader's amazement that survival was possible in them:

“Winter dwellings, that step forward from endless nomadism towards semi-sedentary life, consist of very squalid and highly anti-hygienic earthen huts. Closeness, dirt, dampness, abundance of parasites and dank air serve as the distinctive sign of these unpretentious buildings in winter, at the time when people huddle in them.⁶¹

⁶¹ MPKZ t. 1 (appendix), 71. The most lurid parts of this description relate to the fact that winter dwellings sheltered livestock, and the odors that this produced. Thus winter dwellings, although thought to be a partial step towards settled agriculture, were still associated here with the putatively squalid conditions of pastoralism.

The author of this passage continues that “the linens are for the most part not washed and not changed; small children look like some kind of half-dressed ragamuffins; especially unpresentable is the clothing of the women: summer half-dresses or half-shirts, impossibly dirty.”⁶² In sum, the hygienic conditions of Kazakh winter dwellings were described so as to fully justify the author’s characterization of their inhabitants as “semi-wild men (*polu-dikari*).”⁶³ The traditional yurt, a portable felt hut, was described in more favorable terms: “comfortable and light, and hygienic in the summertime,” but equally as “a marker of antiquity, and not of that approaching future to which culture and progress are leading people.”⁶⁴ Mobile pastoralism (symbolized by the yurt) was thus directly juxtaposed against the progress to be brought to the steppe by the Russian Empire, and fell drastically short in the comparison. The orderly and hygienic material culture of the metropole (even of the metropolitan countryside) was needed, in this understanding, to make the steppe a cleaner and healthier place.⁶⁵

The Kazakhs’ economy, mostly based on animal husbandry, was described as similarly disordered and in need of improvement. In Kokchetau uezd, for example, the local horses were described as short, ugly, and malformed, owing to “the extremely irrational choice of stud animals (*proizvoditeli*).”⁶⁶ The laziness of mobile pastoralists

⁶² Ibid., 71-2.

⁶³ Ibid., 73.

⁶⁴ Ibid., 72. This positive view of the yurt was apparently shared widely among metropolitan scholars. See, for example, P. Makovetskii, “Turta (letnee zhilishche kirgiz)” (Omsk: tip Okruzhnogo shtaba, 1893), where on p. 3 the author cites the yurt as an example of “to what extent the Kazakh is adapted to the conditions of steppe life.”

⁶⁵ This particular civilizing project did not die off with the fall of the Russian Empire, but was also a vital part of Soviet cultural policy in Central Asia. See Paula Michaels, *Curative Powers: Medicine and Empire in Stalin’s Central Asia* (Pittsburgh: University of Pittsburgh Press, 2003) for an argument that Soviet “bio-medicine” in the steppe was a strategy of control and cultural subordination.

⁶⁶ MPKZ t. 1, 99. Concern about the low quality and irrational selection of stud animals on the steppes was a concern for social and governmental organizations alike. See TsGA RK, f. 430, op. 2, d. 1, l. 83, “Po organizatsii Semirechenskogo otdela RGO,” for the work of the Semireche Agricultural Society on this score, and TsGA RK, f. 19, op. 1, d. 1829, sv. 179, “Doklad upravliaiushchogo gosudarstvennym

was so widely acknowledged among Russian commentators as to be almost axiomatic, and stated explicitly in another volume of the Expedition's works: "As a true nomad, he [Kazakhs of Atbasar uezd] tries to expend as little work as possible for his economy."⁶⁷ Rather than troubling about the quality of their livestock, Kazakhs, according to the Expedition's authorial collective, hewed to the motto "as many animals as possible and as few expenses as possible for them" in looking after their herds, and by this means reduced the labor required of them to a bare minimum.⁶⁸ The author of the same passage described all aspects of Kazakh animal husbandry by the word "primitive"; the choice of quantity over quality, in this view, was not only an irrational one but one that marked its practitioners as belonging to a low stage of civilization.⁶⁹ Such a negative view of Kazakh economic lifeways, in the Expedition's view, was well-founded: "Owing exactly to this primitivism, the Kazakh economy is also extremely precarious and unstable. The smallest incident – and the economy of the pastoral nomad at once and quickly falls and blows up completely."⁷⁰ Animal husbandry became, by this narrative, a mark both of the otherness of Kazakh civilization and its failure to measure up to the standards of rationality and efficiency the Expedition set forth.

Nowhere was this contrast of irrationality, on the part of subjects, and precise, measured efficiency on the part of colonizers made more clearly than in discussion of the nomads' practices in feeding their livestock. In the context of land use unconstrained by

konnozavodstvom, kn. Shcherbatova, o rezultatakh poezdki v Turkestanskii krai," on the government's acquisition of land to improve Kazakh horses, hoping to use them in cavalry units.

⁶⁷ MPKZ t. 2, XXI. This trope is thoroughly deconstructed with respect to European empires in Southeast Asia in Syed Hussein Alatas, *The Myth of the Lazy Native: A Study of the Image of the Malays, Filipinos, and Javanese from the Sixteenth to the Twentieth Century and its Function in the Ideology of Colonial Capitalism* (London: Frank Cass, 1977).

⁶⁸ MPKZ t. 1, 111.

⁶⁹ MPKZ t. 1, 111.

⁷⁰ Ibid. The author cites the phenomenon of dzhut as a particularly stark example of the incidents to which the "primitive" Kazakh economy was subject.

outsiders, and usufruct rights to pasture, the “primitive” Kazakh economy “[demanded] changes of pasture as frequently as possible,” despite the vulnerability of such a system to nature’s whims.⁷¹ The solution to this systemic problem, in the Expedition’s view, was to supplement pastures with the cutting and storage of hay, as some Kazakhs had begun to do in recent years, as Russian settlement and administrative boundaries made long migrations impossible.⁷² Yet, although the Expedition acknowledged that Kazakhs in some areas were gradually moving to a system that combined fodder and hay feeding of livestock (and, hence, that Kazakh primitivism was not a permanent problem), it also depicted this feeding as explicitly disordered. Discussing the development of hay-feeding norms (*sennye normy*) for Petropavlovsk uezd, the Expedition described the problems that the Kazakhs’ purportedly irrational practices created for the study it undertook:

“It cannot be said that it is possible to get such immediate data in the Kazakh household. In the best case the Kazakh heads of household can say approximately, that to such and so number of head of sheep in 24 hours is given approximately so much hay; but all this is very approximate.”⁷³

The Expedition, by its very nature, strove to be the apotheosis of rationality, attempting to derive from its census data a set amount of hay that could be fed to each animal daily, and by this to determine how much land the mobile pastoralists it studied would require for their survival. The disordered nature of the Kazakh economy, in this

⁷¹ MPKZ t. 12, 82.

⁷² MPKZ t. 3, “Sennye normy” appendix, 65. The author writes here that “the existence of the modern Kazakh economy without hay stores, and consequently without lands for hay-cutting, is unthinkable.”

⁷³ MPKZ t. 12, “Sennye normy” appendix, 35.

view, hindered both the nomads' own survival and their adoption of an improved economic system in the future.⁷⁴

Nor did the agriculture practiced by semi-sedentary Kazakhs offer, in the Expedition's view, much hope. Their cultivation was mainly done along riverine systems "presenting many conveniences for the drawing from them of aryks, and [the soils of which], overgrown with not especially dense vegetation, and in general quite easy to work, could be worked by Kazakh plowing equipment."⁷⁵ This equipment, in areas bereft of Russian settlement, was uniformly described as of the poorest quality, "the ancient *sokha* (scratch plow), which has all wooden parts," even if the technical achievement required for the maintenance of irrigation systems was tacitly acknowledged.⁷⁶ Even irrigation, though, was poorly and chaotically done in this telling: "Whereas one part of the population built dams (*zaprudy*), another destroyed them, requiring the free flow of water."⁷⁷ Further, the results it gave were poor, the yields it provided hardly justified the switch from animal husbandry, and it quickly turned formerly productive lands into useless salt marshes (*solonchaki*).⁷⁸ Such problems were considered mainly the result of the nomads' inherent laziness (although in some sections the caveat that not all steppe lands were inherently suitable for agriculture was made):

"The Kazakh is a poor worker and not accustomed to persistent agricultural work...In the work itself the nomad is also not regular and not systematic; he does not have a strictly defined working day like, for example, the peasant farmer, does

⁷⁴ In one volume, on Ust-Kamenogorsk uezd, the author does note that "the giving of hay is done very economically," implying a degree of order in the Kazakh economy, but within a broader discussion arguing that most aspects of herd management are "left to nature." See MPKZ t. 9, 51-52.

⁷⁵ *Ibid.*, 60.

⁷⁶ MPKZ t. 12, 196.

⁷⁷ MPKZ t. 1, 53. The author of this passage also criticizes the widespread use of irrigation for "[worsening] in general the conditions of water supply in natural sources."

⁷⁸ On the salinization of soils, and the problems of irrigated agriculture more broadly, see MPKZ t. 3, 137-138.

not have, of course, an appropriate set of work habits, thus his daily productivity is also not great...”⁷⁹

Mobile pastoralism and agriculture were thus associated with two different sets of work habits, one inherently more desirable than the other. The dichotomy between nomad and peasant that this passage creates implies a higher purpose for Russian peasant settlement on the steppe – to increase the productivity not only of its land, but also of the nomads inhabiting it.

Indeed, in the Shcherbina expedition’s materials, Russian colonization appears as the engine *par excellence* of the Kazakh economy’s improvement. The main reason for Kazakhs’ taking up agriculture was the “live example” provided by Cossacks and irregular settlers, in this view, though dzhut and restricted pastoral migration “directly or obliquely pushed the Kazakh to the path which the peasant settler showed him and along which he took him.”⁸⁰ Russian influence was considered fundamental to the development of Kazakh agriculture for a variety of reasons. At the most basic level, in Atbasar uezd, “the Kazakhs of the northern part of the uezd hired Russian peasants for working the land, and in general for all work relating to grain cultivation, then learned to work themselves.”⁸¹ The settlers’ example was depicted as helping Kazakhs to find more regular and efficient methods of harvest and storage of grass and grain; moreover, settlers were described as valuable helpers to the Kazakhs in that they helped the Kazakhs learn to sow grain without recourse to artificial irrigation.⁸² Perhaps most important, in light of

⁷⁹ Ibid., 129-130. pp. 126-127 of the same volume describe many lands of Akmolinsk uezd as “quite unsuitable for agriculture.”

⁸⁰ MPKZ t. 1, 133 and 135. This assumption is pervasive throughout all 12 volumes. See, for example, MPKZ t. 3, p. 105, where the author notes: “Acquaintance with the Russian sedentary economy...gives a new direction to the Kazakh economy.”

⁸¹ MPKZ t. 2, XIV.

⁸² MPKZ t. 2, XXXIII. The author notes that “under the settlers’ influence...Kazakhs are beginning to cut the grass earlier, to store the hay better, and in general they are striving to receive hay of a higher quality.”

the dim view of agricultural techniques previously existing on the steppe that the Expedition held, was the new technology that settlers brought along with them. The Russian plow (*plug*), with its strong metal blades, and pulled by teams of oxen (an animal not traditionally kept in large numbers by the nomads), “opened [for Kazakhs] the possibility to plow on any place suitable for plowing, independent of the possibility of irrigating it,” and Kazakhs went to great lengths to obtain it in the cities.⁸³ The likely advance in the near future of mechanized methods, particularly in hay cutting, gave further cause for optimism.⁸⁴ While new agricultural technology could be obtained by the Kazakhs, promising a brighter future, their lack of it functioned in the text as a marker of the weakness of their economy and civilization in relation to the Russians who brought it to the steppe.⁸⁵ Summing the entire argument up, the editor of one volume wrote, “[The settler] brings with him to the steppes culture, labor, knowledge, new economic forms, and a wider stream of production.”⁸⁶ Russian colonization in this telling is rendered benign, even beneficial, precisely because of what settlers are thought to possess (both materially and morally) and nomads to, if only temporarily, lack.

The word that best summarized the problems of mobile pastoralism, in contrast to the economic forms brought to the steppe by settler colonists, according to the

On the switch to cultivation without artificial irrigation under the influence of Russian settlers, see MPKZ t. 3, p. 140.

⁸³ MPKZ t. 9, 68. See MPKZ t. 1, 139, on the impossibility of obtaining iron plows within the steppe, since Kazakh blacksmiths were unable to make them, and the necessity of running to Russian settlements to purchase them.

⁸⁴ MPKZ t. 11, appendix entitled “Ischisleniia kolichestva sena, neobkhodimogo dlia zimniago prokormleniia skota.” The author describes mechanized hay-cutting as a “revolution in the Kazakh economy.”

⁸⁵ See Michael Adas, *Machines as the Measure of Men: Science, Technology, and Ideologies of Western Dominance* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell UP, 1989).

⁸⁶ MPKZ t. 5, IV. Above all, the author argues (before the concluding point cited in my text) that the economic advantages of settler colonization are already so obvious to the Kazakhs that both Russian settlement and Kazakh adoption of agriculture are inevitable.

Expedition's writings, was "extensive." This term was placed in contrast with "intensive" land use, associated with field rotation and complex agriculture done in a single place. By "extensive," the Expedition meant that Kazakhs, with vast lands presented to their disposal, were able to move about the steppe at will, staying on a pasture for only a few days, and failing to extract all possible value from it. That this was an untenable state of affairs was stated explicitly: "Of course, one should not create obstacles on the path of development of the Kazakh economy in the desired direction, that is, in the transition from extensive forms to intensive."⁸⁷ Cutting and storing hay, viewed as a transitional stage from mobile pastoralism to sedentarism or semi-sedentarism, was also seen as a step towards intensification.⁸⁸ Nomadism, in this view, was the most inefficient way of using the steppe, and only practicable given a low ratio of population to land. This left open the possibility of suggesting that Kazakhs might not need as much land as they occupied, a possibility on which the Expedition capitalized.

With Kazakhs' use of the land established as inefficient, unproductive, and irrational, and set in opposition to the technologically-empowered and efficient economy of Russian settlers, the rationale for expropriating land surpluses from the Kazakhs was firmly established. Indeed, by definition, land can only be considered surplus if it is either completely unused or, as in this case, shown to be used so poorly as to be *functionally unused*.⁸⁹ In connection with a discussion of Kazakhs' "extensive" land use, the Expedition made this latter argument explicitly. Describing the "abundance of vast

⁸⁷ MPKZ t. 6, 77.

⁸⁸ *Ibid.*, 76.

⁸⁹ On the connection between the rhetoric of "emptiness" and settler colonization, see Tracy Banivanua Mar, "Carving Wilderness: Queensland's National Parks and the Unsettling of Emptied Lands, 1890-1910," Tracy Banivanua Mar and Penelope Edmonds, eds., *Making Settler Colonial Space: Perspectives on Race, Place and Identity* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2010), 73-94.

areas occupied by rich, fertile soils,” the author notes that Kazakhs farm by the simplest possible method, sowing an area until its soil is exhausted, and then moving on.⁹⁰ The conclusion he draws from this observation is telling: “The predominance of such methods in Kustanai uezd points to the existence in the uezd of significant land surpluses, which cannot at present be used more rationally by...the available population.”⁹¹

Systematically studying mobile pastoralism and cataloging its defects, the Shcherbina expedition reinforced the view, gaining popularity in administrative circles, that peasant settlement on the steppe was both possible and potentially beneficial to the Kazakhs.

Personnel: Statisticians in the Service of Empire?

Although specific issues of authorship are not always clear in the Expedition’s published materials, there is enough biographical material available about its participants that the straightforward narrative, strongly and unquestioningly promoting settlement, I have set forth thus far should be strongly questioned. Shcherbina himself, after the Expedition, was elected as a deputy to the Second Duma from Kuban oblast, as a Popular Socialist, and head of the Cossack faction.⁹² Other members of the Expedition were equally far, or further, on the left side of the Russian Empire’s political spectrum. For example, T. I. Sedel’nikov was later a deputy to the First Duma from the far-left *trudovik* party, and argued against the seizure of Kazakh lands for Russian settlement in the press.⁹³ Equally politically suspect, from the state’s point of view, was the statistician

⁹⁰ MPKZ t. 5, 124.

⁹¹ Ibid.

⁹² The son of a Kuban’ Cossack priest, Shcherbina’s turn towards populism, leftist politics, and the natural sciences parallels Laurie Manchester’s argument that sons of priests (*popovichy*) in the late 19th century came to see their mission as secular and oriented towards service to the people (*narod*). See Manchester, *Holy Fathers, Secular Sons: Clergy, Intelligentsia, and the Modern Self in Revolutionary Russia* (DeKalb, IL: Northern Illinois UP, 2008).

⁹³ On Sedel’nikov as a Duma member, see Khabizhanova 79; on his participation in the Shcherbina expedition, and later independent statistical research in Uralsk oblast, see T. I. Sedel’nikov, *Borba za*

Lev Chermak, who wrote the introductory notes to volumes six and nine (Karkaralinsk and Ust-Kamenogorsk uezds) of the Expedition's published materials.⁹⁴ Chermak was far from a minor figure in the Expedition; beyond his duties in writing and editing, in 1899 he signed himself as the manager of the Expedition for Research of the Steppe Oblasts.⁹⁵ He was also a political radical, under secret (*neglasnyi*) police observation in Omsk, with his movement in and out of Omsk restricted, and was briefly arrested and sent to St. Petersburg in 1904 for reasons that remain opaque in the archival record.⁹⁶ Even Chermak's personnel appointments, not strictly in keeping with the requirement of advance approval from the military governor of Akmolinsk oblast, were a subject of controversy, even displeasure, among the local administration.⁹⁷ The far-left political parties of the Russian Empire at the turn of the century were extremely pessimistic about settlement, and neither Shcherbina, Sedel'nikov, nor Chermak appears as an ideal agent of a colonial empire. The views of colonization among imperial Russian participants in the Expedition, then, were ambivalent at best.

Nor were all participants in the Expedition representatives of the metropole.

Rather, the local Muslim population, especially Kazakhs, also contributed to its work.

zemliu v kirgizskoi stepi: kirgizskii zemelnyi vopros i kolonizatsionnaia politika pravitelstva (St. Petersburg: elektropechatnia t-va. "Delo," 1907) 3. I am grateful to my colleague Ben Sawyer for taking time from his own research in Moscow to photocopy this text for me. For more on Sedel'nikov's writings, which included sharp criticism of the Shcherbina expedition, see Chapter 6.

⁹⁴ MPKZ t. 6; F. A. Shcherbina and L. Chermak, *MPKZ t. 9: Semipalatinskaia oblast, Ustkamenogorskii uezd* (St. Petersburg: tip. Tovarishchestva "Obshchestvennaia pol'za," 1905).

⁹⁵ TsGA RK f. 369, op. 1, d. 5000, sv. 265, l. 9, "Ob issledovanii v estestvenno-istoricheskom i khoziastvenno-sttisticheskom otnoshenii Petropavlovskogo i Omskogo uezdov." The signature is on Chermak's response to a request, ultimately granted, from the military governor of Akmolinsk oblast to extend the Expedition's activity to Petropavlovsk and Omsk uezds, to clarify questions of Kazakh land use. Chermak's response is dated 2 November 1899.

⁹⁶ TsGA RK f. 369, op. 1, d. 839, sv. 189, "O sostoiashchem pod neglasnym nadzorom politsii Lve Chermak." For official refusal of Chermak's request to travel to St. Petersburg, see l. 8; for his arrest (sent to St. Petersburg for detention), see l. 18, 15 January 1904.

⁹⁷ *Ibid.*, ll. 15-16, letter of the military governor of Akmolinsk oblast to the Omsk gendarme administration, 29 December 1903.

These sometimes appeared only as “unnamed registrars and translators,” but took on more prominent roles in some volumes.⁹⁸ Volumes three and 11, for example, list several obviously Kazakh names as “helpers” (Erezhep Itbaev and Mazhit Chumbalov) and registrars (Mukan Aitpaev, Ia. Akpaev, Kudaikulov, D. Satybaldin, and S. Sabataev).⁹⁹ Most visible was the space afforded to Alikhan Bokeikhanov, who developed clan genealogies, helped to carry out the topographical survey, developed the descriptions of some volosts and sub-regions, and in one volume wrote a history of the settlement of the uezd.¹⁰⁰ I do not wish to argue that ethnic or confessional belonging predisposed these men to any one view of the Russian imperial project; there is no documentary trail to judge many of their views, and those who did leave behind published writings and an archival record exhibited diverse and complicated opinions. But the registrar Iakup-Mirza Akpaev, educated at the Imperial St. Petersburg University, was later sentenced to exile for “anti-governmental activities” after the proclamation of the October Manifesto of 1905, allegedly saying to a crowd, “Before, Russians ruled the Kazakhs, but now Kazakhs will rule the Kazakhs,” and “the tsar is already now not the tsar, but our slave.”¹⁰¹ Bokeikhanov, a member of several learned societies (including the Omsk divisions of the Imperial Russian Geographical Society and the Imperial Moscow Agricultural Society), was elected to the First Duma as a member of the Kadet party, representing the Kazakh population of Semipalatinsk oblast.¹⁰² As Donald Treadgold has noted, “the Kadet party was at best lukewarm to migration”; although they

⁹⁸ MPKZ t. 5, I

⁹⁹ MPKZ t. 11, i; MPKZ t. 3, iii.

¹⁰⁰ MPKZ t. 4, vi-vii.

¹⁰¹ f. 64, op. 1, d. 5832, “O vyselenii i vospreshchenii zhitelstva v Stepnom krae kazakham Baitursynovu Akhmetu, Raimbekovu i drugim za protivopravitelstvennyye deistviia.” The quotations from Akpaev are on ll. 1ob. and 2, respectively; the document is dated 15 November 1905.

¹⁰² R. N. Nurgaliev (glav. red.), *Alikhan Bokeikhan: izbrannoe/tangdamaly*. (Almaty: “Qazaq entsiklopediiasy,” 1995) 40.

did not deny the theoretical possibility that settlement to the steppe oblasts (as well as the west-Siberian oblasts of Tomsk and Tobol'sk) would solve the problem of peasant landlessness in European Russia, the Kadets as a party were also skeptical that it could ever be successfully implemented.¹⁰³ Kadets, then, were not opposed to the idea of settler colonization, but as data about it from Shcherbina and others (most notably A. A. Kaufman) accumulated, they became unconvinced that it was a practical solution to the problems of the peasantry; for Kazakh liberals this hesitancy was augmented by concerns about the possible expropriation of Kazakh land during resettlement. The presence of such Kazakh participants add a further layer of complexity to the Expedition's work. Indeed, its published materials did not straightforwardly support settler colonization; rather, an ambiguous, at times even frankly anti-settlement, perspective emerges.

Problematizing Settlement

From the above, it ought to be clear that the Shcherbina expedition was at least to some degree an imperial project, and its participants did not deny this. In the introduction to volume 6, Chermak writes that Karkaralinsk uezd was only surveyed above the 48th parallel, since "further to the south it was hardly possible to count on the possibility of removal of land surpluses under the settlers' sections."¹⁰⁴ In a later volume, V. Kuznetsov notes that migrant sections (*pereselencheskie uchastki*) are to be allotted in Zaisan uezd "upon support (*po utverzhdenii*) of the norms set up in the present edition."¹⁰⁵ The work of the Expedition, then, was explicitly connected with the movement of peasant settlers from European Russia to the steppe, both rhetorically and in

¹⁰³ Donald Treadgold, *The Great Siberian Migration* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton UP 1957) 186 and 193.

¹⁰⁴ MPKZ t. 6, 1.

¹⁰⁵ F. A. Shcherbina and V. Kuznetsov, *MPKZ t. 8: Semipalatinskaia oblast, Zaisanskii uezd* (St. Petersburg: tip. "Tovarishchestva Khudozhestvennoi Pechati," 1909) VI.

practice. Yet the Expedition was also at pains to argue that its research, and the various uses of it, were not in fact harmful to the Kazakhs, and for the most part it succeeded in translating this concern into a measure of respect for Kazakhs' economic well-being. This was settler colonization, but in a distinctly anti-settlement mode, and privileging migration only when it was organized and well-founded.

The introduction to volume 7 of the Expedition's works neatly summarized its ambiguous relationship to settler colonization:

“It is impossible to look at this phenomenon [the change in nomadic lifeways] either from the indifferent view of historical perspective, or from the narrowly economic viewpoint of the nomad. In the first case it would mean to sacrifice to a theoretical point the most important interests of the population, in the second to close our eyes to reality... While the Kazakh herder and his herd still exist, we must take all measures so as to not allow to collapse at once, all of a sudden, his age-old historically developed forms of economy. This would be a true national tragedy.”¹⁰⁶

That the sedentarization of the steppe was both inevitable and desirable, in other words, did not mean that Kazakhs' lives were to be thoughtlessly sacrificed in the process. The Expedition was cognizant of the fundamental changes that peasant settlement would bring to the steppe; it was further aware of the difficulties that the seizure of purportedly surplus lands would present to Kazakhs. Surplus they might be, but they had also been in use for several generations, and it was unrealistic to expect the nomads to adapt easily to their loss. The Expedition, in other words, sensed the need for caution in the matter of calculating surpluses, and strove to act accordingly.

This caution was exercised in several ways. The first was to err on the more prosperous side in determining what constituted an “average” Kazakh household for the

¹⁰⁶ MPKZ t. 7, II-III.

purposes of calculating pasture norms, thus increasing the size of the average land allotment. Of Zaisan uezd, Kuznetsov wrote,

“It can be seen that the communes selected by us for the definition of pasture norms are distinguished by a high degree of wellbeing: in them (according to groups of regions) from 17.7-64.4 units of livestock belong to one household.... These figures significantly exceed the uezd-wide average and are higher than the norm, which we found to completely satisfy the well-being of the average Kazakh household (15 units).”¹⁰⁷

Noting that the time of Kazakhs’ stay on any given pasture varied significantly (and, with it, the amount of nutritional value their livestock extracted from it), Kuznetsov and the Expedition also attempted to determine an accurate duration of stay for each area separately, “and did not calculate some sort of average figure among different groups of these areas.”¹⁰⁸ The Expedition also recognized that Kazakhs’ use of pastures did not yet correspond to the administrative division of the steppe, accounting for population registered to one area, but continuing to use land in another.¹⁰⁹ Nor did it treat all pastures as identical; rather, in each uezd and region, pastures were ranked according to the quality of their grass and availability of fresh water near them, so as not to allot Kazakhs a seemingly sufficient amount of pasture that proved useless in fact.¹¹⁰ Moreover, despite its certainty that Kazakhs were already transitioning to less extensive land use, and would continue to do so, the Expedition treated most uezds as existing

¹⁰⁷ MPKZ t. 8, 160. Such calculations of the Kazakhs’ well-being were not made arbitrarily. Rather, Kuznetsov, before selecting communes for pasture norms, made exhaustive calculations of Kazakhs’ dietary requirements, assuming that an adult male worker needs 150 grams of protein, 75 of fat, and 450 of carbohydrates per day and concluding that 15 units of livestock, supplemented by purchased flour, were sufficient to provide this minimum requirement for an average-sized household of 4.4 souls. See MPKZ t. 8, 144-146 (a long footnote to Kuznetsov’s text).

¹⁰⁸ Ibid., 171.

¹⁰⁹ MPKZ t. 7, 57. Such calculations, for Aktiubinsk uezd, resulted in the subtraction of 130,000 desiatinas from the originally-established land surplus.

¹¹⁰ MPKZ t. 6, 28-29 has an extensive discussion of this, with pastures divided into four groups, the best abounding in fresh water and grass, and minimally covered by snow in the winter, and the worst described as “hillocks (*melkosopochnik*) with insufficiently windblown slopes... distinguished by dryness of soils, comparatively poor water supply, along with which many wells have salty water, and a great quantity of salt marshes.”

wholly on the basis of animal husbandry (and hence requiring a vast quantity of land for native subsistence).¹¹¹ Operating with particular care and thoroughness, the Expedition strove to make its work as accurate as possible, with faith that such accuracy would result in the least harmful consequences possible to the Kazakhs.

Further, the norms, beyond the painstaking procedures used by statisticians and registrars, were themselves raised above an average the Expedition considered to err on the high side. Chermak wrote, concerning the pasture norm calculated for nomads:

“It should express that smallest quantity of pasture lands of various types which, under average conditions for a given location, would give enough fodder for a herd of a certain size. Thus the definition of pasture norms is done first, from the calculation of the size of the herd by which a household, satisfying all the needs of the family, not only would not collapse, but would even have the possibility to progress and second, from the definition of the amount of pasture land which is necessary for the feeding of such a herd.”¹¹²

The norm was intended not to preserve the Kazakh economy in stasis, but to permit the growth of human and animal populations within the context of mobile pastoralist lifeways. To this end, Shcherbina wrote, “in all cases corrections were taken on the side of raising the figures.”¹¹³ Such measures allowed the Expedition to conclude, apparently without self-deception, that “The surpluses of land formed under such norms can be used for the goals of settlement without any risk of causing any sort of harm to the interests of the population within the bounds of the historically set average requirements and needs of the nomad.”¹¹⁴ For this to be acceptable colonization, in the Expedition’s view, it had to conform to the state’s long-standing rhetoric about not harming the interests of the nomads; by its actions it sought to make this a reality. Settler colonization,

¹¹¹ MPKZ t. 6, 34.

¹¹² *Ibid.*, 31.

¹¹³ MPKZ t. 1, 186.

¹¹⁴ MPKZ t. 1, 186.

if properly planned and done on the basis of precise surveys, could indeed be done, in this positivist view, without ruining the mobile pastoralists who had long lived on the steppe; the Shcherbina expedition, abetting the migration of thousands of peasant settlers, strove to preserve the nomads' interests as fully as possible.

Cracks in the Armor

While the Shcherbina expedition, both by its very purpose and by its institutional sponsorship, privileged the settlement of peasants from European Russia to the steppe, an alternative narrative also emerged in its materials, justifying its cautious attitude in calculating land surpluses. This narrative was based on two fundamental points. Firstly, despite optimistic projections of the steppe's future under Russian colonization (views that the Expedition, at least to some extent, shared), the observable effects of colonization on individual Kazakhs in the short term were deleterious and destructive. Secondly, because of the unique properties of the steppe's flora, fauna, climate, and soil, sedentary agriculture was not unambiguously superior to mobile pastoralism as a form of economic organization in all areas. Rather, according to this counter-narrative, mobile pastoralism offered distinct advantages in the steppe milieu, which in turn offered an argument for its preservation. Thus the Shcherbina expedition simultaneously reinforced and problematized the civilizational hierarchies inherent in settler colonization.

The Expedition noted that settler colonization reduced the amount of free land available for Kazakhs in terms both neutral, presenting sedentarization as an objective historical fact, and negative, considering the matter from the perspective of Kazakhs crowded off of their ancestral lands. Kazakh landlessness, in some uezds, was becoming a serious problem:

“In Pavlodar uezd there are Kazakh communes (*obshchiny*) that do not have their own winter campsites... The absence of lands of this type represents for the Kazakhs the most vital need. It is the same thing as the absence of one’s own field land for a farmer.”¹¹⁵

This need had previously been ameliorated by Cossacks’ practice of renting out lands they had no use for to the Kazakhs at low cost (in the absence of high demand), allowing the Kazakhs to “live wonderfully in the Irtysh valley.”¹¹⁶ From the 1880s on, though,

“With the passing of the Siberian railroad and with the strengthening of the settler movement, rental prices for land have begun to grow very quickly. There emerged rivals to the Kazakhs, more accustomed to higher forms of economy than the Kazakhs, and thus they were able to use the rich meadows of the Irtysh more intensively and profitably. And here the rivals raise, and threaten to raise still more in the near future, rental prices to a level that the primitive economy of the Kazakh-nomad cannot achieve.”¹¹⁷

Such constraint in land use threatened to oblige the Kazakhs to move away from the 10-versta tract (*polosa*) surrounding Cossack fortifications in a best-case scenario, and more likely to cause significant changes in their economy and lifeways.¹¹⁸ The consequences of restricted land use, in this counter-narrative, appeared stark and inevitable, with landless households (a category not existing before the establishment of Cossack stations in the steppe) forced to “find a place to live in a new *kstau*, where they had to pay for the rights of land use...or, finally, rent the lands seized from them for the Cossack settlements.”¹¹⁹ In Pavlodar uezd, the Expedition characterized settler colonization of the Irtysh valley as a “still more unforgiving (*bezposhchadnyi*) enemy” than the earlier establishment of Cossack pickets in the region, since this new class would

¹¹⁵ MPKZ t. 4, II.

¹¹⁶ Ibid., II.

¹¹⁷ Ibid., II-III.

¹¹⁸ Ibid., III. The ten-versta tract extended ten verstas into the steppe from the line of Cossack fortifications along the Irtysh. Lands within this area were in the permanent ownership of the Siberian Cossack Host, although individual Cossack landholders were permitted to rent out their sections freely.

¹¹⁹ Ibid., 29.

be less likely to rent out lands the Kazakhs needed; in Omsk uezd some Kazakhs were “already completely crowded out.”¹²⁰ Colonization’s benefits might have been clear from St. Petersburg, but on the steppe, they were far less so.

More offensive still, in the Expedition’s view, were the specifics of the relationship between Kazakhs and the new residents of the steppe, whether Cossack or peasant. The terms of rental were much more favorable to the Cossacks, the legal owners of the land around their fortifications, than to the Kazakhs who needed it and had, in some sense, a historical right to it, resulting in a rental payment more than twice the sum of all government taxes and duties they were subject to.¹²¹ Settlers, while perhaps not willfully constraining the nomads, did so all the same:

“The nomadic, animal-rearing life of the Kazakhs is completely incomprehensible to [settlers]... Thus the settlers do not consider it shameful to use Kazakh mowing lands, drag off wood from the Kazakh buildings, neglected in summer, to cut down groves that defend the Kazakh winter settlements from winter storms, to destroy the graves of their ancestors. All this deeply shocks the Kazakhs.”¹²²

These misunderstandings cut both ways – the author notes just after this passage that Kazakhs, understanding borders differently than their new Russian neighbors did, frequently violated them – but in either case, it was the pastoralists who suffered from them.¹²³ The Expedition summarized the economic position of the Kazakhs living along the Irtysh thus: “It is his complete lack of rights in relation to the Cossack, the owner of the land, and his complete dependence on the latter: from here is eternal danger for his existence, constant fear for his tomorrow.”¹²⁴ Such colonization, with the Kazakhs,

¹²⁰ Ibid., 90.

¹²¹ On rental terms favoring the Cossacks, see MPKZ t. 4, 73 – Kazakhs are described as unable to pursue the terms of rental most advantageous to them. On the total of rent obligations, juxtaposed against the total of governmental taxes and duties, see the same volume, p. 90.

¹²² MPKZ t. 12, 75-6.

¹²³ Ibid., 76.

¹²⁴ MPKZ t. 4., 89.

theoretically protected by Russian law, rendered powerless in fact, was depicted as flatly undesirable.

Sedentary agriculture was not the only new economic form brought to the steppe oblasts along with settlers from European Russia. In some areas, salaried work (*batrachestvo*) at new Russian commercial enterprises, often low-paid and hazardous, played a significant role in economic change among the Kazakhs. This was especially the case in Ust-Kamenogorsk uezd, which owing to geographical factors (mainly its proximity to Tomsk guberniia) “constantly [sent] its work force to Russian settlements for salaried work,” and whose ever-increasing number of gold mines “also [required] a significant number of working hands.”¹²⁵ Although the Expedition did not develop the materials it gathered on the topic of Kazakh hired labor, since this was not among its primary tasks, Chermak all the same noted that Ust-Kamenogorsk, more than any other uezd, suffered under “the destructive influence of economic sources (*nachal*) completely alien to it.”¹²⁶ Hiring out as a *batrak* indicated that a household was forced by constraint in land use “to seek means for existence outside of animal husbandry,” while also subjecting its members to work conditions generally acknowledged to be lamentably poor.¹²⁷ In this arena, too, the advance of Russian settlement deeper into the steppe had produced results that were mixed at best.

¹²⁵ MPKZ t. 9, II.

¹²⁶ Ibid., II.

¹²⁷ Although the Expedition did not comment directly in its published materials about the conditions at mines and factories in the steppe, it was surely not unaware of them. N. Ia. Konshin (see Chapter 4) described, in one article, “large barracks of burnt brick, of which each extends to several quarters for the common living of several families,” in which it was constantly dark and there was no fresh air, in addition to the dangerous work conditions in the mine. See N. Ia. Konshin, “Ot Pavlordara do Karkaralinska – putevye nabroski,” in *Pamiatnaia knizhka Semipalatinskoi oblasti za 1901 g., vyp. 5* (Semipalatinsk: tip. Semipalatinskogo oblastnogo pravleniia i torgovogo doma “P. Pleshcheev & co.”) 9-10.

Beyond the fact that the observable realities of settler colonization, by the late 1890s, seemed not to accord with the utopian visions of its proponents, the Expedition's anti-settlement counter-narrative also injected a measure of uncertainty into the civilizational hierarchies implicit in settlement.¹²⁸ Rather, mobile pastoralism, in this view, held certain preferences over agriculture. These preferences became especially clear on the vast swaths of the steppe oblasts unsuitable for grain cultivation in any form:

“Here [in the Hungry Steppe], perhaps, is expressed so brightly the quality of the Kazakh nomad, knowing how to use the scantiest and most modest (*neprikhotlivuiu*) vegetation of the steppe, as in Atbasar uezd. The Kazakh is the best and most desirable manager (*khoziain*) in the steppe semi-desert and, what is more notable, this very ruler of the semi-desert turns out to be the richest owner of livestock.”¹²⁹

Similarly, in Omsk uezd, despite the proximity of several Cossack stations, the Siberian railroad, “natural conditions” (meaning, mainly, that most lands were useable only as pasture) encouraged the Kazakhs to remain, almost entirely, mobile pastoralists.¹³⁰ Settler colonization, then, did not lead to change in economic lifeways as straightforwardly as the Expedition argued elsewhere in its materials, nor was it necessarily desirable that the entirety of the steppe oblasts be devoted to cultivation. The Expedition exhaustively categorized the soils and vegetation of the steppe, observing that some areas had thin, salty soil, scant vegetation beyond the hardiest grasses, and little water to drink or water crops with. This being the case, mobile pastoralism was not

¹²⁸ For a more detailed examination of the tensions between imperial visions and physical reality in Siberia (albeit further east and several decades earlier), see Mark Bassin, *Imperial Visions: Nationalist Imagination and Geographical Expansion in the Russian Far East, 1840-1865* (Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 1999).

¹²⁹ MPKZ t. 2, XXXVI. The Hungry Steppe (Kaz. *Betpak-dala*) is the name given to a particularly dry section of steppe, characterized by sharply continental climate and scanty vegetation, located in the northern part of Syr-Darya and the southern part of Akmolinsk oblasts.

¹³⁰ MPKZ t. 11, “Ob’iasnitelnaia zapiska k dannym o zemel’nykh normakh i izlishkakh zemel po Omskomu uezdu,” 3.

simply to fade away in the aftermath of settlement; it was a logical way of organizing the economy in the steppe environment, and had a future there.¹³¹

Subaltern Voices

Although Kazakh participation in the Shcherbina expedition was extensive, so much so that it is difficult to imagine its completion without their work, Kazakhs are elusive in the Expedition's materials, writing in their own words but rarely. Though Kazakh surveyors and translators were routinely credited for their work in the introduction to each volume of *Materialy po kirgizskomu zemlepol'zovaniuu*, their contributions infrequently extended to authorship. It is difficult, then, to speculate about how they understood their role in the Expedition, and how they evaluated its larger tasks. We know only that Expedition's organizers, for the sake of completeness and precision, actively sought Kazakhs' participation, considering it to set their enterprise apart from previous, deficient attempts to survey the steppe. A notable exception to this silence is the naturalist-cum-politician Alikhan Bokeikhanov, whose writings appear briefly in several different volumes. These writings are consonant with both narratives, promoting and problematizing settlement, that I have described above; at the same time, Bokeikhanov's particular understanding of the steppe's history made a significant difference in the tenor and conclusions of at least one volume in which his writings appear.

¹³¹ In his later work on sheep-keeping (*ovtsevodstvo*) in the steppe oblasts, Alikhan Bokeikhanov, the most visible Kazakh participation in the Expedition, cited and endorsed the words of K. A. Verner: "If under the name of rational economy one understands only that which is set up in strict correspondence with local conditions and gives the possibility without depletion (*istoshcheniia*) to extract the greatest benefit from the soil, then it is impossible not to acknowledge that the Kazakh nomadic economy under the given conditions is a completely rational economy." Alikhan Bokeikhanov, "Ovtsevodstvo v stepnom krae," in Zh. O. Artykbaev (ed.), *Kazakhi: istoriko-etnograficheskie trudy* 3rd ed., dop. (Astana: "Altyn-kitap," 2007) 247.

One possible interpretation of the role of Bokeikhanov and the other Kazakh participants of the Shcherbina expedition is highly Foucauldian, in the sense that the information they gathered, once systematized, was intended to bring the steppe and its inhabitants inexorably closer to the state apparatus. These men were indispensable to the Expedition's function, performing the most vital tasks of translation and interpretation. Conducting interviews and household surveys, they were intermediaries between the state and the nomads, counting and categorizing the latter for the purposes of the former. Collecting and writing down genealogies that had been preserved orally for generations, they brought the long-standing basis of land use on the steppe into the state's view more clearly than ever before.¹³² Bokeikhanov, describing two volosts of Pavlodar uezd, notes the average livestock and land holdings per household as dispassionately as any other participant in the Expedition; he observes the widespread building of winter camps, that generally acknowledged sign of the progress of sedentarization, and concludes, "In comparison with past years, the food has become worse, but life in general better than before."¹³³ At least superficially, this suggests that a small handful of Kazakhs played an important role in abetting a colonial empire's reapportionment of their native steppes.

This conclusion, however, hardly accords with what we know of the later political affiliations and actions of Bokeikhanov (and still less of Akpaev). Later a loud voice against the actions of the Resettlement Administration, Bokeikhanov would seem a strange advocate of unrestricted settler colonization. It is perhaps, then, not a coincidence that volume four of the Expedition's materials, concerning Pavlodar uezd, is both the one

¹³² Genealogies appear, among other locations, at MPKZ t. 12, "Sennye normy," 93-98. No authorship is attributed.

¹³³ MPKZ t. 4, "Opisaniia obshchikh khozyaistvennykh uslovii (po volostiam)" 126-134. Bokeikhanov describes Altybai and Kyzyltau volosts.

where Bokeikhanov appears most prominently and the most unambiguously anti-colonial of the Expedition's publications. Bokeikhanov appears in this volume not only in his role, cited above, as a surveyor, but also as the writer of a history of the population of the uezd by Kazakhs. Like the other authors who developed the Expedition's statistical materials, Bokeikhanov linked changes in Kazakh lifeways, and the movement of large groups of mobile pastoralists, to Russian settlement, connecting one clan's occupation and subsequent abandonment of the Altai mountain okrug with its "colonization by settlers."¹³⁴ He further noted that high rental prices, widely acknowledged by the Expedition to be caused by the price competition provided by Cossack and peasant settlers, forced certain clans to resettle within the uezd.¹³⁵ As elsewhere in the Expedition's published works, this process is written as natural and inevitable. Volume four, however, goes further than any other in describing the negative consequences of colonization for Kazakhs, illustrating, for example, "how, under the influence of Russian orders, [Kazakh land relations] broke down."¹³⁶ This is the volume that protests against Kazakh herders' lack of rights in relation to Cossacks, and argues that Kazakhs are already completely crowded off of their lands in many areas. The editorial committee also observes that the Kazakhs' economy is particularly rational, if not easy to quantify:

"The definition of areas subjected to grazing is a whole science: here are taken into account the thickness and density of snow, the quality of fodder and the weather, and the length of the day (in November and December less fodder is required than, for example, in March) and so forth."¹³⁷

The connection between Bokeikhanov's participation and a publication that, while it served the goals of settler colonization (finding 391,000 desiatinas of surplus land even

¹³⁴ MPKZ t. 4, 7.

¹³⁵ Ibid., 9-10.

¹³⁶ Ibid., 23.

¹³⁷ Ibid., 39.

in this apparently hard-pressed region), also stridently criticized settlement when done rapaciously and on an unequal basis, is highly suggestive.¹³⁸

The position of Kazakhs in the Shcherbina expedition with respect to settler colonization, then, was just as ambiguous as that of any other participant. Reading more widely in Bokeikhanov's published works (roughly contemporaneous with the Expedition), it becomes clear that while his feelings were mixed about settler colonization in general, he supported the "correct colonization" the Shcherbina expedition embodied. He too deployed the rhetoric of Kazakh primitivism, writing in an edited volume about nationalist movements in European empires, "The Kazakh household...all the same remains predominantly natural, and significantly exceeds in its primitiveness the peasant household of Russia."¹³⁹ Agriculture, further, was indeed possible on the steppe in his view – but *only in some areas and under certain circumstances*. He divided Akmolinsk oblast (and, by extension, the entirety of the steppe) into a northern section with rich topsoil and a southern section (south of the Ishim and Nura river valleys), where predominated "soils of the wormwood-*kokpek* steppe, waterless and not very productive, as a consequence of which [they are] completely hopeless for agricultural exploitation under current techniques."¹⁴⁰ His later criticism of the Resettlement Administration focused on its use of such "hopeless" lands and inadequate aid to the hard-pressed peasants who made the long journey from the inner provinces of the Empire to the steppe, describing the latter as "proletarians" rather than

¹³⁸ Ibid., "Ob''iasnitel'naia zapiska," 27.

¹³⁹ Alikhan Bokeikhanov, "Kirgizy," in Artykbaev 12-13. For the original text, see I. A. Kostelianskii (ed.), *Formy natsional'nogo dvizheniia v sovremennykh gosudarstvakh* (St. Petersburg: n.p., 1910) 577-600.

¹⁴⁰ Alikhan Bokeikhanov, "Pereselencheskie nadely v Akmolinskoi oblasti," in Nurgaliev (ed.), 242. *Kokpek* (Rus. *lebeda*) is a general term for plants of the genus *Atriplex*, known colloquially in English as "saltbush," characterized by their tolerance of high salt content in soil. The presence of such plants on the steppe, then, is a strong indication that the soil there is unsuitable for grain cultivation.

real colonizers.¹⁴¹ Such poor peasants were, far from carrying out any civilizing mission, or even improving the Empire's finances, thrown into a tense struggle for their very survival, and often forced to give up agriculture, return to their home provinces, or assume the status of irregular migrants in Siberia. In sum, the colonization sponsored by the Resettlement Administration, carried out by the poorest peasants and on useless land, promised nothing, in Bokeikhanov's view, but the adoption by settlers of extensive, semi-pastoralist economic forms, an outcome directly opposed to what the Shcherbina expedition sought. Impoverished and desperate settlers, he wrote, "inevitably changing intensive culture to extensive, will divide with the Kazakhs the amount of livestock that can survive in the Kazakh *krai*, which in several of its areas already exists among the Kazakhs. Nothing can emerge from this beyond general impoverishment."¹⁴²

Bokeikhanov, a liberal by conviction and a Kazakh concerned about the fate of his land and people, supported a regular, mathematically certain colonization, one that vouchsafed Kazakhs' progress as a whole. But irregular, unequal, irrational settlement, so inimical to the Expedition's ideals, was another matter entirely.

The Multiple Uses of Objective Truth

Indeed, Bokeikhanov, among others on the liberal wing of imperial Russian politics at the turn of the 20th century, stoutly defended the Expedition and its prioritization of Kazakh economic interests against those who fought against both. He insisted on recognition of the 25% increase (*nadbavka*) to Kazakh land norms that the Expedition usually applied, since even this "did not save the Kazakhs from loss of substantial lands (*ugodii*) – fields, mowing lands and water supplies, given over to the

¹⁴¹ Alikhan Bokeikhanov, "Krizis kantseliarskogo pereseleniia" in Nurgaliev (ed.), 273. Originally published under the pseudonym "Statistik" in *Sibirskie voprosy* No. 31-32 (1910).

¹⁴² Bokeikhanov, "Pereselencheskie nadely," 248.

peasants in allotment.”¹⁴³ Criticizing the policy of resettlement, he deployed the Shcherbina norms rhetorically as an absolute and incontrovertible requirement for Kazakh life: “Of the group of Kazakhs, the complaints of whom reached Gen. Nadarov’s [the Steppe Governor-General’s] conference (*soveshchanie*), it turns out that more than two-thirds are left without the Shcherbina norm.”¹⁴⁴ Further, he contended that even the existing norm was used by the Resettlement Administration not with the care the Expedition had originally intended, but simply as a number; resettlement bureaucrats, he argued, “in no way [concern] themselves with the productivity of the land that remains among the Kazakhs.”¹⁴⁵ For Bokeikhanov, then, the Shcherbina land norm represented both a minimal guarantee of secure existence for Kazakhs (even though he claimed that Kazakhs “consider it low”) and the best possible rhetorical device to deploy against uncontrolled, incorrect settler colonization.¹⁴⁶ The ministries of St. Petersburg had provided the Shcherbina expedition with vast resources, if not the authority to write its norms into law independently; Bokeikhanov insisted that they follow through on this commitment.

If Bokeikhanov and others felt the need to stridently defend the Shcherbina norms, especially in their attempt to deliberately overestimate Kazakh land needs, the increasingly aggressive policy of the Resettlement Administration in the early 1900s on the steppe gave them good reason to do so. The complaint of the manager of Semireche resettlement region (moving there after years of work in Semipalatinsk and Akmolinsk

¹⁴³ Alikhan Bokeikhanov, “Kirgizy,” in Artykbaev 26-7.

¹⁴⁴ Alikhan Bokeikhanov, “Kirgiz na soveshchaniia stepnogo general-gubernatora,” in Nurgaliev 255. Original source: “Trudy chastnogo soveshchaniia, sozvannogo 20 maia 1907 g. stepnym generalom-gubernatorom po voprosam o nuzhdakh kirgiz Stepnogo kraia.”

¹⁴⁵ Ibid., 250.

¹⁴⁶ The “consider it low” claim is *ibid.*, 250.

oblasts), S. N. Veletskii, to the Governor-General of Turkestan, N. I. Grodekov, in 1907 embodies the ardently nationalist vision prevalent among many of the Empire's resettlement bureaucrats. Colonization was opposed, he argued, by people who placed the interests of the borderlands above those of the state as a whole, subscribing to the slogans "Turkestan for the Turkestanis," or "Semireche for its residents (*dlia semirekov*)," "whereas it, being a component part of Russia, should be primarily for the Russians (*russkie*)."¹⁴⁷ Kazakh protests, in Veletskii's view, were conditioned merely by their failure to recognize that the lands seized from them were never really theirs to begin with, and unwillingness to sympathize with the plight of Russian settlers who had not yet been allotted with land. Accordingly, he and another high-ranking official within the Semireche filial of the Resettlement Administration, A. I. Pil'ts, proposed several changes to settlement policy. Such changes went significantly beyond an end to the 25% increase in Kazakh land norms that Bokeikhanov had so stoutly defended.¹⁴⁸ Pil'ts argued that, since Kazakhs in Semireche were already moving to sedentarism, a more intensive form of land use than mobile pastoralism,

"It is necessary to create a law, according to which the Kazakh population would be allotted field lands equally with Russians, and pastures, as government property, would be presented to animal herders of all nationalities for a minimal fee. Another decision of the question, with the transition to sedentarism observed, would put the Kazakhs in an impossible position."¹⁴⁹

¹⁴⁷ TsGA RK f. 19, op. 1, d. 41, sv. 5, l. 20ob., Veletskii's report to the Turkestan Governor-General, 24 Feb 1907. The title of the file is "Delo o postanovke i vvedenii pereselencheskogo dela v Semirechenskoi oblasti." Veletskii cites his experience in Akmolinsk and Semipalatinsk oblasts, "with complete tranquility of the Kazakh population," in the same file on l. 21ob., in defense of his new policies.

¹⁴⁸ Noting that the 25% increase, by 1907, was already widely ignored by resettlement bureaucrats, to the detriment of Kazakhs in the steppe oblasts and Semireche alike, Bokeikhanov blamed not local administrators but rather the "hurriedness (*toroplivost'*) of [Duma] deputy Markov II." See Bokeikhanov "Kirgizy," in Artykbaev 29.

¹⁴⁹ TsGA RK f. 19, op. 1, d. 39, sv., 5, l. 5ob., Pil'ts' report to the Chancery of the Turkestan Governor-General, 21 Dec 1907. Title of file: "Delo o vyiasnenii 'izlishkov' zemli u kochevnikov i o zemelnykh normakh v Semirechenskoi oblasti."

The per-household norms calculated for this sedentary allotment, independently of the Shcherbina expedition's methodology, were low relative to those calculated for the steppe oblasts (which typically ran into the hundreds of desiatinas) – 40 desiatinas for most areas, rising to 70-80 in rare cases.¹⁵⁰ In Pil'ts and Veletskii's view, these norms were more than sufficient to satisfy a striving that, they claimed, was already present among Semireche's nomads, and necessary to satisfy the mass of peasants that had migrated to Central Asia with the expectation of quickly receiving the land they required for their livelihood. While they employed the rhetoric of normal, mathematically regulated colonization, they considered their first responsibility – whether out of broad ideological considerations or, more prosaically, a sense of duty and professional interest – to be to the settler colonists.

Officials in the Semireche oblast and Turkestan Governor-Generalship administrations, however, struggled against the new proposals of the Resettlement Administration, and the Shcherbina expedition was a vital part of their argument against sedentarizing Semireche's nomads. Although Veletskii and Pil'ts cited the authority of Semenov-Tian-Shanskii, Mushketov, Sapozhnikov, and other well-known scholars in their proposal, the administrator Mustafin, in a report to the chancery of the Turkestan Governor-General, considered such citations unsuited to the task before them: “One must have in mind that many scholars were in Semireche several decades ago and their research did not have colonizing goals, nor the establishment of norms under which the

¹⁵⁰ TsGA RK f. 19, op. 1, d. 67, sv. 10, l. 123, “Istoricheskaia spravka o polozhenii pereselencheskogo dela v Semirechenskoi oblasti.”

nomads and their herds will not die of hunger.”¹⁵¹ He held up the Shcherbina expedition as an example of the seriousness with which it was necessary to approach the problem:

“If as the basis of work in defining norms it were possible to accept scientific research, reconnaissance and et cetera., then in the steppe krai all this was done [i.e., before the Expedition], however the government found it necessary to command there the whole Shcherbina expedition, costing millions of rubles and working several years. The more, it is impossible on such flimsy (*legkie*) data to determine the fate of the nomads of Semireche, which sharply differs from the Steppe *krai*, excluding parts of Lepsinsk uezd.”¹⁵²

Mustafin’s view fundamentally shares the Expedition’s assumptions, arguing for the specificity of Central Asia’s various biomes and wary of the errors possible when arguing by analogy. Further, he appears convinced that only an undertaking on the Expedition’s scale could properly define land norms. Grodekov, with the unanimous support of Semireche’s uezd nachalniks, agreed with Mustafin’s opinion, finding suspension of the 25% addition to land norms (made law by a 1901 circular of the Ministry of Agriculture) “inopportune” for two principal reasons.¹⁵³ First, it was considered necessary to “encourage” (*pooshchriat*) the Kazakhs to agriculture, rather than forcibly moving them to a sedentary state; second, he argued, hasty settlement of Russian migrants already endangered the Kazakhs:

“As a consequence of the need to settle migrants quickly, it is necessary in practice to seize significant areas of Kazakh lands, which are factually not surplus for them. Obviously the requirement of the best securing of the Kazakhs is not always observed, and thus to reduce the harm caused to the Kazakh economy it is necessary to put Circular #1 in force.”¹⁵⁴

¹⁵¹ TsGA RK f. 19, op. 1, d. 39, sv. 5, l. 6ob. Report of 29 Dec 1907.

¹⁵² Ibid., l. 7ob.

¹⁵³ TsGA RK f. 19, op. 1, d. 39, sv. 5, l. 11, relation of the chancery of the Governor-General of Turkestan, 2 Jan 1908.

¹⁵⁴ Ibid., l. 13ob. Circular #1 refers to the 1901 Ministry of Agriculture circular on the 25% addition to Kazakh land norms.

A later justification for maintaining the 25% increase (although it was suspended, as an emergency measure, for the sake of settling some migrants who had already remained without land for several years) emphasized that, years after its completion, the Shcherbina expedition's positivist assumptions were widely shared among administrators:

“Although in Semireche agriculture is done on irrigated lands, they have not until now been studied, and the...areas able to be irrigated have not been defined. Undoubtedly, in such a position errors are possible and there is no basis to think that they will be to the nomads' benefit. In this case 25% is a corrective in these errors in defining surpluses, and *of course they will not be required*, when Semireche oblast will be studied in detail and the growth of the population taken into attention.”¹⁵⁵

For many administrators, the principles of the Shcherbina expedition in general, and the norms it established in particular, were of vital importance, and deployed against what they argued were the inexact and arbitrary plans of resettlement officials. The 25% increase might fade away with time, but the ideal of exact study of Central Asian lands as the epitome of proper colonization remained.^{156,157}

As ever more migrant sections were allotted from “surplus” lands in the Kazakhs' use, some nomads used the imperial legal system to protest what they viewed as illegal seizures of land, at times invoking the Shcherbina norms to support their cases. Although it is unclear to what extent these litigants, or their representatives, believed their

¹⁵⁵ TsGA RK f. 19, op. 1, d. 39, sv. 5, l. 19, relation of the chancery of the Governor-General of Turkestan, 31 March 1908. Emphasis added.

¹⁵⁶ Opposition to Pil'ts and Veletskii extended even to the central office of the Resettlement Administration in St. Petersburg, which complained in a report after Pil'ts' presentation to the Duma that newspaper reports misrepresented its colonizing policy, “which allegedly intends to take all lands from the Kazakhs that are in their use at present” and that this “can be explained only by Mr. Pil'ts' complete unfamiliarity with the land allotment work of the settler administration on the Kazakh steppes.” See TsGA RK f. 19, op. 1, d. 80, sv. 13, ll. 24-24ob., “Doklad nachalnika zemledeliia i gosudarstvennykh imushchestv v Turkestanskoi krae A. I. Pil'tsa ‘O kolonizatsionnom znachenii Semirech'ia.’” The report cited dates to 29 September 1908.

¹⁵⁷ This is a counterpoint to Gulnar Kendirbai's emphasis on the “arbitrary administrative rule” that settlement represented; while misrule and corruption were common, there were other officials devoted to a program that defined itself by its *lack* of arbitrariness. See Kendirbai, *Land and People: The Russian Colonization of the Kazak Steppe* (Berlin: Klaus Schwarz Verlag, 2002) 1.

arguments, and to what extent they were co-opting imperial rhetoric with the calculation that it would be successful, the very fact that they considered it worth deploying is significant of itself. For example, the representatives of the Kazakhs of a subdivision of Kokon'sk volost, Semipalatinsk uezd, Chiykebai Musafitov and Aksy Uzdembaev, complaining of their forced resettlement from the ten-versta line surrounding Cossack fortifications, and petitioning for an allotment of public lands from the oblast, cited the Expedition's data to establish their poverty (and, hence, need for land):

“As is known to Your Excellency from Shcherbina's statistical materials, the majority of Kazakhs of Semipalatinsk uezd belongs to the indigent (*neimushchim*) poor...completely horseless. This mass drags out a poor existence, along with which migration is met only as a survival of the past.”¹⁵⁸

The petitioners also cited their ancestral claims to oblast lands, but clearly considered the Expedition's authority to lend strength to their argument. In this complicated case, wherein the Host Economic Administration of the Siberian Cossack Host denied the possibility of allowing Kazakhs to live within the ten-versta tract, owing to a significant lack of land relative to the norm, and other Kazakhs of Kokonsk volost claimed that putatively free lands were, in fact, summer pastures necessary for their existence, the petitioners ultimately received their land allotment.¹⁵⁹ The multiple interested parties in this case indicate the incorrectness of viewing the petition as a straightforward act of anti-colonial resistance. Rather, the constraint in land use caused by settler colonization caused Kazakh groups to compete among themselves for land, and some invoked the Expedition in these struggles as well. Petitioning the Military

¹⁵⁸ TsGA RK f. 15, op. 1, d. 2315, sv. 124, l. 20, petition of Musafitov and Uzdembaev to the Military Governor of Semipalatinsk oblast, dated 25 April 1911. The title of the file is “O nadelanii zimovymi stoibishchami kazakhov Kokon'skoi volosti Semipalatinskogo uezda.”

¹⁵⁹ Ibid., ll. 10 (Cossack refusal), 13-13ob. (Kazakh refusal, as reported by a land captain), and 13ob.-14 (allotment of land to the Kokonsk petitioners by decision of the Semipalatinsk uezd assembly of land captains). The first document is undated (but certainly dates to some time in 1911), and the second dates to 24 May 1911.

Governor of Semipalatinsk oblast for winter camp lands (after an unsuccessful petition to the land captain of Ust-Kamenogorsk uezd, section 1) the Kazakhs of seniority #1 of

Ulansk volost wrote:

“Insufficiency of area under winter camps is established by Shcherbina’s researchers, according to the count of whom, in the total area of winter camp lands of Ulansk volost there are 104,095 desiatinas, 28,990 short of the norm. Society had only to reassign (*otvesti*) to us lands located in the common use of the volost; there are 20,389 desiatinas of such lands, used by society only during fall migration, of which 5,020 are surplus relative to the norm. But society constantly refuses to reassign (*otvod*) these lands, mainly under the influence of the rich Kazakh Dzhakezhan Tlekin, having up to 3000 head of livestock and needing, for its grazing, an enormous quantity of land.”¹⁶⁰

In an atmosphere of increased competition for land, Kazakhs and Cossacks both invoked statistically-derived norms in staking their claims. The valence of objective truth with which such norms were equipped could serve multiple purposes.

Land norms, treated as abstract figures disconnected from physical reality (i.e., in a way contrary to the spirit of the Expedition), could also serve the purposes of the most committed officials of the Resettlement Administration in the steppe. Bokeikhanov writes, in a scathing critique of this organization’s practices, that to avoid paying compensation to Kazakhs for land seized under migrant sections, it would lay borders so as to leave the nomads with a minimal amount of land, but also leave all buildings in their possession – avoiding the compensation required by law for such structures, but forcing the Kazakhs to flee in any case.¹⁶¹ Noting that, even as the Shcherbina norms were superficially observed, most nomadic households’ factual land use fell below the figure they required, Bokeikhanov explained,

¹⁶⁰ TsGA RK f. 15, op. 1, d. 1550, sv. 80, ll. 79ob.-80, petition of 22 July 1907. The title of this file is “O zemelnom spore mezhdru kazakhami aulov no. 1 & 6 Ulanskoi volosti, Ust-Kamenogorskogo uezda.”

¹⁶¹ Bokeikhanov, “Pereselencheskie nadely,” in Nurgaliev 248.

“They [resettlement officials] formed four sections where there is a huge real surplus; there was the possibility to use these surpluses without harm to the Kazakhs, but instead of seizing their surpluses from their use, they resettled the Kazakhs themselves from farmsteads (*usadeb*) and cut off the mowing lands, having the first and last significance in their economy. With all this the bureaucrats of GUZiZ [the main administration of land settlement and agriculture] continually complain about the constraints caused by the norms of the Shcherbina expedition.”¹⁶²

Originally intended as a method of insulating the steppe’s mobile pastoralists from the economic dislocations that would accompany peasant settlement, the Shcherbina norms, in the hands of officials with a professional interest in establishing as many new villages as possible (and as quickly as possible, considering the number of impoverished, restive migrants not yet allotted with land), could also be used to the nomads’ distinct disadvantage.

The fact that an enterprise conceived, at its inception, as the final and decisive survey of the steppe lands of the Russian Empire was broadly contested in the early 1900s suggests some important points about the Expedition, and the dueling narratives of imperial power found in its materials. If there was a wide range of financial and political interests, both in Petersburg and the steppe oblasts, that converged on the idea that organized settler colonization was necessary, there was little consensus about what it would mean and how precisely it would be done. Such tensions are inherent in the texts the Expedition produced, and indeed were present among its participants – accomplished in the scholarly sense, but far from reliable politically. If this group of liberals and radicals served the goals of settlement, it is both because they believed in the benefits it could bring to the steppe (as well as to landless peasants, in the liberal case) and because of their faith in the power of counting, organization, and regulation to ensure that it did

¹⁶² Bokeikhanov, “Russkie poseleniia v glubine stepnogo kraia” in Nurgaliev 232. On factual land use relative to the norm, see *Ibid.*, 230-31.

not harm the Kazakhs.¹⁶³ What I have termed the anti-settlement narrative of the Shcherbina expedition is consistently opposed to a specific type of colonization, one that is disorganized, without regulation, and fails to reckon with the physical realities of the steppe. Its participants were much in favor of the “correct colonization” of the steppe oblasts; the 25% increase they made to Kazakh land norms was intended to ensure its correctness, in the sense of not harming the nomads’ economy (a long-standing state priority or, at least, rhetorical device). The Expedition’s premise, though, also interested political figures for whom settlement was a far greater priority than securing Kazakhs’ “primitive” economic lifeways. The Shcherbina expedition and its norms, then, were only uncontroversial so long as they remained ideas. When put into practice, their implications were wildly divergent for conservatives, liberals, radicals, and Kazakhs both apolitical and of all political stripes. The objective truth of the land norms proved stunningly subject to manipulation and malfeasance in its application.

Conclusion

The Russian Empire was long concerned with the problem of peopling its new acquisitions in the Kazakh steppe with an agricultural, Slavic population from its inner provinces, whether in the form of Cossacks or peasant settlers. This interest was reflected, among other things, in early state-sponsored military surveys, travelogues, and scientific expeditions, some of which tried to ascertain the extent to which the land they

¹⁶³ In a trenchant critique of Michel Foucault, Laura Engelstein argues that, while Russian liberals were aware of the imperfections of the bourgeois, rule-of-law state, Foucault’s criticism of the “minor tyrannies” of this order works poorly in the context of an autocratic state deeply suspicious of the rule of law and the delegation of disciplinary authority. See Engelstein, “Combined Underdevelopment: Discipline and the Law in Imperial and Soviet Russia,” in Jan Goldstein (ed.), *Foucault and the Writing of History* (Cambridge, MA: Blackwell, 1994) 220-236. I would extend Engelstein’s critique to the Expedition’s work. The project of measuring and classifying the steppe, Foucauldian on the surface, was preferable, in the mind of its liberal participants, to colonization done arbitrarily, without regulation or sufficient knowledge.

surveyed was suitable for cultivation by Russian migrants. Until roughly 1880, though, such migration as occurred was unplanned and not sanctioned by the state apparatus (“irregular,” in the bureaucratic vernacular of the time); only after this time did administrative organs begin to take a more systematic approach to settler colonization. The acme of this more systematic approach was the Shcherbina expedition of 1896-1903, a massive and well-funded attempt to determine, with mathematical precision, the amount of land needed to secure the existence of the longest-tenured residents of the steppe oblasts, the Kazakhs, and from this figure to calculate how much surplus land was available to form new agricultural settlements for migrants. Operating within an objectivist and determinist framework, the Expedition attentively surveyed the steppe and interviewed its inhabitants in pursuit of the colonizing goal set up for it in St. Petersburg (and actively solicited by overwhelmed administrators within the steppe oblasts).¹⁶⁴

However, closer inspection of the textual record left by the Expedition, and the lives of its known participants, makes it difficult to read it as a straightforward exercise of imperial power through measurement, surveillance, and the production of knowledge. I have identified strains both in favor of and opposed to settlement within its works, as might well be expected, considering the oppositional politics of many of its participants. A teleological narrative wherein the sedentarization of the steppe is both inevitable and, for economic and civilizational reasons, desirable, is juxtaposed against a counter-narrative that privileges mobile pastoralism in some steppe environments, notes the

¹⁶⁴ See TsGA RK f. 15, op. 1, d. 481, sv. 25, l. 53 for the Steppe Governor-General’s decision to allow irregular peasants from Tambov guberniia to live in Ust-Kamenogorsk uezd until the results of the Expedition’s study of the uezd are known (decision of April 1899). Title of the file is “Ob otvode uchastka zemli krestianam-pereselentsam na uchastke “Karash” v Ust-Kamenogorskom ueзде, Semipalatinskoi oblasti.” Also see TsGA RK f. 369, op. 1, d. 5000, sv. 265, ll. 5-8, for the Military Governor of Akmolinsk oblast’s request to the Expedition to come and survey Petropavlovsk and Omsk uezds for the sake of deciding land disputes among the Kazakh population there.

dislocations in Kazakh life caused by the transition to sedentarism, and argues for special protection of nomadic lifeways (and, indeed, of the nomads themselves) because of such dislocations. To the extent that subaltern voices appear in the Expedition's texts, they seem to have shaped both narratives. That two such conflicting narratives could so easily co-exist within this corporate scholarship suggests that, perhaps, the participants of the Shcherbina expedition did not understand them as contradictory. Rather, imperial projects were to be promoted and abetted to the extent that they were done in a regular and non-exploitative fashion (and the Expedition's participants certainly believed in the possibility of a non-exploitative colonialism). Correct colonization, epitomized by the work of the Expedition, could bring benefits to the Empire as a whole and the steppe in particular in this view, for consensus existed among both Russian and Kazakh participants that pure mobile pastoralism was primitive and needed to change. Only when insufficient care was taken, and the interests of the colonized population not properly accounted for, did the colonization of the steppe become problematic.

Most importantly, though, the rhetoric of positivism surrounding the Shcherbina expedition enabled anyone interested in it – participants, sponsors, civil and military administrators, and the peasants and nomads influenced by its results – to claim it for their own interests.¹⁶⁵ Thus the results of the Shcherbina expedition provided ammunition simultaneously for proponents and opponents of settler colonization in the steppe, both of whom could claim that their views were grounded in the best statistical

¹⁶⁵ Indeed, Shcherbina's earlier work on peasant budgets and land needs in Voronezh province, with a similarly objectivist and positive tone, would be used (with some critical comment) by V. I. Lenin in his 1894 essay "What the 'Friends of the People' Are and How They Fight Against the Social-Democrats," arguing for the existence of social differentiation and a form of capitalism among the Russian peasantry. See Lenin, *Polnoe sobranie sochinenii*, v. 1 (Moscow: Gosudarstvennoe izd-vo. politicheskoi literatury, 1963), 224-25.

data available. Faith in an objectively correct solution to the problems created by peasant migration from the inner provinces of the Empire, providing a large number of settlers with large tracts of land while not interfering with Kazakhs who did not wish to settle, was widespread. Indeed, such was the underlying assumption of the expedition. The Russian Empire's settlement policy, by the end of the 1890s, was fraught with severe tensions, but the project of fixing a mathematical norm of Kazakh land use lent it a veneer of calm unanimity. Disputes, for the time, were kept to the realm of numbers, with the underlying assumption that they would certainly disappear when a final solution was found. While this faith was not unshakeable, considering the well-documented troubles of the Bashkir people following their sedentarization, it was strong enough that, for a time, no interested party could countenance the ultimate impossibility of "correct colonization" of the steppes.¹⁶⁶ As peasant settlement to the steppe oblasts increased, such idealistic views foundered on the rocks of physical reality. After the turn of the century, then, the debate about settlement exploded; the staggering range of perspectives it encompassed in the capitals and the steppe, and the outcomes produced by such informational incoherence, are the subjects of the next chapter.

¹⁶⁶ The Bashkirs, a Turkic-speaking people of the southern Urals (living among the Volga, Kama, Samara, and Tobol rivers), stood as the most stark example of sedentarism's potentially negative influence on mobile pastoralists for scholars and administrators alike. See, for example, G. Potanin, "V iurte posledniago kirgizskago tsarevicha (iz poezdki v Kokchetavskii uezd)," *Russkoe bogatsvo* 8 (August 1896): 80, where the author describes the Bashkirs as a "dying (*vymiraiushchii*) people" and ponders a similar fate for Kazakh agriculturalists.

Chapter 6

Flawed Epistemology and the Fate of a Settler Colonial Empire, 1898-1917

Introduction

In April 1910, the Third Duma of the Russian Empire, with no representatives of Central Asia present, declared all lands occupied by pastoralists there to be state property and significantly expanded the Resettlement Administration's power to seize "surplus" lands from them. One of the few remaining Muslims in parliament, S. N. Maksudov, protested against this measure, drawing distinctions among three types of state property. State ownership, he noted, could be political, managerial, or signify the same property rights as a private person would enjoy. The relevance of this distinction for administration of Turkestan and the steppe, he continued, was that "when some state conquers a territory or peacefully incorporates it, by this means the state obtains the right of political predominance, which does not at all contradict the old rights of private owners, individual or juridical persons."¹ Maksudov's argument, roundly rejected by a Duma for which peasant resettlement to Central Asia and Siberia was a major policy priority, brings the ambiguity of the steppe's position in the Russian Empire in the early 20th century into sharp focus. Brought into the Russian Empire by treaties and military conquest, the meaning of its incorporation was unclear – were these lands and their inhabitants the spoils of victory or a constituent part of the empire identical to any other province? Debates around resettlement, political participation, and political

¹ S. N. Maltusynov, sost., *Agrarnaia istoriia Kazakhstana (konets XIX-nachalo XX v.): sbornik dokumentov i materialov* (Almaty: Daik-Press, 2006) 972.

representation during the parliamentary era provided a series of contradictory answers to this question.

By the October Manifesto of 1905, Nicholas II permitted the creation of a parliamentary body, the State Duma, forming a legislature that initially granted substantial representation to peasants, workers, and non-Russian nationalities. This experiment in constitutional monarchy, however, was beset by confusion about the relationship between the legislature and the tsar, whose instincts remained autocratic. Two meetings of the Duma were called and disbanded in quick succession in 1906-7 for their relative intransigence with respect to executive and ministerial policies. Subsequently, a new electoral law of June 3rd, 1907 was calculated to remedy this, creating a stable conservative legislative coalition by substantially raising the property qualifications for voting and disenfranchising some regions of the empire. The regions excluded from elections were, with the exception of Yakutsk oblast in eastern Siberia, only the steppe oblasts and Turkestan. In the interregnum between the first two meetings of the Duma, meanwhile, by an *ukaz* of 9 November 1906, prime minister P. A. Stolypin made significant steps forward in a process of agrarian reform for the peasantry of European Russia that depended on the creation of individualized land use for peasants, rather than the seizure of noble landholdings.² This measure was slightly predated by a measure expanding the state's colonizing fund, and indeed would depend on resettlement to Central Asia and the steppe – the same areas disenfranchised less than a year later under the 3rd of June system. For intellectuals among the Kazakhs and other Central

² This measure was of a piece with discussions at the conference on the needs of agriculture (1902-1905) called by S. Iu. Witte, in which several figures later prominent in the Resettlement Administration participated. See the discussion in David Macey, *Government and Peasant in Russia, 1861-1906: The Prehistory of the Stolypin Reforms* (DeKalb, IL: Northern Illinois UP, 1987), especially Chapters 2 and 3.

Asian Muslims, their economic expropriation and political disenfranchisement were closely connected.

The corpus of knowledge about the steppe and its inhabitants that Russian scholars and administrators had accrued over the previous seventy years, and which around the turn of the 20th century they augmented with particular alacrity, played an important role in debates about resettlement and political representation alike. The role it played, however, was not straightforward; seemingly objective data about the soil and climate of the steppe could be used – or misused – to support a wide range of arguments about the proper course of settlement, although no influential politician or administrator wholly opposed it in the Duma era. The misuse of such information would play a significant role in the creation of discontent among Kazakhs impoverished by an aggressive resettlement policy. Further, understandings of nomadism as a primitive stage through which all peoples would ultimately pass, grounded in an evolutionary scheme common to European anthropological scholarship of the period, were deployed in defense of and opposition to Kazakhs' economic interests. The longstanding anthropological debate about Kazakhs' intellectual capacity, mixed with a growing tide of Islamophobia, carried over into the decision to disenfranchise the steppe provinces after the dispersal of the Second Duma. At the same time, Russo-Kazakh schools, founded and expanded on the idea that Kazakhs could be civilized and trained, produced a cohort of intellectuals able to protest against their lack of representation. The Russian Empire's attempt to know the steppe was successful in providing the necessary information to expropriate pastoralist lands and move peasants from European Russia onto them, temporarily alleviating the agrarian crisis there. But, as the agronomist O. A. Shkapskii warned, this

expropriation, without consideration of the political and property rights the colonized believed themselves to enjoy, led to “the emergence of an agrarian question in Asia as well,” and Kazakhs’ response to this, both intellectually and materially, came to represent a serious threat to imperial rule in Central Asia.³

In an influential essay, Frederick Cooper and Ann Stoler have drawn attention to the “tensions of empire,” signifying the “competing agendas for using power, competing strategies for maintaining control, and doubts about the legitimacy of the venture” characteristic of all colonial regimes.⁴ However, this essay, like others in the volume it introduces, is focused on tensions at the level of discourse – whether among colonizers, colonized people, or between the two groups (a distinction which is itself unsatisfactory for Cooper and Stoler). The preceding chapters of this work have demonstrated that this is a productive research agenda for the Russian Empire as well. The fate of Russian imperialism in Central Asia during the early 20th century indicates, though, that it can be pushed further. The tensions of empire are not merely discursive; rather, they are significant because of the contradictory social, economic, legal, and environmental outcomes of which discursive tensions, over time, are productive. The Russian Empire was also characterized by disjunctions between its multiple discourses on empire and an autocratic, top-heavy political structure. The information about colonized lands with which the Russian state supplied itself could, in this environment, be sacrificed on the altar of political expediency. The centralized and hierarchical decision-making structure of the Russian Empire privileged some ways of thinking about the steppe and its

³ O. A. Shkapskii, “Pereselentsy i agrarnyi vopros v Semirechenskoi oblasti,” *Voprosy Kolonizatsii* 1 (1907), 19.

⁴ Frederick Cooper and Ann Laura Stoler, “Between Metropole and Colony: Rethinking a Research Agenda,” Cooper and Stoler, eds., *Tensions of Empire: Colonial Cultures in a Bourgeois World* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1997) 6-7.

inhabitants over others. Arguments that mass resettlement to the steppe was untenable were not heard, while the very notion of peasant settlement was founded on a view of Kazakhs' place within the empire which the state itself had not fully endorsed. Among the final results of the contradictions in scholarly and bureaucratic writing about the steppe, and of the conflict between imperial knowledge and an empire whose decision-making did not require complete or correct information, was a massive popular rebellion of Kazakhs and Kyrgyz in the summer of 1916. This revolt revealed clearly that the success of Russia's settler colonial empire had been, in a sense, superficial, and had in fact exacerbated the problems of an empire unable to decide whether it was Russian and Orthodox or truly multi-national.^{5,6}

Central Asian Environments in Early-20th Century Scholarship

The Shcherbina Expedition's materials concerning Kazakh land use first appeared in press in 1898, and new volumes trickled out over the course of the following decade. Although its findings played an important role in shaping polemics (scholarly and political alike) about steppe land use, they were not the only source of information on the topic in the pre-revolutionary era. A similar attempt was made to survey pastoralist-dominated regions in the Turkestan Governor-Generalship, and the information this yielded was distributed widely. Further, the Resettlement Administration established a

⁵ For a useful argument emphasizing the tension between the priority given to ethnic Russians and an emphasis on securing the preeminence of the Romanov dynasty in particular (even at the cost of privileging ethnic and religious minorities in some areas) see Theodore R. Weeks, *Nation and State in Late Imperial Russia: Nationalism and Russification on the Western Frontier, 1863-1914* (DeKalb, IL: Northern Illinois UP, 1996).

⁶ Marco Buttino, among others, has emphasized the continuity of certain structures associated with settler colonialism after 1917. See Buttino, *Revoliutsiia naoborot: Sredniaia Azia mezhdu padeniem tsarskoi imperii i obrazovaniem SSSR*, trans. Nikolai Okhotin (Moscow: Zven'ia, 2007). By "superficial" here, though, I am emphasizing that the Romanov dynasty's policies of colonization contributed, in the steppe oblasts and Central Asia, to a level of instability, low economic productivity, and uncontrolled violence it wished to avoid.

professional journal, *Voprosy kolonizatsii (Problems of Colonization)*, published frequently between 1907 and 1917. While these and other publications looked at Central Asia and the steppe exclusively through an agricultural lens – assessing it in terms of its suitability, or lack thereof, for agricultural colonization – they were far from united in their conclusions on this score. Questions of climate, hydrology, and soil quality, and different weighting of each, led some observers to optimistically conclude that the steppe and Turkestan would supply the empire with grain and cotton while providing a “third way” to solve the problem of peasant landlessness. The majority of such observers was in the employ of the Resettlement Administration and had, thus, a professional interest in promoting and expanding settlement, but some were formidable scholars in their own right. Other scholarly commentators, mostly on the political left, were pessimistic about its practicability. Across the political spectrum, consensus reigned that resettlement was necessary, although perhaps not sufficient to resolve rural Russia’s agrarian crisis, but there was no consensus that it could actually be done.

Publications sponsored by the Resettlement Administration were the foremost purveyors of this optimistic outlook. In what one scholar has described as this administration’s “masterwork,” the three-volume compendium *Aziatskaia Rossiia* (Asiatic Russia, published in 1914), the geologist and pedologist K. D. Glinka classified most of the soil of the steppe provinces as *chernozem* (“black earth,” well suited for cultivation) or “chestnut” (*kashtanovaia*, less fertile but not entirely unsuitable for agriculture).⁷ In the same volume, the meteorologist A. I. Voeikov argued that agriculture in Siberia (including the northern steppe) “[could] go quite far to the north”

⁷ *Aziatskaia Rossiia*, t. 2: *zemia i khoziaistvo* (St. Petersburg: izdanie Pereselencheskogo Upravleniia, 1914), 15-21. For the word “masterwork” (142), see Willard Sunderland, “The Ministry of Asiatic Russia: The Colonial Office that Never Was but Might Have Been,” *Slavic Review* 69.1 (Spring 2010): 120-150.

because of the warmth of summers there, and that even the relatively dry and continental central steppe, “completely deprived of agriculture,” could already be observed to transform as drought-tolerant grain varieties were used more widely.⁸ At least some areas of the steppe, then, were naturally suited to agriculture and promised much for settler and local farmers, whether Kazakhs or *starozhily* (long-term residents of Siberia). Turkestan, according to Voeikov, had even greater potential if artificial irrigation were to be used in some areas. He wrote that “[Turkestan’s] high temperature is very favorable for vegetation: it is possible to grow cotton, rice and other warm-country plants, if only there is enough water.”⁹ Recent research sponsored by the Resettlement Administration, further, had given hope that irrigation would not even be necessary in some areas; great hope was invested in the so-called “rain-fed” (*bogarnye*) lands, said to abound in the foothill regions of Aulie-ata uezd (centered on present-day Taraz, Kazakhstan) and to be rented out freely to settlers by Kazakhs.¹⁰ With the benefit of hindsight, we know that *Aziatskaia Rossiia* was published after the peak of Slavic peasant resettlement to Central Asia and the steppe, but its contributors made a sustained and coherent case for its continued viability.

However, the rosy picture that the contributors to *Aziatskaia Rossiia* – who included not only bureaucrats but scholars prominent in their own right, such as Voeikov and the limnologist L. S. Berg – distilled from more than a century of imperial scholarship obscured more dubious assessments of Central Asia’s agricultural potential. These, too, had been present in Russian scholarly discourse since the General Staff

⁸ *Aziatskaia Rossiia*, t. 2, 3.

⁹ *Ibid.*

¹⁰ TsGA RK f. 33, op. 1, d. 34, sv. 4, ll. 2-2ob., “Estestvenno-istoricheskoe opisanie Aulie-atinskogo uezda i rukopisnye materialy k estestvenno-istoricheskomu opisaniiu Chimkentskogo uezda, Syr-Darinskoi oblasti.” The document is dated 25 February 1911, and refers mostly to research carried out in 1909.

publications of the 1860s and only grew more voluble after the turn of the century.¹¹ The most pressing issue in this disagreement was, for Turkestan and the arid central steppe, irrigation, without which agriculture was impossible. O. A. Shkapskii, a former member of the terrorist movement *Narodnaia Volia* (People's Will) and, briefly, the manager of the Tashkent division of the Resettlement Administration, noted that data provided by that administration about the amount of free and suitable land available for settlement in Semireche were useless. During the collection of these it had escaped notice, he argued, that the lands they referred to could only be cultivated if they were irrigated, but no bodies of fresh water were near some of them.¹² Unoccupied land, in other words, was not necessarily potential farmland. A. A. Kaufman, the *doyen* of Russian agronomists and a leading member of the Kadet party, went even further in his criticism of the figures provided by the Resettlement Administration. Citing the same elevated figure as Shkapskii (4,846,000 desiatinas) of free land in Turkestan, he noted, "The quantity of *free water*, which could be used for irrigation, not entering into precise calculations, is comparatively small...It is not subject to doubt that the unused waters of Turkestan would not permit one to irrigate even a million desiatinas."¹³ Regulation of water use – a project taken up soon after by the Resettlement Administration, under the sponsorship of the Third Duma – might, he thought, permit some expansion of this area, but at an

¹¹ The scholarly apparatus backing *Aziatskaia Rossiia* was a dense seventy pages; assessments of the steppe's economic potential slanted towards stock-raising were rare in the bibliography, and almost entirely downplayed in the text. See *Aziatskaia Rossiia*, t. 3: *prilozheniia*, LXXI- CXLI.

¹² Shkapskii, "Pereselentsy," 29-31. According to Mukhammedzhan Tynyshpaev (about whom more later), Shkapskii was removed from service in Tashkent because of his cautious and moderate attitude towards settlement; his replacement was the aggressive and Russocentric S. N. Veletskii, whose views on settlement were discussed in Chapter 5. See Tynyshpaev, "Iz protokola doprosa mirovym sud'ei 4-go uchastka Cherniaevskogo uezda inzhenera M. Tynyshpaeva ob istorii vzaimootnoshenii Rossiiskoi vlasti s kazakhami," M. Q. Qoigeldiev, glav. red., *Alash qozghalysy/Dvizhenie Alash*, t. 1: *sbornik dokumentov i materialov* (Almaty: "Alash," 2004), 194-95.

¹³ A. A. Kaufman, *Pereselenie i kolonizatsiia* (St. Petersburg: tip. "Obshchestvennaia pol'za," 1905) 263.

unappealing cost in money and manpower.¹⁴ The portions of the steppe that remained untouched by the settler movement in 1905 were, he claimed, even worse-equipped in this respect. Sharing the Shcherbina Expedition's view that a line roughly along the 50th parallel divided the part of the steppe where agriculture could plausibly be done from the part destined to remain without cultivation, Kaufman wrote of the "extremely doubtful suitability" of the steppes south of this line for agriculture, on which irrigation could barely be put into practice:

"The broad development of irrigation, according to natural conditions, is possible only along the edge of the mountain country enclosing the Central Asian steppes from the south and southeast; on the whole remaining area of the latter stores of water suitable for artificial irrigation are so restricted that there is not enough of them even for the native Kazakh population, which is gradually moving to agriculture and, in places, has already broadly developed irrigation."¹⁵

The distribution of water around the steppe and Turkestan constituted, for Kaufman, a much larger obstacle to resettlement than for contributors to *Aziatskaia Rossiia*; his assumption that the needs of the local population also needed to be taken into account was also contradictory to the practices of local resettlement officers.

The quality of soil and climate of the region was also subject to dispute. Although *Voprosy kolonizatsii* became a semi-official organ of the Resettlement Administration, an early issue contained opinions criticizing resettlement as it was practiced. One contributor, P. Kokoulin, voiced explicitly the conflict between what the Resettlement Administration claimed about the soils of the northern steppe and what settlers had experienced there:

"According to the data of Shcherbina's statistical expedition and the opinion of the manager of Turgai-Ural'sk region, L. N. Tsabel', the soils of Kustanai and

¹⁴ See for example TsGA RK f. 33, op. 1, d. 12a, sv. 2, "Ob organizatsii vodoispol'zovaniia iz reki Dzhety-oguz."

¹⁵ Kaufman, *Pereselenie*, 232.

Aktiubinsk uezds, especially in the north and west, are distinguished by great capacity; other local actors assert, almost unanimously, that the soils here are weak, quickly becoming exhausted, and that a serious agricultural crisis will strike the oblast within 15 years.”¹⁶

Even the part of the steppe provinces widely acclaimed as an ideal region for settlement was thus subject to doubt in this respect, although the author of this piece, Kokoulin, recommended further help to settlers rather than the cessation of their movement there.¹⁷ Shkapskii, too, despite his belief that in general, “the question of the suitability of Semireche oblast for the economic activity of Russian peasant settlers is not subject to doubt,” noted that the cold and snow that characterized winters in its rain-fed foothills – the most promising lands for agricultural settlement – also meant that seed grain froze regularly.¹⁸ Kaufman, publishing separately, expressed practical concerns about Turkestan’s suitability for Russian settlement in light of its hot and arid climate; the heat made it only suitable for settlers from southern Russia, who were accustomed to high temperatures. Its arid climate, moreover, meant that settlers would quickly have to learn new agricultural techniques, and how to grow new crops (cotton and rice, rather than wheat and rye), tasks for which he doubted they were prepared.¹⁹ The environments of all regions proposed for settlement thus had their potential drawbacks, and if no agronomist considered these disadvantages serious enough to call a full halt to settlement, Kaufman and Shkapskii in particular argued that caution, slow tempos, and restricted numbers of settlers were required if it were to succeed.

¹⁶ P. Kokoulin, “Khod pereseleniia, vodvoreniiia, i khoziaistvennogo ustroeniia pereselentsev v Turgaiskoi oblasti,” *Voprosy kolonizatsii* 1 (1907): 220-221.

¹⁷ *Ibid.*, 221.

¹⁸ O. A. Shkapskii, “Pereselentsy-samovol’tsy i agrarnyi vopros v Semirechenskoi oblasti” (St. Petersburg: izd. Pereselencheskogo upravleniia, 1906) 53, 64.

¹⁹ Kaufman, *Pereselenie*, 260, 335.

Peter Holquist has argued that officials within the Resettlement Administration saw colonization as, in part, “a state-directed endeavor to maximize the human and productive resources of the empire as a whole, by matching available territory with the population and its productive capacity.”²⁰ Thus assessments of the way the land’s current occupants made use of it were vital to arguments about the proper course of new peasant settlement, and on this score, too, disagreement was frequent. Kazakhs of all lifeways, as well as long-term residents of Slavic extraction (Cossacks and *starozhily*), were subject to such analyses. The *starozhily*, for proponents of state-organized resettlement, represented the government’s incorrect former attitude towards colonization; a commentator in *Voprosy kolonizatsii*, N. Shuman, described their domestic economy as little better than nomads’: “The *starozhily* carry out their accustomed wild economic system on their lands.”²¹ This system both wasted a great deal of useable land, the author argued, and had a deleterious moral influence on arriving settlers, who followed the example of the *starozhily* rather than bringing their own, purportedly more efficient and intensive, methods to bear.²² Thus the entirety of the lands under the Resettlement Administration’s authority, even those populated by an earlier generation of Slavic migrants, needed in this view to be modernized. Kaufman, more hesitant about the practicability of resettlement, shared this view, within limits. Settlers, he claimed, had in

²⁰ Peter Holquist, “‘In Accord with State Interests and the People’s Wishes’: The Technocratic Ideology of Imperial Russia’s Resettlement Administration,” *Slavic Review* 69.1 (Spring 2010): 156.

²¹ N. Shuman, “K voprosu o zemleustroistve i kolonizatsii Sibiri,” *Voprosy kolonizatsii* 1 (1907): 6-7. The three forms of fieldwork Shuman cited were *pestropol’e* (whereby different crops were planted in the same field side by side), disordered *zaleznoe* (characterized by abandonment of exhausted soils and migration to virgin soil) and *paro-zaleznoe* (a variant on the *zaleznoe* system where exhausted lands were cultivated again after a fallow period). I am extremely grateful to Yanina Arnold for her assistance with these terms.

²² *Ibid.*, 7. This implicitly positive view of Slavic peasants’ economic productivity before resettlement was sharply at odds with the condescending, negative evaluations cited by Yanni Kotsonis in *Making Peasants Backward: Agricultural Cooperatives and the Agrarian Question in Russia, 1861-1914* (New York: St. Martin’s Press, 1999).

general a more organized and intensive agricultural system than *starozhily*, though he did not share Shuman's concern about the moral influence of long-term residents, describing settlers as "bringing the light of culture" to *starozhily*.²³ At the same time, though, citing the authority of the Tobol'sk agronomist and Popular Socialist politician (of the Second and Third Dumas) N. L. Skalozubov, he noted that this was not always the case: "There is no basis to consider the average or aggregate settler, as a colonizer, as any better than the average Siberian peasant."²⁴ The *starozhily*, according to Kaufman's data, ate better than settlers and were much more inclined to invest their capital in improved and intensified agricultural methods than settlers forced to battle for their existence. If there was some agreement among professional agronomists and statisticians that the *starozhily* of Siberia and the steppe ran their households inefficiently, there was no clear indication that new peasant settlement would lead to improvement in this respect.

The bulk of the population of the steppe oblasts (and a significant part of that of Turkestan), though, consisted of Kazakhs, some settled on the land, others mostly pastoralist, and the expansion of settlement would turn on evaluations of their economic productivity.²⁵ Pro-settlement commentators denigrated both sedentary and pastoralist Kazakhs as unproductive and inefficient. For example, in the pages of *Voprosy kolonizatsii*, P. Khvorostanskii wrote:

²³ Kaufman, *Pereselenie*, 325.

²⁴ *Ibid.*, 326.

²⁵ Taking Akmolinsk oblast, one of the most extensively settled provinces of the empire, as an example, data from the empire-wide census of 1897 give 174,292 residents speaking Russian as their birth language, and approximately 230,000 when adding speakers of Ukrainian, Polish, and German to the mix, as against 427,389 Kazakh speakers. Even in 1910, after the peak of the settler movement, scholars estimate that Akmolinsk oblast's population was less than 50% Russian. See S. M. Abashin, D. Iu. Arapov, and N. E. Bekmakhanova, eds., *Tsentral'naia Aziia v sostave Rossiiskoi imperii* (Moscow: Novoe literaturnoe obozrenie, 2008) 384-385 and Donald Treadgold, *The Great Siberian Migration: Government and Peasant in Resettlement from Emancipation to the First World War* (Princeton: Princeton UP, 1957) 228.

“Pure nomads do not know even divisions of pasture into winter and summer: some summer where others wintered, in fall they shear sheep, depending on the weather, one year on one tract (*urochishche*), another year 250 verstas from the former; this is not running an economy but wandering.”²⁶

The Resettlement Administration did not, as a rule, look on sedentary Kazakhs any more favorably. An anonymous resettlement bureaucrat in Syr-Darya oblast, for example, while not refusing the theoretical desirability of Kazakh sedentarism on non-irrigated lands, claimed:

“The cultivated area on rain-fed lands cannot grow quickly, only because the Kazakhs, with their primitive working tools, do not have the strength themselves to plow up virgin lands. Most run to settlers for help, renting out certain sections of the steppe to them under cultivation.”²⁷

Such arguments had the dual effect of denigrating the productivity and technological achievements of Kazakhs already on the land and advancing the claim that the proximity of well-equipped Slavic peasant settlers was the most promising tool available to improve the Kazakhs. Resettlement, in this view, became more than a release valve for the surplus rural population of central Russia and Ukraine; for some, it was also the spread of thousands of *Kulturtragers* to an economically unproductive backwater.

While even figures relatively committed to Kazakh land rights were not sanguine about pastoralism, they assessed the productivity of sedentary Kazakhs more positively. Shkapskii wrote that “the settlement of Kazakh nomads is an extremely desirable thing,” and even T. I. Sedel’nikov, ejected from the state service for his vocal and public opposition to the practices of the Resettlement Administration, based his opposition in

²⁶ P. Khvorostanskii, “Kirgizskii vopros v sviazi s kolonizatsiei stepi,” *Voprosy Kolonizatsii* 1 (1907): 65-66.

²⁷ TsGA RK f. 33, op. 1, *delo* number unlisted, l. 11. Although this file lacks a number, its title is “Obshchii ocherk kazakhskogo khoziastva v Aulie-atinskom raione,” and the report cited is from 1910.

part on the idea that the government, by taking cultivable land “surpluses” from Kazakhs’ use, had made it more difficult for them to settle permanently.²⁸ But they disputed the claims of pro-settlement commentators that sedentary Kazakh agriculturalists were unproductive. The cautious Shkapskii, for example noted an “analogy” between the practices of Kazakh farmers and Russian peasants, leading him to the conclusion that it was impossible to allot lands used by the former for the use of settlers, since there was no indication that the settlers would use them any better.²⁹ If such commentators agreed with proponents of colonization that the Kazakhs should sedentarize, they refused the idea that peasant resettlement would be the best way to bring this about.

The inability of scholarly and bureaucratic observers to agree on the quality of land in Central Asia and the steppe provinces, or on the value that the longer-term residents of those regions extracted from the land, engendered a much more fundamental dispute about the amount of land available in Russia’s colonizing fund. The result of this calculation would define the number of land shares available for settlers, and hence indicate the extent to which resettlement could serve as a solution to peasant landlessness. Kaufman, even in his early writings, struck a pessimistic tone. Since, he claimed, most of the high-quality agricultural land under the control of the Ministry of State Domains had already been settled by 1905, resettlement alone would do nothing for rural Russia. To resolve the agrarian crisis, he argued, would require tens of millions of desiatinas of good land, and “these tens of millions of desiatinas do not and never will exist.”³⁰ Proponents of colonization, however, most of them affiliated with the Resettlement Administration,

²⁸ Shkapskii, “Pereselentsy-samovol’tsy,” 185; T. I. Sedel’nikov, *Bor’ba za zemliu v kirgizskoi stepi* (St. Petersburg: Elektropechatnia t-va. “Delo,” 1907) 31-32.

²⁹ Shkapskii, “Pereselentsy,” 38.

³⁰ Kaufman, *Pereselenie*, 155-56.

could not believe that the vast, seemingly empty space of Siberia and the steppe could already be completely filled. Shuman, in *Voprosy kolonizatsii*, argued that claims that the colonizing fund was already exhausted were based, erroneously, on the way the land was used by *starozhily*, extensive and predatory.³¹ Although he failed to cite a specific figure for the number of settler allotments available, calling instead for future research, his emphasis on the “vast land area” of Asiatic Russia and the possibility of state-sponsored economic intensification gave readers reason to believe that Kaufman’s “tens of millions of desiatinas” might indeed be available.³² Khvorostanskii, in the same volume, lambasted the “aristocratic” norms of pastoralist land use at which the Shcherbina expedition had arrived.³³ The vast majority of the Kazakh population of the steppe provinces, he contended, could make do with far less land, and lowering the norms would add a significant amount of land to the colonizing fund. None of these views was based on any sense that Kazakhs had a real claim to the land they occupied; *Aziatskaia Rossiia*’s laconic statement that “the Kazakhs’ lands are state lands” was axiomatic for all commentators.³⁴ Nor did the optimists, as a rule, provide precise figures, rather indicating that the future of resettlement was, however indefinitely, hopeful. This contested question was not just important for agronomists and statisticians, though. Rather, indications about the huge size of Russia’s potential colonies, however guarded and tentative, could also be put to political use.

The Russian Empire’s attempt to bring Central Asia and the steppe fully into the state’s view, after several decades and tens of millions of rubles spent, yielded less

³¹ Shuman 4-5.

³² *Ibid.*, 9-10.

³³ Khvorostanskii 102.

³⁴ *Aziatskaia Rossiia*, t. 2, 159. Sedel’nikov was a notable exception to this rule, but because of his insistence on the priority of Kazakh land claims over those of settlers, he rejected the very notion of a colonizing fund as illegal (44).

certainty about the topics investigated than the ministers of St. Petersburg would have wished. Beyond a basic agreement about pastoralism's non-viability as a form of economic organization, and the agricultural prism through which they viewed colonial borderlands, the army of scholars and bureaucrats deployed there by civil and governmental organizations found no consensus. Scholarly disagreements about the climate, hydrology, and soil quality of these regions, as well as competing assessments of the productivity of their original occupants, led to uncertainty about how much of the Empire's apparently vast and thinly-populated borderlands was actually available for colonization. The political climate in which these views were written, though, had more to say about which of them would gain predominance than any question of scholarly merit or evidence. In the highly charged circumstances following Prime Minister P. A. Stolypin's "wager on the strong," whereby the success or failure of peasant resettlement would play a large role in the success or failure of the government, only the most optimistic voices were given credence. The hasty and abusive practices of colonization to which this inattention to inconvenient data led, in turn, were a major contributing factor to the revolt of 1916.

Resettlement and the "Wager on the Strong"

The causes of the Revolution of 1905 were many, but among the most important was a simmering discontent in the agrarian countryside of central Russia and Ukraine about the lack of cultivable land for peasants emancipated from serfdom in 1861, but not granted land to farm.³⁵ Nicholas II understood the problem similarly; his initial speech to the First Duma, the parliamentary body that was the most tangible outcome of Russia's

³⁵ David A. J. Macey, *Government and Peasant in Russia, 1861-1906: The Prehistory of the Stolypin Reforms* (DeKalb, IL: Northern Illinois UP, 1987); Teodor Shanin, *Russia, 1905-07: Revolution as a Moment of Truth* (London: MacMillan, 1986), 1-33.

first revolution of the 20th century, exhorted delegates to devote themselves to “selfless (*samootverzhennoe*) service to the Fatherland for clarification of the needs of the peasantry, so close to [his] heart.”³⁶ It was inevitable, then, that discussion of potential solutions to peasant landlessness would occupy much of the new legislature’s time. Geoffrey Hosking has argued that late in 1905, as Nicholas II signed the October Manifesto establishing political parties and granting the right of parliamentary representation, three groups had formed among politicians and bureaucrats, each representing a distinct solution to the agrarian crisis: a conservative one favoring the preservation of the land relationships of rural Russia, but with eased taxation; a moderate group leaving land in the hands of landlords, but encouraging peasants to break from their communes; and a “radical” solution proposing the seizure of private landholdings and their allotment to needy peasants.³⁷ This tripartite division, however, obscures the importance that peasant resettlement already had in Russian political discourse as a potentially painless solution to the agrarian crisis – giving peasants the land they were thought to crave without expropriating it from the former serf owners who comprised an influential rural elite.^{38,39} The data and interpretive framework that scholarly and bureaucratic descriptions of the land and inhabitants of the steppe provinces and Central Asia set the terms of discussion of resettlement in all four meetings of the Duma. The

³⁶ Maltusynov 528, speech of 2 May 1906.

³⁷ Geoffrey A. Hosking, *The Russian Constitutional Experiment: Government and Duma, 1907-1914* (Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 1973) 59.

³⁸ Peasant resettlement’s role in Duma politics has generally been understated; arguably the classic treatment in Russian historiography of the Third of June system mentions *pereselenie*, to the best of my knowledge, once and in passing. See V. S. Diakin (*otv. red.*), *Krizis samoderzhavii v Rossii, 1895-1917* (Leningrad: “Nauka,” 1984), 349-374.

³⁹ In a detailed study of the Council on Local Economic Affairs, established in 1904, K. I. Mogilevskii emphasizes the role of such local power-brokers in the coalition that Stolypin attempted to create in support of his land reforms. See K. I. Mogilevskii, *Stolypinskie reformy i mestnaia elita: Sovet po delam mestnogo khoziaistva (1908-1910)* (Moscow: Rossiiskaia politicheskaia entsiklopediia, 2008).

opposition's ability to contest ministerial prerogatives in this respect, though, decreased sharply after the electoral reform of 3 June 1907. With this political triumph, one strain of imperial knowledge also emerged victorious, viewing the lands available for colonization as lush and abundant, and the people who inhabited them as unsuited to use them. The optimistic view of the colonizing capacity (*emkost'*) of Central Asia and the steppe gave rise to fantastic plans for resettlement even as new information strongly suggested that such plans were built on sand.

Scholars and politicians alike (although the distinction between the two groups was not always clear) both agreed on the place that statistical and agronomic data should hold in public discussions of the agrarian question. O. A. Shkapskii, introducing the first volume of *Voprosy kolonizatsii*, declared that its contents would be useful both for professional resettlement bureaucrats and "for Russian society, too little informed about 'resettlement questions' and with the tasks whose completion is necessitated by the lives of migrating peasants and the natives (*aborigenov*) of colonized regions."⁴⁰ Shkapskii and other contributors to *Voprosy kolonizatsii* were both aware of, indeed encouraged, the instrumental uses to which their data could be put; the writings of this journal and other publications of the Resettlement Administration were intended to create informed public discussion. The very conservative, pro-settlement deputy V. A. Bobrinskii, even arguing against the use of numbers on the parliamentary floor, could not completely deny their value. After a series of oppositional speeches on the floor of the Second Duma citing statistical data, he complained about anti-settlement deputies' tendency to confuse correlation and causation, and continued,

⁴⁰ Shkapskii, "Ot redaktsii," *Voprosy Kolonizatsii* 1 (1907), no page number. Dated 17 September 1906.

“I would even say that it is best to refrain from mentioning such figures here. The place of statistical figures is in commissions, where we can always indicate to one another where we are taking them from, how we are combining them, and what relationship they have to the question.”⁴¹

Bobrinskii too, then, considered statistical information to have an important role in discussions of the agrarian question – he simply did not believe that it belonged on the floor of parliament, where it could not be properly interrogated. Such attitudes are not surprising in light of the importance that had been placed on statistics by the “enlightened bureaucrats” working under Nicholas I, or the role played by the Central Statistical Committee (established in 1858) in implementing the Great Reforms of Alexander II; statistical surveys were also important to the liberal movement developing around the *zemstva* (organs of local self-governance) towards the end of the 19th century.⁴² For almost a century, there had been a belief across the Russian political spectrum that accumulating information, as much and as precise as possible, was a necessary first step towards improved governance. In all four iterations of the Duma, though, the varied representations of colonized land and people provided by scholarly and bureaucratic authors lent themselves to a wide range of uses.

Such contestation was particularly apparent in the First and Second Dumas, before changed electoral laws substantially weakened the legislative influence of the liberal and radical opposition.⁴³ In this environment, when all three of the solutions to

⁴¹ Maltusynov 650-51, speech of 29 March 1907.

⁴² On statistics and the Great Reforms, see especially scholarship on the career of D. A. Miliutin, most recently M. N. Osipova, *Velikii russkii reformator fel'dmarshal D. A. Miliutin* (Moscow: Animi Fortitudo, 2005). On the role of statistics in shaping the program of the *zemstvo* movement see N. M. Pirumova, *Zemskoe liberal'noe dvizhenie: sotsial'nye korni i evoliutsiia do nachala XX veka* (Moscow: Nauka, 1977), particularly 127-174.

⁴³ Some have argued that the liberal influence even on the proceedings of the first two Dumas has been exaggerated. See Shmuel Galai, “Kadet Domination of the First Duma and its Limits,” Jonathan D. Smele and Anthony Heywood, eds., *The Russian Revolution of 1905: Centenary perspectives* (New York: Routledge, 2005), 196-217.

the agrarian crisis identified by Hosking had significant backing, resettlement gained importance as a potentially painless (from the state's point of view) alternative. Early in the short life of the First Duma, the Council of Ministers, in response to a range of legislative proposals, pointed obliquely to resettlement as a compromise solution. Objecting – ironically, from the point of view of the soon-to-be-colonized – to the “radical” plan of expropriating land from *pomeshchiki* (nobles) who had formerly owned serfs, since “State power cannot acknowledge the right of property to land for some and take this right from others,” the Council pointed to an alternative:

“With the vast and far-from-exhausted means at the state's disposal, and with the broad application of all legal methods for it, the land question can undoubtedly be successfully decided without the decay (*razlozhenie*) of the very basis of our nationhood (*gosudarstvennost'*) and the undermining of the vitality (*zhiznennykh sil*) of our Fatherland.”⁴⁴

The “vast” means indicated here meant, undoubtedly, lands outside the agricultural, Slavic core of the Russian Empire, but also still outside the state's colonizing fund, located in Central Asia, Siberia, and the steppe. A month later, an article in the governmental journal *Pravitel'stvennyi vestnik* added another vital component to this argument. Saying nothing about the quantity or quality of lands in the colonizing funds, the anonymous author demonstrated, through a series of calculations, that there was not enough room in European Russia for all peasant smallholders to thrive even if all privately-owned lands were confiscated and redistributed. Subtracting the entirety of the territory of “unsuitable” provinces (Arkhangel'sk, Vologda, Olonetsk, Viatka, and Perm), forests, and land already held by peasants from the total land area of European Russia left 43 million desiatinas, “a quantity large in and of itself, but

⁴⁴ Maltusynov 541, dated 13 May 1906.

insignificant for such a huge population as Russia has.”⁴⁵ Among the solutions the author proposed for the problems of low crop yields and landlessness was *rasselenie*, not the term usually associated with peasant resettlement (*pereselenie*) but implying the dispersal of population over a wider and less concentrated area.⁴⁶ Without explicitly naming the final destination, non-legislative political figures spent the short life of the First Duma hinting strongly that resettlement was to play a major role in the state’s agrarian policy.

In the First Duma, T. I. Sedel’nikov, the land surveyor and leftist deputy from Orenburg province, took the leading role in opposing resettlement to Central Asia and the steppe, a position he had long held, but particularly important in light of the late arrival of Central Asian deputies to St. Petersburg. Although he paid rhetorical homage to the areas “in which there is much land like...the Kazakh steppe and Siberia,” on which proponents of resettlement pinned their hopes, he also insisted that the economic interests of impoverished Kazakhs had to be the state’s first concern – which, in turn, would reduce the amount of land available for the state colonizing fund.⁴⁷ He cited his experience as a land surveyor during the Shcherbina expedition both to point to the existence of landless and nearly destitute Kazakhs in the steppe provinces (a point some doubted) and to argue that, if the interests of previous residents and the quality of available land were taken into

⁴⁵ Maltusynov 574, report of 20 June 1906.

⁴⁶ Maltusynov 572.

⁴⁷ Maltusynov 533-35, speech of 3 May 1906. In *Bor’ba za zemliu v Kirgizskoi stepi*, Sedel’nikov explicitly connected the question of Kazakh economic interests to projected land surpluses, blasting F. A. Shcherbina for his incautiousness in calculating surpluses, and failing to recognize that the land-allotting (*zemleotvodnye*) works he carried out were illegal; A. A. Kaufman also came in for criticism for failing, allegedly, to appreciate that the Kazakhs had any interests more important than the success of Russian colonization (44, 67).

consideration, resettlement was no better a solution to the agrarian crisis than the Council of Ministers claimed expropriating major rural landowners was.⁴⁸ He claimed:

“The government wishes to bring resettlement up to a maximum, to the greatest possible scale, dreams of resettling 300,000 people annually. I served in the resettlement organization, worked with all my strength (*rabotal vovsiu*), and I will tell you that there is no possibility...none whatsoever, to resettle 300,000 annually. It is impossible, and land will not be found for 300,000 annually.”⁴⁹

If Kazakhs' interests in steppe land – what Sedel'nikov described as “the only remotely serious colonizing fund at present” – were properly recognized, resettlement could not be done to the extent necessary to make a difference in the inner provinces of the empire.⁵⁰ A further challenge, just before the dispersal of the First Duma, centered around a point Sedel'nikov had publicly argued earlier, but now signed by forty other deputies, not exclusively from the steppe provinces. These legislators questioned the legality of using the Steppe Statute of 1891 to seize surplus lands from the Kazakhs. In the strictest sense, they argued, this law required a precise delimitation of which lands were state property and which belonged to the Kazakhs. Meanwhile, “the delimitation between the Treasury and Kazakhs at present not only is incomplete but has not even begun whatsoever.”⁵¹ This represented a call for further research, rather than a permanent obstacle to settlement, but as the response of the Council of Ministers, the Main Administration of State Domains and Agriculture, and pro-settlement parliamentarians in the Second Duma would indicate, it still represented a significant barrier to the immediate migration of peasant settlers, which was growing into a governmental priority.

⁴⁸ For doubts see, e.g., Khvorostanskii 53, where the author claims that incorrect information about resettlement has helped the Kazakh intelligentsia to swindle the Russian public about the true course of resettlement in the steppe provinces.

⁴⁹ Maltusynov 536-37, speech of 4 May 1906.

⁵⁰ *Ibid.*, 536.

⁵¹ *Ibid.*, 586, 4 July 1906.

Indeed, such debates continued in similar terms after the second calling of the Duma in early 1907. The context for them, however, was new and more urgent, after the *ukaz* of 9 November 1906, the so-called “wager on the strong,” sponsoring individualized land use for peasants.⁵² This decree was actually the midpoint of a series of agrarian reforms beginning in August 1906 and continuing through 1910, forgiving debts, making state lands available for colonization, extending a variety of civil rights to the peasantry, and ultimately giving them the right to consolidate their strips of land and separate from their rural commune.⁵³ The main thrust of these reforms was to create of the peasant “a new type of husbandman,” a farmer who, using land independently, would hopefully make the transition to more intensive, technologically advanced, and commercially oriented cultivation.⁵⁴ Granting land to peasants without seizing land from rural power-brokers, this was a brilliant political compromise. It also, by doing nothing to increase the quantity of land available for peasants in European Russia, depended implicitly on the expansion of peasant resettlement; in areas where what Kaufman described as “absolute landlessness” prevailed, the right to own an inadequate scrap of land did nothing for the peasantry.⁵⁵ For proponents of settlement like prince Sviatopolk-Mirskii, individual land ownership (inherently desirable, as the path pursued by advanced Western European states) necessarily meant that some peasants would have to settle elsewhere

⁵² Abraham Ascher has described this law, passed without a vote under Article 87 of the Fundamental Laws, as “almost certainly the most effective response to Russia’s agrarian crisis.” See Ascher, *P. A. Stolypin: The Search for Stability in Late Imperial Russia* (Stanford, CA: Stanford UP, 2001) 164. This is perhaps so, in theory, but the lack of a mechanism for expropriating noble land in the law, a major point of the left’s critique of it (Ascher 161) made the reform dependent on settlement to an untenable degree.

⁵³ For a very convincing peasant-centered account of the implementation of the Stolypin reforms see Judith Pallot, *Land Reform in Russia, 1906-1917: Peasant Responses to Stolypin’s Project of Rural Transformation* (New York: Oxford UP, 1999); an idiosyncratic, bird’s eye view of the politics of agrarian reform is Stephen F. Williams, *Liberal Reform in an Illiberal Regime: The Creation of Private Property in Russia, 1906-1915* (Stanford, CA: Hoover Institution Press, 2006);

⁵⁴ This understanding of the land reform is drawn from the introduction to Pallot, *Land Reform*; the quotation is *ibid.*, 1.

⁵⁵ Kaufman, *Pereselenie*, 181 and 217.

(*rasselenie*).⁵⁶ The land they could be allotted, in turn, was to be found in the Central Asian colonies; V. A. Bobrinskii, a vocal conservative, nationalist, and opponent of the peasant commune, expressed this idea explicitly:

“Beyond this, the annual growth of the population while it does not find the employment of its labor in the intensified economy in both small and large enterprises, in developed industry, can be removed (*vyselit'sia*), as in other states. For this, we have Siberia, the steppe *krai*, and Turkestan.”⁵⁷

Deputies on the far right, in turn, selected the most exceptional figures pertaining to Kazakh land holdings, without accounting for the differences between agriculture and pastoralism or the quality of the land, to advocate for accelerated resettlement. S. I. Kelepovskii, representing Kherson province, claimed, “At present the Kazakhs own 500 desiatinas of land per family. These lands are considered occupied, and therefore our settlers are not sent to this region, very rich and having a luxurious climate.”⁵⁸ This was a two-pronged argument, at once confirming the idea that the steppe was potentially an inexhaustible and verdant colonizing fund, and pointing out that its present occupants would need to be expropriated somewhat to make it viable. As to the legal basis of seizing “surplus” lands for settlers, a point raised by deputies on the left in the Second Duma as well, the Main Administrator of State Domains and Agriculture, A. V. Krivoshein, argued that the law prevented Kazakhs from coming to financial harm when their lands were seized, but also pointed to the practical impossibility of what the left had requested, since it would mean “making peace with vast areas, completely suitable for settlement, in Siberia remaining empty until – and this is a very long time away – the

⁵⁶ Maltusynov 636, speech of 19 March 1907.

⁵⁷ Maltusynov 653-54, speech of 29 March 1907.

⁵⁸ Maltusynov 663, speech of 2 April 1907.

whole local population will be definitively set up with land.”⁵⁹ Krivoshein’s convoluted argument – that it was probably illegal, but still expedient, to take ‘surplus’ lands before the steppe had been definitively surveyed – was symptomatic of how deeply, in some quarters, the idea of Russia’s colonial borderlands as vast and inexhaustible had penetrated. There was no need to worry about taking land too aggressively, in other words, because in the minds of Krivoshein and others there was so much of it available.⁶⁰ This idea was not universal, though, and in the Second Duma as in the first, opposition to it centered on the question of whether the Kazakhs’ claim to the steppe had any merit.

Early in the Second Duma’s term, a deputy from Semipalatinsk oblast, T. T. Norokonev, made a plea for Kazakhs to retain their land as settlement was expanded: “If the Kazakhs need land, they will suffer from unemployment as well. Gentlemen, do not forget to allot land for the Kazakhs.”⁶¹ This complaint drove home, for oppositional deputies, the absurdity of hopes for resettlement when the very people from whom ‘surpluses’ were being seized complained of landlessness. N. N. Kutler, speaking for the Kadets, cited Kazakhs’ protests about the loss of their best lands to build a case that resettlement needed to be done with great caution, and that because of this, the number of settlers established on the steppe would be “insignificant in comparison with the needs of the peasantry within European Russia”; Kutler’s status as the former head of GUiZ (in 1905) and the Kadet party’s leading thinker on land and peasant issues lent particular weight to his statement.⁶² F. V. Tatarinov, a member of the social-democratic fraction,

⁵⁹ Maltusynov 687, report of 24 May 1907.

⁶⁰ This statement echoes what Frederick Jackson Turner described as “the appeal of the undiscovered” in the westward expansion of the United States, giving the appearance that land and resources were practically inexhaustible. See Turner, *The Frontier in American History* (New York: Henry Holt and co., 1921) 293.

⁶¹ Maltusynov 632, 15 March 1907. Norokonev’s comment was considered “off topic” (*ne po voprosu*) in a discussion of aid to the unemployed.

⁶² Maltusynov 642, speech of 19 March 1907.

argued similarly, pointing out the impossibility of large-scale resettlement on the basis that representatives of the Kazakhs testified that GUiZiZ “already takes those lands that serve there as the only security of their existence.”⁶³ Such opposition, though, was not limited to a defense of Kazakhs’ rights to land, but also based on an explicit claim that the information the anti-settlement minority used was superior to that of the pro-settlement majority. Thus the *trudovik* (moderate agrarian socialist) A. L. Karavaev contrasted the “deep conviction that Siberia presents an inexhaustible (*neob’iatnyi*) area of suitable land” with the “research of such a scholarly and indisputable expert as Kaufman, among others, indicating that there is little land in Siberia.”⁶⁴ The informational critique of resettlement extended to the quality, as well as the quantity of land purported to be available for settlement; a Kazakh deputy, B. B. Karataev, challenged the validity of the Shcherbina Expedition’s results (cited by many in arguments for the expansion of settlement) by claiming that Shcherbina had only studied the fertile, northern uezds of the steppe provinces,

“but did not succeed in researching their southern uezds. If the entirety of all soil and climactic conditions had been studied, he undoubtedly would have been forced to conclude that there are very few surplus lands, because in the southern uezds of the Steppe provinces the soil is saline and sandy, a waterless desert, waterless salt flats. To such an area resettlement is hardly permissible.”⁶⁵

Whether because of a flawed research design (failing to measure all regions considered for settlement) or flawed premises (that the Kazakhs could be expropriated

⁶³ Maltusynov 675, speech of 9 April 1907.

⁶⁴ Maltusynov 638-39, speech of 19 March 1907. For more on the relationship between the *trudoviki* and the Socialist-Revolutionary Party from which they split, see Manfred Hildermeier, *The Russian Socialist Revolutionary Party Before the First World War* (New York: St. Martin’s Press, 2000), especially Chapter 5.

⁶⁵ Maltusynov 731, speech of 16 May 1907. Karataev was responding directly to a speech by the Octobrist V. N. Tetervenkov on the same day using the Shcherbina Expedition’s data to argue that there were huge areas of suitable land on the steppe, used poorly by Kazakh pastoralists (Maltusynov 728-29).

legally), opposition to resettlement in the Second Duma was based on criticism of the body of statistical and agronomic knowledge on which resettlement was founded.

After the dissolution of the Second Duma and its shift towards a conservative, ethnically Russian parliamentary body (on the basis of new electoral laws passed by decree on June 3, 1907), peasant resettlement enjoyed a heyday of financial and political support. The Resettlement Administration was annually voted substantial budgetary increases, with the means at its disposal increasing from 12 million rubles in the budget of 1907 to almost 30 million by 1913.⁶⁶ In this environment, the myth of Russia's colonizing fund took on gargantuan proportions. The Octobrist A. L. Tregubov, for example, cited the generous allotments provided by the Shcherbina norms as evidence that the Kazakhs could not possibly be declining because of resettlement; the reactionary N. E. Markov provided figures proving, allegedly, that it was more logical to expropriate land from Kazakh pastoralists than from the Russian gentry, since the former both held more land and used it inefficiently.⁶⁷ Moreover, a new narrative emerged, countering claims that some lands could not be colonized because of their bad soil or unsuitable climate. Russian *muzhiks*, it was claimed, had a long history of successful colonization in difficult environments, most notably the Arctic, and there was no reason to think they would fail to adapt to the steppe and Turkestan.⁶⁸ Similarly, pastures became, in reports by the Resettlement Administration, potential fields. Responding to P. N. Miliukov's accusations of improprieties in peasant settlement, the head of the Resettlement Administration, G. V. Glinka, made this argument clearly:

⁶⁶ Maltusynov 825, 1062.

⁶⁷ Maltusynov 883 (undated; from discussion of the Resettlement Administration's budget for 1909) and 862-63 (7 November 1908), respectively.

⁶⁸ Maltusynov 1041, speech of 12 May 1912 by the Saratov deputy Kindiakov.

“Why are these lands [in the colonizing fund] pastures? *Only because the Kazakhs have not developed their fields there*, but Russian settlers, piling into to these areas, will do sowing without irrigation, the so-called “rain-fed” sowings, depending only on atmospheric moisture, and thus will set up well.”⁶⁹

In an environment where resettlement was politically expedient, even necessary, most influential actors found a way to resolve the contradictions in the information they received about areas targeted for settler colonization. Neither the claims of the local colonized population nor environmental constraints could place a cap on peasant settlement.

Paradoxically, this increasing certainty about the correctness and bright prospects of settlement came about in the face of ever-greater indications (both in the Duma and popular press) that it was failing to live up to its proponents’ claims.⁷⁰ Opposition to resettlement was centered on the findings of Count K. K. Pahlen, who traveled to Central Asia in 1908 and 1909 and was appalled by the waste and corruption he discovered among resettlement officials there.⁷¹ P. N. Miliukov, leader of the much-reduced Kadet fraction, argued that the abuses of power detailed in Pahlen’s report, and the predatory peasants for whom he claimed the land was seized, “[could] do nothing for Russian

⁶⁹ Maltusynov 998, speech of 7 December 1910, italics added. For a thorough analysis of the linkages between civilizational hierarchies, colonial politics, and narratives about the colonial environment, in a context (Algeria under French rule) that technocrats within the Resettlement Administration considered highly relevant to their work in Turkestan and the steppe, see Diana K. Davis, *Resurrecting the Granary of Rome: Environmental History and French Colonial Expansion in North Africa* (Athens, OH: Ohio UP, 2007), especially Chapters Four and Five.

⁷⁰ This evidence manifested itself most notably in the masses of resettled peasants who returned to European Russia and Ukraine in the early 1910s. According to one source, 60% of peasant migrants returned to their original homes in 1911 alone; see Treadgold 187, citing Lenin. This claim was made in the context of Lenin’s strong criticism of the government’s resettlement policy and should be regarded cautiously, but seems unlikely to have been completely manufactured.

⁷¹ K. K. Pahlen, *Otchet po revizii Turkestanskogo kraia, proizvedennoi po Vysochaishemu poveleniiu senatorom K. K. Palenom* (St. Petersburg: Senatskaia tipografiia, 1909-1910). Portions of this report are available in English translation as K. K. Pahlen, *Mission to Turkestan: Being the Memoirs of Count K. K. Pahlen, 1908-1909*, trans. N. J. Couriss (New York: Oxford UP, 1964).

national interests, but discredit the name of Russians.”⁷² Although there remained some concern among members of the opposition about the reliability of the information on which plans for settlement were founded, resettlement by this time had already been carried out.⁷³ Rather, criticism stemming from the Pahlen report focused on the errors of settlement to which erroneous information had already led. Illegal land seizures, necessary for the allotment of land to settlers who arrived in numbers the most optimistic proponents of settlement had encouraged, led, according to Pahlen and other eyewitnesses, to inter-ethnic conflict; meanwhile, Miliukov argued that this violated the core principle backing Russia’s success in Central Asia, the establishment of good relations with the local population.⁷⁴ Ill-informed resettlement, it was further claimed, also harmed settlers, whose interests had been sacrificed in the name of preserving the land holdings of rural power-brokers. Thus in 1908, a Kadet deputy repeated *Voprosy kolonizatsii*’s claims of a potential agrarian crisis in Akmolinsk and Turgai oblasts; the oppositional press derided the Resettlement Administration’s claims of prosperous, well-organized settlers as inauthentic and exaggerated.⁷⁵ If the principle of resettlement was acceptable to many during the parliamentary era, the Resettlement Administration was frequently criticized for working incautiously, or arbitrarily, in practice. Both critiques pointed to the misuse (or ignoring) of information intended to support and extend peasant

⁷² Maltusynov 996, speech of 7 December 1910. Such views were very much in agreement with the patriotic anti-chauvinism that Melissa Kirschke Stockdale attributes to Miliukov in *Paul Miliukov and the Quest for a Liberal Russia, 1880-1918* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell UP, 1996).

⁷³ Maltusynov 1095, speech of the Moscow Kadet deputy D. I. Shchepkin, arguing that no member of the Duma knew enough about conditions in Turkestan to unreservedly endorse settlement there, 18 June 1913.

⁷⁴ Maltusynov 996. Glinka, responding to rumors of inter-ethnic conflict emerging before the Pahlen report, roundly rejected such claims as exaggerated and irrelevant (Maltusynov 849, 29 March 1908).

⁷⁵ Maltusynov 840-41, speech of 29 March 1908; for popular criticism of the Resettlement Administration see Judith Pallot, “The Stolypin Land Reform as ‘Administrative Utopia’: Images of Peasantry in Nineteenth-Century Russia,” Madhavan K. Palat, ed., *Social Identities in Revolutionary Russia* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2001) 126-27.

movement to Central Asia and the steppe. Indeed, GUZiZ rejected the Pahlen report, a decision that would later have negative consequences. Information favoring peasant resettlement done *somehow* triumphed over data suggesting the need for a limited and cautious implementation of settler colonialism.

After Stolypin's "wager on the strong," but before the implementation of the Third of June electoral system, Prince Sviatopolk-Mirskii, a proponent of resettlement, argued that for an economic reform to be considered acceptable, it had to serve either the interests of the entire state or "the interests of some separate group of people, sufficiently numerous or prominent, so as to play a serious role in the economic life of the state."⁷⁶ Sviatopolk-Mirskii was referring to the peasantry's role in Russia's economic development, but the reverse of his statement is also telling; economic reform could be acceptable even if it ran contrary to the interests of a group of people not considered to play, for whatever reason, a serious role in the economic life of the state. Hence the absence of Kazakhs, pastoralist or sedentary, from the calculations of resettlement's most fervent proponents about the colonizing capacity of the steppe provinces – people leading a disordered, primitive, and unproductive economy were not thought to be important enough to the economic interests of the state to have their interests taken into account. Dissenting voices pointed to the illegality of expropriating the Kazakhs (its desirability from an economic standpoint notwithstanding) and to uncertainty about the suitability of Central Asian environments for cultivation on the scale necessary for resettlement to succeed. Crucially, after the dissolution of the Second Duma, Kazakhs were legally barred from numbering among these dissenters on the floor of parliament. Resettlement assumed that the Kazakh population of the Russian Empire was of no great economic

⁷⁶ Maltusynov 633, speech of 19 March 1907.

significance; the Third of June electoral system assumed that it was of no political significance. This latter perception was shaped, just as the expansion of resettlement was, by what imperial Russian politicians and administrators knew – or thought they knew – about the steppe and its inhabitants.

Ethnography, Chauvinism, and Political Representation

Indeed, during the first years of the 20th century, the Russian Empire's former uncertainty about Kazakhs' intellectual capacity and political loyalty swung definitively, at the highest administrative and political levels, towards a perspective viewing them as fanatical and primitive. Such views found their basis in a wide range of sources, not all of them scholarly or bureaucratic; rather, these views drew their strength from the fact that narratives in scholarly-bureaucratic writing about Kazakhs often complemented, or did not wholly exclude, strongly negative ideas about Islam, "Asiatic races," or pastoralists (sometimes derided as *brodiachie*, or "wandering") available in more polemical literature. Further, while Kazakhs had not previously been widely thought to be "true Muslims," their incorporation into this category in the early 20th century permitted the application to them of a formerly distinct brand of knowledge-making pertaining to Islam. The outcomes of this shift were tangible and not to the Kazakhs' benefit; it facilitated their total exclusion from the Third and Fourth Dumas as well as the seizure of great quantities of land from pastoralists and sedentarists alike.⁷⁷ A system of representation that had previously been uneven tilted even more overwhelmingly in the favor of land-owning, Orthodox, ethnically Russian people after 1907, but some national

⁷⁷ It has been noted that the miniscule "Muslim fraction" in the Third and Fourth Dumas, comprised of a few deputies from the Caucasian provinces as well as Kazan' and Orenburg, attempted to represent Kazakhs' interests in these organizations. This is undoubtedly true, but still falls short of actual political representation, of which only the Governor-Generalships of Turkestan and the Steppe were deprived after 3 June 1907. See D. M. Usmanova, *Musul'manskie predstaviteli v Rossiiskom parlamente, 1906-1916* (Kazan': izd-vo. "Fan" Akademii nauk Respubliki Tatarstana, 2005) 5-6.

and confessional groups were better positioned than others within a fundamentally unequal system; Kazakhs and other Central Asian Muslims occupied, arguably, the bottom rung of this hierarchy, with no clear means of improving their position. The increasing administrative and economic integration of Central Asia and the steppe into the rest of the Russian Empire that, some have argued, characterized tsarist policy in the late-19th and early-20th centuries did not prevent them from being turned, unambiguously, into colonies in the political sense after the implementation of the 3rd of June system.⁷⁸ The choices that imperial Russian policy-makers made among previously available images of Kazakhs, in turn, played a fundamental role in the political (as well as the settler) colonization of Central Asia and the steppe.

Throughout the 19th century, Russian colonial administrators prioritized non-intervention in the religious affairs of their non-Orthodox subjects, including Muslims, a policy referred to in administrative circles as *ignorirovanie* (ignoring).⁷⁹ This changed in the aftermath of a rebellion that took place in May of 1898 in Andijan uezd, in the Fergana Valley of present-day Uzbekistan, led by a Sufi spiritual leader known as the Dukchi *ishan*. Armed with swords and knives, approximately 2,000 Muslims attacked a Russian garrison near Andijan and were repulsed after a short battle.⁸⁰ The uprising was widely interpreted as an Islamist movement, and as evidence of the failure of *ignorirovanie* with respect to Islam. The epitome of this viewpoint was a report produced by S. M. Dukhovskoi, appointed Governor-General of Turkestan two months

⁷⁸ For this argument see, for example, L. M. Dameshek and A. V. Remnev, eds. *Sibir' v sostave Rossiiskoi imperii* (Moscow: Novoe literaturnoe obozrenie, 2007) 243.

⁷⁹ This tradition dates, at least, to Catherine II's edict banning the conversion of non-Orthodox people in 1767. For an argument that the Russian Empire actively sponsored Muslim religious institutions, and that its Muslim subjects invested significant meaning in these institutions, see Robert Crews, *For Prophet and Tsar: Islam and Empire in Russia and Central Asia* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard UP, 2006).

⁸⁰ Hisao Komatsu, "The Andijan Uprising Reconsidered," Tsugitaka Sato, ed., *Muslim Societies: Historical and Comparative Perspectives* (London: Routledge, 2004) 29-61.

before the rebellion, entitled *Islam in Turkestan*. In it, Dukhovskoi argued that Islam, because of the influence of *shariat* on all aspects of Muslim life, made its practitioners fundamentally incompatible with – and potentially hostile to – representatives of all other faiths, most notably (because of their frequent interactions in Turkestan) people confessing Orthodoxy.⁸¹ He ascribed the weakness of Russian colonialism in Central Asia, as evidenced by the Andijan uprising, entirely to a government-wide failure to recognize this immutable difference:

“[In government circles] the Sart, Kazakh, Tajik, and Turkmen are considered to be spiritually equal to the Russian peasant of the inner guberniias. Asiatic flattery is accepted as clean money, and purchased devotion taken for fear before our power. Such an error is very often reflected in decisions concerning various presentations, coming from Turkestan, and causes the delay, sometimes even the complete refusal of the best-intended proposals of the local authorities.”⁸²

Muslims, in this telling, were rendered always potentially disloyal and dangerous to the state’s social and political order. Although a debate had raged throughout the 19th century about whether or not the Kazakhs were actually Muslims, the fact that Dukhovskoi’s report was sent not only to Nicholas II, but also to Baron M. A. Taube, Governor-General of the Steppe, and that responses to it were solicited from military governors of the steppe oblasts indicates strongly that Kazakhs were considered by some to fall into the same religious category as the sedentary Muslims of Turkestan.⁸³ The solutions proposed ranged from a blunt reminder that the population of Central Asia and the steppe, under local suzerainty, was “accustomed to respect rough force” to an attempt to reduce the influence of traditional Muslim institutions by expanding Russian governance, providing useful services (such as hospitals) and crowding out *mektebs* with

⁸¹ TsGA RK f. 64, op. 1, d. 5578, ll. 4-4ob.

⁸² *Ibid.*, l. 3ob.

⁸³ *Ibid.*, ll. 3 (report addressed to M. A. Taube), 16-16 ob. (report of military governor of Semipalatinsk oblast), 26 (report of military governor of Akmolinsk oblast).

more Russo-native schools.⁸⁴ Above all, the Minister of War, Sakharov, concluded, on the basis of Dukhovskoi's report, that all governmental organs needed to clarify that they would not tolerate "that the religion confessed by the natives follows political goals" – an ironic position in light of the preference given to the interests of Orthodox people in the Third and Fourth Dumas.⁸⁵ While "neither fear nor contempt dominated" imperial Russian views of Islam over the broad sweep of the 19th century, such contemptuous views were particularly prevalent at high administrative levels after the Andijan rebellion.⁸⁶

This anti-Islamic strain in Russian administrative discourse had tangible effects throughout the two decades between the Andijan rebellion and the collapse of the Romanov dynasty, both before and after the 3rd of June system disenfranchised many of the Empire's Muslims. Christian Noack has detailed the role of anti-Islamic stereotypes in the fabrication by the *gendarmierie* of Kazan' of anti-governmental conspiracies allegedly taking root among the city's Tatar population during the Revolution of 1905, although this population was, in the main, distinguished by its loyalty; he goes on to note that such accusations ultimately worsened Russo-Muslim relations, creating the very separatism they feared.⁸⁷ A similar phenomenon occurred in Turkestan and the steppe oblasts. For example, in 1905, rumors began to circulate in Russian administrative

⁸⁴ Ibid., 9 and 11.

⁸⁵ Ibid., ll. 32 ob.-33, dated 16 May 1900. For the prioritization of Orthodoxy in the last two Dumas see, i.e., the speech by N. E. Markov of 18 June 1913, where he argues: "Gentlemen, the truth is that in the Russian state the Russian people, and not any other, should stand in the first place... The Russian state... was established not by Kazakhs, Sarts, Catholics or foreigners, but by the Russian Orthodox people" (Maltusynov 1097-98).

⁸⁶ David Schimmelpenninck van der Oye, *Russian Orientalism: Asia in the Russian Mind from Peter the Great to the Emigration* (New Haven, CT: Yale UP, 2010) 238-39.

⁸⁷ Christian Noack, "Retroactively Revolting: Kazan Tatar 'Conspiracies' During the 1905 Revolution," Jonathan D. Smele and Anthony Heywood, eds., *The Russian Revolution of 1905: Centenary Perspectives* (New York: Routledge, 2005) 119-136.

circles about Kazakhs' desire to present a petition directly to Nicholas II, an effort organized, allegedly, by Alikhan Bokeikhanov.⁸⁸ This petition did exist, but its content was moderate relative to the irredentist fears of some colonial administrators, asking not for full autonomy but for the right of equal representation in the Duma: "What serious reasons can there be, not sinning against elementary justice and truth, to make of the Kazakh population, six million strong, a special, illegal group, without rights?"⁸⁹ However, the military governor of Semipalatinsk oblast, Galkin, with the agreement of the Governor-General of the Steppe, declared the petition impermissible on the grounds that "it is impossible to be sure that among the Kazakhs there are not people with evil intentions, willing to, for the sake of personal profits, call forth disorders in the steppe on the basis of religious fanaticism."⁹⁰ In the steppe too, then, the Islamophobic lens through which some administrators viewed their subjects closed off the possibility of working within the Empire's political system to subalterns who were very interested in doing so. Participation in this petition's compilation was also a contributing factor in the 1909 arrest and detention of Akhmet Baitursynov for "anti-governmental activity," although Baitursynov too "supported the efforts of other Kazakhs to attain political influence in the Duma," rather than separatism or pan-Islamism.⁹¹ Confessional politics and stereotypes meant that, for some administrators, Kazakhs and other Muslims could

⁸⁸ TsGA RK f. 64, op. 1, d. 5658, ll. 24 ob.-25, report of the uezd nachalnik of Karkaralinsk uezd to the Governor-General of the Steppe, N. N. Sukhotin, 21 August 1905.

⁸⁹ Ibid., ll. 10-10 ob., undated petition, probably mid-1905.

⁹⁰ Ibid., ll. 1 ob. (Galkin) and 8 (Sukhotin).

⁹¹ TsGA RK f. 64, op. 1, d. 5832, ll 61-61 ob., excerpt from the Semipalatinsk newspaper *Sovremennoe slovo*, 19 November 1909. Title of the file is "O vyselenii i vospreshchenii zhitelstva v Stepnom krae kazakham Baitursynovu Akhmetu, Raimbekovu i drugim za protivopravitelstvennyye deistviia." On Baitursynov see Steven Sabol, *Russian Colonization and the Genesis of Kazak National Consciousness* (New York: Palgrave MacMillan, 2003) 97.

never definitively prove their loyalty or their desire to become a part of the political system of the Empire.^{92,93}

Under a suspicious administrative gaze, though, not all of the Russian Empire's Muslims were considered to be equally threatening, or equally unworthy of political representation. To understand the uniquely low position that Kazakhs and other Central Asian Muslims occupied on the Russian Empire's hierarchy of *inorodtsy*, it is also necessary to consider the negative traits ascribed to pastoralist lifeways in imperial Russian scholarly and administrative discourse. Pastoralism, in this context, was considered much worse than a highly inefficient way to use natural resources, although it certainly was that as well.⁹⁴ Rather, pastoralism made its practitioners ungovernable, interfering with the development of any kind of civil order among them, while facilitating the abuse of the vast majority of the population by a few influential magnates (*bais*). On the difficulty of governing pastoralists, P. P. Rumiantsev cited Levshin extensively in an official GUZiZ publication in 1910, noting that the Russian government was long obligated to struggle against the Kazakhs theoretically subject to it in order to protect its border. He further argued that mobility prevented the Kazakhs even from advancing through the feudal stage of history, since "a pastoral nomad, who freely wanders around the boundless, deserted steppes, cannot be fastened to one place. And without such

⁹² In tracking the connections between discourse about the Other in Russian administrative circles and political outcomes, this discussion parallels the argument in David Schimmelpenninck van der Oye, *Toward the Rising Sun: Russian Ideologies of Empire and the Path to War with Japan* (DeKalb, IL: Northern Illinois UP, 2001).

⁹³ Such paranoia took on ludicrous proportions during World War I when, since the Ottoman Empire numbered among Russia's enemies, the Russian Empire's Turkic Muslim population came under great suspicion. See TsGA RK f. 15, op. 1, d. 357, sv. 17, "Delo o dvizhenii sredi musul'manskogo naseleniia v svyazi s pervoi imperialisticheskoi voinoi," where the uezd nachalnik of Pavlodar uezd alleges that the apparent patriotism of the Kazakh population under his authority is a sham meant to conceal its true sympathies for the Sublime Porte: "In the sincerity of their elevated patriotic feeling I, on the basis of my observations over the course of 17 years of police service, do not believe" (l. 13, 5 November 1914).

⁹⁴ See Chapter 5 of this dissertation for much more on this issue.

fastening it is not possible to have any sort of firm power over him.”⁹⁵ Mobility and insufficient civil development were thus, for some, inextricably linked. Even Shkapskii, the advocate of gradual resettlement, connected pastoralism with the exploitation of ordinary people by sultans and *manaps* because of the indefiniteness of land claims he associated with it.⁹⁶ This meant a connection not only between mobility and difficult governance, but between mobility and despotism.⁹⁷ While this left open the possibility that Kazakhs and other mobile pastoralists could be somehow “promoted” by settling on the land – a trend which many observers had noted – in practice the incredibly slow pace at which they were allotted farmland meant that this avenue was closed to most.⁹⁸ Meanwhile, *Aziatskaia Rossiia*, the closest thing to an official governmental line concerning the population of colonized regions, described the “idleness” of pastoralist men, derided Kazakhs’ belief in the power of sorcerers (*baksy*), and emphasized that “the Kazakh stands on a low level of development,” with little indication that this would change in the future.⁹⁹ In some administrative circles of early-20th century Russia, to be a Muslim was damning enough; to be a Muslim pastoralist was to be doubly ungovernable.

These two factors, Islamophobia and a widespread belief in pastoralist primitivism, explain why the new electoral system decreed on June 3rd, 1907 turned out as it did. Of course, this electoral system excluded more people than just Central Asian

⁹⁵ P. P. Rumiantsev, *Kirgizskii narod v proshlom i nastoiashchem* (St. Petersburg: Pereselencheskoe upravlenie Glavnogo upravleniia zemleustroistva i zemledeliia, 1910) 28, 19.

⁹⁶ Shkapskii, “Pereselentsy-samovol’tsy,” 44.

⁹⁷ This argument was repeated on the floor of the Third Duma, where Tregubov, a proponent of settlement, argued that peasant settlement offered most Kazakhs the opportunity to be liberated from the oppression (*gnet*) of wealthy pastoralists (Maltusynov 929, undated discussion of the Resettlement Administration’s budget for 1910).

⁹⁸ For the connection between sedentarization and the end of despotism, see Tregubov’s speech, *op. cit.*, and Khvorostanskii 80. On the slowness of land allotment for sedentarizing Kazakhs see, for example, TsGA RK f. 19, op. 1, d. 180, sv. 29, l. 43, “Prosheniia kazakhov o zhelanii pereiti v osedlost,” where a group of Kazakhs are denied immediate allotment on request owing to the lack of land surveyors to measure a section for them (3 May 1911).

⁹⁹ *Aziatskaia Rossiia*, t. 1, 159-63.

Muslims; it drastically increased the property-holding qualification for voting, and women were no more able to cast votes than they had previously been.¹⁰⁰ Nor had the previous system of selecting Duma deputies been entirely fair to the Muslim population of Turkestan and the steppe; the requirement that *inorodtsy* could only participate in elective assemblies in their own volosts effectively disenfranchised the Muslim population of Central Asian cities (as well as anyone who had left their volost for education or service), while the requirement that all delegates to elective assemblies be able to speak Russian severely constrained, and sometimes negated, election results in many areas.¹⁰¹ Still, the 3rd of June system was unique in the extent to which it singled out Turkestan and the steppe for exclusion from the body politic of the empire – these were the only two categories beyond women and “wandering” (*brodiachie*) non-Russians categorically denied the franchise.¹⁰² Nicholas II’s “Manifesto” dissolving the Second Duma and announcing new procedures for future elections, although it stressed that future Dumas should be “Russian in spirit,” made provisions for at least the token representation of national minority groups; the exception was “those border areas of the state where the population has not attained an adequate level of citizenship, [where] elections to the State Duma must temporarily be brought to an end.”¹⁰³ The few Muslim

¹⁰⁰ *Vysochaishe utverzhdennoe 3 iunia 1907 g. Polozhenie o vyborakh v Gosudarstvennuiu Dumu* (St. Petersburg: Senatskaia tipografiia, 1907) 3, 20.

¹⁰¹ See TsGA RK f. 44, op. 1, d. 2662, sv. 245, ll. 144-144 ob., “Po vyboram v Gosudarstvennuiu Dumu, t. 2,” for a claim by the military governor of Semirech’e oblast (undated, but probably early February 1907) that the choices of twelve volost assemblies in Pishpek uezd had been invalidated because of the inability of the chosen candidate to speak Russian; see also TsGA RK f. 44, op. 1, d. 2527, sv. 233, “Po telegramme Turkestanskogo general-gubernatora o naznachenii novykh vyborov v Gosudarstvennuiu Dumu,” for complaints by city-dwelling Muslim *inorodtsy* that they are deprived of electoral rights.

¹⁰² *Polozhenie o vyborakh*, 3. Other provinces of the empire with a partially Muslim population, such as Orenburg, Kazan’, and Ufa, were permitted to have a limited number of deputies. It was not Islamophobia alone, but its combination with discourses concerning civilization (or its absence) that accounted for the exclusion of Central Asia and the steppe from the Third and Fourth Dumas.

¹⁰³ *Polnoe sobranie zakonov Rossiiskoi imperii. Sobranie tretie*, vol. XXVII, no. 29240 (St. Petersburg: various publishers, 1885-1916).

deputies (there were only eight in the so-called “Muslim fraction,” out of 465 total deputies) were thus drawn from Kazan’, Ufa, and Baku guberniias, where the predominantly sedentary Muslim population had apparently achieved a level of citizenship adequate for political representation, albeit unequal.¹⁰⁴ Throughout the 19th century, Tatars and Caucasian Muslims had been considered implacable religious fanatics, the banes of Russian imperialism, but this was not sufficient to see them wholly excluded from political representation. Rather, what imperial Russian policymakers thought they knew about Central Asian Islam, combined with what they thought they knew about pastoralist lifeways, combined to form a uniquely strong case for the sole exclusion of Kazakhs and other Muslim ethnic groups of Central Asia from the Duma.

The immediate ramifications of the exclusion of Central Asian deputies on the floor of the Third and Fourth Dumas were significant. For opponents of resettlement to Turkestan and the steppe, especially members of the Muslim fraction, the absence of representatives of areas targeted for settlement constituted a serious error, without resolving which the topic could not be seriously and properly discussed, as this exchange of March 1908 demonstrates:

“Khas-Mamedov: Thus, in the name of justice, humanitarianism, and the eternal rights of the Kazakh population to land and its use, the settler movement to Kirgizia should be quickly ceased.
Berezovskii: That will never happen.
Khas-Mamedov: It is easy for you to say, deciding the fate of the Kazakh population, which is even deprived of representation in the Duma.”¹⁰⁵

¹⁰⁴ Maltusynov 773-85 provides convenient lists of members of the Third Duma, broken down by province and political alignment.

¹⁰⁵ Maltusynov 832-33, 29 March 1908. Khas-Mamedov was a member of the Muslim fraction, representing the Caucasian provinces of Baku, Elisavetpol’, and Erevan; Berezovskii was a far-right deputy from Volyn province.

The majority of the Duma's deputies, however, as Berezovskii's interjection indicates, did not believe the absence of Kazakhs and other Central Asian Muslims to be a serious issue. One deputy went so far as to sarcastically complain that representatives of the Muslim fraction spoke on behalf of an "apocryphal Kirgizia...If we go along this path, why not complain that the Land of Gypsies (*Tsyganiia*)...[is] not given the right of representation in the State Duma?"¹⁰⁶ Wandering, fanatical, and uncivilized, the Kazakhs, for most in the last two Dumas (and certainly in the Council of Ministers) did not need to be collectively taken into account in discussions of questions directly concerning them; their interests were firmly subordinate to those of the state.¹⁰⁷ As N. E. Markov might have put it, they were simply not important enough. Complaints about the absence of Central Asian deputies when deciding issues concerning resettlement were raised again in the Fourth Duma, and were similarly inconsequential to budgetary and legal decisions favoring Orthodox, Slavic settlers.¹⁰⁸ It is doubtful that the presence of a few additional Central Asian deputies would have changed this, in light of the other electoral changes that the 3rd of June system entailed; even the liberal deputies who remained in the Duma were more concerned about the illegality of, and misconduct during, resettlement than the practice itself. The expropriation of land without even token representation of those from whom it was taken, however, would take on tremendous symbolic significance for Kazakh publicists and intellectuals as they strove

¹⁰⁶ Maltusynov 843, speech of P. A. Nekliudov (Octobrist, Kharkov province), 29 March 1908.

¹⁰⁷ This goes beyond the easily identifiable rise of Russian-chauvinist attitudes in the last two Dumas; Liisa Malkki's idea of a "sedentarist metaphysics," describing the connection, for many, between rootedness in the soil and nationhood, is a useful tool for understanding why, for Nekliudov, "Kirgizia" was apocryphal; a mobile pastoralist people could make no claims to particular interests in a piece of land. See Malkki, "National Geographic: The Rooting of Peoples and the Territorialization of National Identity among Scholars and Refugees," *Cultural Anthropology* 7.1 (Feb. 1992): 22-44.

¹⁰⁸ Such protests in the Fourth Duma (see, i.e., Maltusynov 1099 and 1100) did not prevent the passage of a measure granting the right to use lands irrigated at the Treasury's expense in the Hungry Steppe (southern Akmolinsk oblast, previously considered impossible to settle) only to Orthodox people.

to understand their standing within (or outside of) the Russian Empire during its final decade.

Contradictions were as much a part of what imperial Russian policymakers knew about the population of Central Asia and the steppe as about the landscape of those regions. Although Kazakhs had frequently been considered, by some scholars and administrators, potentially loyal and civilizable subjects, there was never consensus in this respect, and the Andijon rebellion of 1898 confirmed, for some, the threat that Islam posed to the Russian Empire. Longstanding ideas about the inefficiency and backwardness of pastoralist lifeways, further, became increasingly prominent in the early 20th century. The convergence of these two lines of thinking accounts for the particular exclusion of Kazakhs and other Muslim ethnic groups of Central Asia from political representation under the 3rd of June system, which was also the period of greatest state support of peasant resettlement to Turkestan and the steppe. But the Russo-Kazakh schools that had been previously established in these areas, whether out of a conviction that Kazakhs could be civilized or fear that Kazakhs would, lacking an alternative, turn to Islamic educational institutions and become radicalized, created a group of bilingual Kazakhs who were able to protest against their disenfranchisement and expropriation. Their responses to the electoral and agrarian policies emerging from St. Petersburg were neither uniform nor inevitably nationalist, but the recalcitrance of the imperial Russian state to allow them to fully participate in its economic and political life pushed the situation, gradually, in a volatile direction.

Which Sedentarism? Kazakh Responses to Peasant Resettlement

Publicistic responses to the policy of peasant resettlement were mainly the province of a group of young, bilingual Kazakhs, many of whom had served in the colonial administration at some level, and all of whom had first been educated in the Russo-native schools before, in many cases, advancing to higher educational institutions. Among these figures, part scholar and part polemicist, Alikhan Bokeikhanov advanced from a Russo-Kazakh school near Karkaralinsk to the Omsk Technical School; Akhmet Baitursynov completed a Russo-Kazakh school established by Altynsarin in Turgai before becoming a teacher himself; Mirzhaqyp Dulatov, like Baitursynov, studied pedagogy at a Russo-Kazakh school; and Mukhammedzhan Tynyshpaev, after study at the male gymnasium in Vernyi, studied at the Imperial Railroad Institute in St. Petersburg.¹⁰⁹ In both metropolitan and steppe-based periodicals, as well as through all available official channels, these and other, more obscure figures expressed a bewildering range of ideas about what course resettlement should take, and what its intensification would mean for the future of the steppe. Indeed, there were actually two different land questions for Kazakhs during the Russian Empire's parliamentary era, one externally directed, concerning the cessation or slowing of resettlement, the other among themselves about how Kazakhs should respond to the *fait accompli* of Slavic migration to the steppe. Although Kazakh publicists shared metropolitan assumptions about the superiority of sedentarism as an economic and cultural formation, they deployed this rhetoric in defense of, rather than opposition to, the immediate economic interests of Kazakh pastoralists. Moreover, they did not agree among themselves about when Kazakhs ought to become

¹⁰⁹ On Bokeikhanov see Sabol 74; on Baitursynov see Sabol 95; on Dulatov see Z. Akhmetov, "Zhanga ideialar zharysy," Kh. Toikenov, ed., *Mirzhaqyp Dulatuly: shygharmalary* (Almaty: "Ghylym," 1996) 3-18; on Tynyshpaev see the documents pertaining to his election to the Duma, TsGA RK f. 44, op. 1, d. 2663, ll, 185-185 ob.

sedentary, or what a sedentary Kazakh economy would look like, and these internal debates were informed by competing ideas about the steppe environment and civilizational progress. Ethnic or confessional belonging did not predetermine subaltern responses to the “land question,” but peasant resettlement became a focal point for both self-criticism and criticism of colonial authorities.

The majority of metropole-directed Kazakh commentary about resettlement took place on metropolitan terms, which is unsurprising when considering the realities of imperial power relationships during the early 20th century, as well as the relatively elevated position of such figures as Bokeikhanov and Tynyshpaev in the imperial Russian technocracy. However, such commentary, predominantly in Russian, critiqued resettlement for its failure precisely in the terms it had set for itself. Bokeikhanov, at various times, identified two different factors motivating the state-organized peasant colonization of the steppe. He wrote of the initial attempt to regulate settlement as the result of Alexander II’s concern “about the creation in the [Kazakh] *krai* of a peaceful, cultivating element, which would render a beneficial influence on the vanquished nomads.”¹¹⁰ In the parliamentary era, he further acknowledged that resettlement had become important to the state’s decision of the agrarian question in European Russia, allotting land on the steppe to indigent *muzhiks*.¹¹¹ On both counts, he claimed, the Resettlement Administration had failed. Moving settlers around arbitrarily, in a manner he described as “chancery colonization,” the Resettlement Administration had not taken

¹¹⁰ R. N. Nurgaliev, glav. red., *Alikhan Bokeikhan: tangdamaly/izbrannoe* (Almaty: Qazaq entsiklopediiasy, 1995) 53. Article title: “Istoricheskie sud’by Kirgizskogo kraia i kul’turnye ego uspekhi,” originally published in 1903 as part of volume 17 of the series *Rossia: Polnoe geograficheskoe opisaniie nashogo otechestva*.

¹¹¹ See Nurgaliev 291, “Doloi s dorogi: idet ovtsevod!” for criticism that surplus land suitable for agriculture on the steppes north of Semipalatinsk was given to Russian sheep-keepers, although it “should have been given to settler-farmers, which is acknowledged by the [Resettlement] administration.”

proper care to secure their well-being, making them “proletarians” hardly better than the irregular colonizers who had preceded them.¹¹² The best lands, further, did not always appear to enter the possession even of peasant settlers; rather, he asked why, in 1913, a requirement that only Orthodox people could receive steppe allotments had been introduced if helping the landless poor was the government’s only concern, and demanded an investigation into rumors that a certain “Baron Serket” had seized 15,000 desiatinas of good land, intended for peasant settlement, for his personal use.¹¹³ Even allowing rhetorically that the priorities of resettlement’s advocates were permissible – and as we will soon see, few Kazakh commentators considered such priorities to be legitimate – the Resettlement Administration had comprehensively failed, in Bokeikhanov’s view, to carry them out.

Some Kazakh commentators also shared the technical rhetoric of the Resettlement Administration, engaging with it on the level of surpluses and land norms, but using this rhetoric to criticize its activities. Tynyshpaev expressed concerns in this respect even during the revolution of 1905 (and, hence, before the apogee of the Resettlement Administration’s influence), in a letter to the Council of Ministers in June of that year. Citing the “dubious quality” of the information that had served as the basis for previous peasant settlement, and the “greater applicability (*prigodnost*)” of the data that years of Kazakh lived experience represented, he argued that “lands considered to be surplus and necessary for the settlers should be defined by societies of the Kazakhs themselves, and

¹¹² Nurgaliev 273, “Krizis kantseliarskogo pereselenia,” originally published under the pseudonym “Statistik” in *Sibirskie voprosy* (1910). In another article of 1908, Bokeikhanov had decried the “hopeless battle with nature” into which the Resettlement Administration had apparently cast some settlers (Nurgaliev 241).

¹¹³ Nurgaliev 300, “Tortinshi дума ham Qazaq”; U. Subkhanberdina, sost., *Qazaq: Alash azamattarynyng rukhyna baghyshталady* (Almaty: Qazaq entsiklopediiasy, 1998) 300. This article, entitled “Zapros,” appeared in 1916 under Bokeikhanov’s most-used pseudonym, “Qyr balasy” (son of the steppe).

allotted with their agreement from the area of summer pastures only.”¹¹⁴ Removing most lands suited for agriculture from the colonizing fund, Tynyshpaev argued for both a substantial reduction of the amount of “surplus” land on the steppe and a major shift in administrative and informational authority alike. Bokeikhanov, however, a trained statistician who had worked with the Shcherbina Expedition, was the most vocal Kazakh activist with respect to land norms. In his view, inaccurate assessments of the suitability of the steppe biome for agriculture, as well as inaccurate measurements of the land within its borders, had led to the projection of hopes for resettlement that could never be realized.¹¹⁵ He raged, for example, that the dry steppes of Akmolinsk oblast “will not grow a single kernel of grain,” and alleged that an agronomist within the Resettlement Administration who presented research asserting the same to his superiors was fired “since his views were not applicable to the agrarian views of the central government.”¹¹⁶ Even the estimates of the land area south of the 48th parallel – generally considered to be the least suited to human habitation – had been done carelessly, he claimed, without an instrumental survey, in advance of a proposal by Steppe Governor-General I. P. Nadarov to forcibly move Kazakhs from productive land in Ust-Kamenogorsk uezd to this

¹¹⁴ TsGA RK f. 380, op. 1, d. 1, ll. 135-136, dated 20 June 1905. This file, entitled “Raport Turkestanskomu General-gubernatoru komanduiushchego voiskami Turkestanskogo voennogo okruga Kuropatkina i drugie materialy po vosstanovleniiu kazakhov v 1916 g.,” is the only one in the personal *fond* of B. P. Trizna, a minor colonial administrator exiled for anti-governmental activities during the 1880s who later served as commissar of Syr-Darya oblast in 1917. It is a rich and seemingly random collection of documents pertaining to Central Asian autonomy movements and the early years of Soviet governance in Central Asia.

¹¹⁵ Imperial Russian administrators advanced similar claims; see the discussion of opposition in the Turkestan Governor-Generalship to S. N. Veletskii’s behavior in Chapter 5 of this work as well as the discussion in Pahlen 191-94.

¹¹⁶ Nurgaliev 224-25. Original article, “Russkie poseleniia v glubine Stepnogo kraia,” appeared in *Sibirskie voprosy* in 1908.

desolate area.¹¹⁷ Thus the data on which settlement was based had, according to Bokeikhanov, been massaged, and both he and Tynyshpaev questioned their utility for achieving the goals the colonial state claimed to pursue by resettlement. For Bokeikhanov, further, this careless assessment of the steppe's colonizing capacity was inextricably linked with his other chief complaint about resettlement – the often, allegedly, careless and abusive behavior of resettlement bureaucrats when creating land sections for peasant settlers:

“The eternal wish of the bureaucrats of the settler administration to cut off large sections [for settlement] and by this means increase the speed of work per unit of time is in conflict with the lack of suitable areas, embedded in the midst of huge steppes unsuitable for agriculture, as well as the lack of natural water sources with enough fresh water.”¹¹⁸

Resettlement officers were thus, in this view, both ideologically and professionally interested in producing numbers – settling as many people as possible, as quickly as possible – regardless of the physical constraints they faced.

However, these technical arguments, perhaps intended to be more palatable to metropolitan audiences, concealed a fundamental conflict between Kazakh commentators and their imperial Russian interlocutors of all political stripes. Maksudov's speech during the Third Duma, cited at the beginning of this chapter, elegantly summarizes this axiomatic disagreement. Bureaucrats of the Resettlement Administration considered the steppe and Turkestan to be state property in the fullest sense of the expression.

¹¹⁷ Nurgaliev 276. Original article, “Biurokraticheskaiia utopiia,” published in *Sibirskie voprosy* in 1908. Bokeikhanov sarcastically concluded that, if the Governor-General's mind was already made up, perhaps a detailed instrumental survey was unnecessary.

¹¹⁸ Nurgaliev 244. Original article, “Pereselencheskie nadely v Akmolinskoi oblasti,” published in *Sibirskie voprosy* in 1908. Reports of such misbehavior, including allegations of forcible resettlement, emerged in more widely-circulating metropolitan journals as well, but were roundly denied by resettlement officials. See the discussion of accusations of improprieties in a 1912 edition of *Russkoe slovo* at TsGA RK f. 33, op. 1, d. 40, sv. 1, “Doklad zaveduiushchego pereselencheskim delom v Syr'-Darinskoi raione o gazetnoi zametke v ‘Russkom slove.’”

Understood from this perspective, their actions become logical; if Kazakh interests in the land were seen as less substantial than the state's interest in relieving its agrarian crisis and increasing the economic productivity of the steppe, the state was within its rights to – indeed *had to* – take its own property back. Although Kazakh commentators were at pains to demonstrate that resettlement would not immediately enlighten the steppe and usher in a new era of economic efficiency, they also did not believe that the land was state property whatsoever. An anonymous 1914 article in the newspaper *Ai qap*, for example, was entitled “Topyraghymyz altyn” (“Our land is gold”).¹¹⁹ The use of the possessive here stood for a perspective wholly absent from metropolitan discussions of the land question. Tynyshpaev, writing to the Council of Ministers, expressed this view while still an engineering student in St. Petersburg:

“We the Kazakhs from time immemorial have owned our property – our land – and voluntarily, without bloodshed, accepted Russian tribute not for deprivation of our best lands and not to silently bear offenses and violence, but for the establishment among us of tranquility and peace and defense from oppression; therefore justice demands that winter camps, fields, mowing lands would be completely excluded from the number of regions able to be cut off for the benefit of the arriving population.”¹²⁰

Bokeikhanov, similarly, cast the period between 1909 and 1914 as an era during which “eight million desiatinas of our Kazakh land (*bizding qazaq zherinen*) was taken.”¹²¹ Critiques of the peasant as a colonizer, then, or the amount of land actually present in the Empire's colonizing fund, then, barely papered over the fact that Kazakhs ascribed as little legitimacy to the Resettlement Administration's claims to the steppe as it did to theirs.

¹¹⁹ U. Subkhanberdina, sost., *Aiqap* (Almaty: Qazaq entsiklopediiasy, 1995) 197.

¹²⁰ TsGA RK f. 380, op. 1, d. 1, l. 135.

¹²¹ Subkhanberdina, *Qazaq*, 119. Article published during 1914, entitled “On tort toghyz bola ma?” (Will '14 be like '09?). “Qazaq” (Kazakh) was a category only available in the Kazakh language, at this time; the Russian equivalent, *kazakh*, did not come into common use until the early Soviet era. Hence for the early 20th century Kazakh intelligentsia, “qazaq” (Kaz.) and “kirgiz” (Rus.) refer to the same ethnic group.

Internally, however, Kazakh intellectuals appear to have taken metropolitan discussions of cultural and economic primitivism to heart. In a 1910 letter to Bokeikhanov, the lawyer and deputy of the Second Duma (elected from the Kazakh population of Ural'sk oblast) B. B. Karataev cited the Kazakh people's "ignorance and nomadic lack of culture" as a threat to its existence equal to that presented by resettlement bureaucrats.¹²² Indeed, despite significant fragmentation among Kazakh publicists with respect to the land question, there was broad consensus that some form of sedentarism would have to take the place of pastoralism. Bokeikhanov argued that Slavs had been able to move into the steppe and Central Asia with little opposition because "[their] culture was higher than that of the rulers of the Kazakh *krai* at that time"; Baitursynov, in an early issue of *Ai qap*, one of two major journals founded by the Kazakh intelligentsia (the other was *Qazaq*, established later), also claimed that it was no longer sensible for Kazakhs to use as much land as pastoralism required.¹²³ Ideas about social evolutionism had penetrated the Kazakh intelligentsia so deeply that no influential commentator endorsed the continuing viability of pastoralism, despite the claims of some Soviet historians.¹²⁴ This did not mean, however, that there was consensus about which *kind* of sedentarism best suited the Kazakhs and their land; rather, two more or less distinct groups formed, one around the journal *Ai-qap*, favoring the wholesale adoption of agriculture, the other around the journal *Qazaq*, arguing instead for sedentary, intensified,

¹²² Qoigeldiev 88-89, letter dated 30 September 1910. Short biographical information on Karataev is at Maltusynov 759.

¹²³ Nurgaliev 51; Subkhanberdina, *Aiqap*, 60-61 (article from 1911, entitled "Taghy da zher zhainan").

¹²⁴ By emphasizing the influence of social evolutionism on Kazakh discourses surrounding sedentarism, I am somewhat disagreeing with Peter Rottier, who instead frames sedentarization as a pragmatic choice by a small group of intellectuals. See Rottier, "The Kazakness of Sedentarization: Promoting Progress as Tradition in Response to the Land Problem," *Central Asian Survey* 22.1 (March 2003), 67-81. My comment on Soviet scholarship on the land question in Kazakh periodicals is also drawn from Rottier (74-75).

and commercially-oriented animal husbandry.¹²⁵ This polemic was based on contradictory understandings of both the relationship between the lifeways and civilizational level of a people and the suitability of Kazakh land for agriculture.

Kazakh proponents of agriculture, in general, did not explicitly mention the environmental characteristics of the region in which they proposed it, implying that this question was not significant for them. In 1911, an anonymous author cited the successes of Kazakhs in occupations other than pastoralism as part of an exhortation to take up agriculture:

“Thus if we look at the Kazakhs living near Aq-meshit, Turkistan, Tashkent, Samarqand, and Kokand, who have become the owners of huge gardens, and have started to raise rice and cotton, we see Kazakhs who are experiencing their best times. Near Astrakhan, near the sea, Kazakhs are living well...by fishing.”¹²⁶

Areas of Turkestan and the steppe oblasts that would become central to the arguments of this position’s opponents (such as, for example, the waterless Hungry Steppe in the southern part of Akmolinsk oblast) are conspicuous by their absence from this argument. Proponents of this position, rather, directed their efforts towards disassociating Kazakhs and pastoralism. The anonymous author cited above also noted that many Kazakhs had successfully taken up commerce, skilled trades, and government duties. Similarly, a later pseudonymous commentator (under the pen name “*Qazaqemes*” – “not a Kazakh”) argued that Kazakhs had always been characterized by economic diversity, with some sowing, some raising livestock, some migrating, some not.¹²⁷ Becoming sedentary and cultivating grain, then, would not necessarily be alien to

¹²⁵ Rottier 78; see also Gulnar Kendirbai, “We are children of Alash...” *Central Asian Survey* 18.1 (March 1999): 5-37. The distinction between these journals proved somewhat fluid in practice.

¹²⁶ Subkhanberdina, *Aiqap*, 82. The title of this article is a Kazakh proverb: “Zamanyng tulki bolsa, tazy bolyp qu.” The city of Turkistan, in present-day southern Kazakhstan, should not be confused with Turkestan as a geographical formation.

¹²⁷ *Ibid.*, 172. Article title: “Qazaqqa alalyq qaidan keldi.”

Kazakhs' historical experience. The benefits to be gained from such an immediate transition, further, were described as vast. Moving to agriculture, Kazakhs would become cultured (*onerli*) people, "worthy of being citizens of great Russia"; just to sedentarize was not enough, in this view, to overcome the ignorance that, for most commentators, lay at the root of Kazakhs' problems.¹²⁸ Rather, it was specifically agriculture that was the next stage of human development for proponents of this viewpoint, a stage towards which all Kazakhs needed to immediately strive.

Proponents of intensified, market-oriented animal husbandry attempted to vanquish all of these arguments about the steppe environment, the historical relationship between Kazakhs and agriculture, and the relationship between agriculture and civilizational development. At the core of this program was the idea that, while some sort of economic change was necessary, the steppe was unsuited for an immediate transition to agriculture, indeed permanently unsuited to it in some areas; Bokeikhanov, for example, writing in *Qazaq*, argued that while certain northern uezds (Kokshetau, Kostanai, and Aktobe) had the thick topsoil needed for agriculture, "a Kazakh settling on the 15 desiatina [agricultural] allotment in other areas cannot survive."¹²⁹ An anonymous article of 1914 in the same newspaper repeated the claim that the steppe was unsuitable for cultivation but further substantiated it, asserting that while "Culture is good...peoples who have achieved [it] did not achieve it by the forced sedentarization of resettlement bureaucrats but gradually achieved it, moving slowly, by properly contemplating the

¹²⁸ Ibid., 82. For the rhetoric of ignorance see, i.e., Baitursynov's 1911 article "Qazaq okpesi," where he argues that, because of laziness and ignorance, "We [Kazakhs] have no one to blame but ourselves" for the problems engendered by peasant resettlement (ibid., 47-49).

¹²⁹ Subkhanberdina, *Qazaq*, 46. Article title: "Tortinshi дума ham qazaq."

matter (*kenginen tolghanyp*).”¹³⁰ Agriculture without proper information, against the conditions dictated by the surrounding environment, in this view would sooner lead to the Kazakhs’ extinction than any sort of progress.¹³¹ The Kazakhs’ pastoral, stock-raising economy had formed in close connection with this environment, and there was, against the claims made in *Ai-qap*, no basis for thinking that they would be able to change this quickly, as an anonymous contributor to *Qazaq* wrote:

“The Kazakhs and the peasants are two different peoples (*zhurt*). The two of their positions, customs, ways of life (*rasim zholy*) and etc., and the economic forms they use, are different... Taking land like the *muzhik* [i.e., the 15 desiatina agricultural norm], it has become clear already for three years that we are not farmers like the *muzhik*. We cannot live without livestock.”¹³²

Nor were such commentators convinced that the connection between cultivation and cultural progress was absolute. Bokeikhanov cited the Arabic language as an example of the level of culture a stock-raising people could achieve, and Switzerland and Australia as countries combining animal husbandry and efficient economic organization; though the Bashkirs and Tatars had turned to agriculture before the Kazakhs, he further argued, they had not achieved any more than the latter.¹³³ Consideration of environmental factors and a skeptical attitude about agriculture’s superiority led most of *Qazaq*’s contributors to conclude, as an anonymous author put it, “Let the Kazakh who is currently able to survive by the plow take the sedentary norm [15 desiatinas]. The Kazakh who currently survives by stock raising must take the livestock raising norm [30

¹³⁰ Ibid., 85. Article title: “Zher zhmysyna din zhmysyn qystyrmalau.”

¹³¹ That economic change and environmental conditions were connected was axiomatic for proponents of intensified animal husbandry. See, i.e., the 1915 article “Sharualyq ozgerisi” (Subkhanberdina, *Qazaq*, 246) for an explicit claim that “It is indisputable that the position of the economy is closely tied with natural conditions.”

¹³² Ibid., 193. Article title: “Mal normasya ham qazaq polozheniesine qaitu.”

¹³³ Nurgaliev 303, “Zhaup khat,” originally in a 1915 issue of *Qazaq*.

desiatinas].”¹³⁴ Only this, for them, represented a suitable compromise between sedentarism’s assumed necessity and most Kazakhs’ immediate, practical requirements for survival.

Kazakh responses to the land question were not, however, exclusively reflected in the nascent journal culture of the steppe; there is ample material in the files of provincial chanceries and the Resettlement Administration to identify two distinct social reactions to resettlement. One of these, gleefully cited by resettlement officers as proof of the beneficial effects of peasant settlement, was to request the 15 desiatina sedentary allotment, often according to the formula “We wish to receive the peasant allotment, perform (*otbyvat*) equally with the peasants all administrative orders and also to render the troop duty.”¹³⁵ Whether this stemmed from sincere desire to do agriculture or a pragmatic choice to hold onto some land (since officials from the Resettlement Administration had made it clear that pastoralists would never be permanently granted the nomadic norm), it was a common reaction, and well-aligned with the intelligentsia’s views on the subject. Another social response, though, was less aligned with visions of orderly land allotment leading to economic intensification. The archives of the Resettlement Administration are filled with tens of reports of Kazakh opposition to the activities of resettlement bureaucrats. These actions were, in the main, prosaic, rather than constituting any kind of armed rebellion – a report of abuses that turned out to be false, theft of a surveyor’s horse, destruction of a measurement pole – but all constituted forms of everyday resistance, making the work of land surveyors difficult without

¹³⁴ Subkhanberdina, *Qazaq*, 95. Article title: “Qazaq ham zher maselesi.”

¹³⁵ TsGA RK f. 19, op. 1, d. 180, sv. 29, l. 1, 2 May 1910, petition of a group of Kazakhs of Lepsinsk uезд. Title of file: “Prosheniia kazakhov o zhelanii pereiti v osedlost’.”

attracting serious consequences from the colonial administration.¹³⁶ It is difficult to impute, from the sources available, any ideological motives to Kazakhs who acted in this fashion, but it is clear that for many, the presence of a surveyor on their pastures, to whatever purpose, was a source of antagonism from which they sought to extricate themselves. The aspirations of the Kazakh intelligentsia were not necessarily the aspirations of all Kazakhs, a tension that would grow sharper as resettlement progressed.

Trained in metropolitan schools and, often, having experienced service in imperial Russian institutions, the Kazakh intelligentsia of the early 20th century was willing to engage with the colonial state on its own terms in assessing settlement, employing the standards of the latter to demonstrate that resettlement, even from the perspective of raising the cultural and economic level of the steppe, or providing aid to struggling peasants, was a failure. Metropolitan assumptions also pervaded discussions of the land question created by resettlement among Kazakhs, none of whom endorsed the continuing, unchanged viability of mobile pastoralism as a form of economic organization, although stock-herding Kazakhs outside the nascent journal culture of the steppe appear to have disagreed with the intellectuals on this point. Despite some internal dispute, Kazakh intellectuals agreed that the land of the steppe was fundamentally theirs, and not state property, an intractable conflict with the designs of resettlement officers. Still more galling to them was the idea that land was expropriated without even token Kazakh representation in the Duma. The land question and its resolution, after 1907, became

¹³⁶ For examples of Kazakh resistance to resettlement bureaucrats see TsGA RK f. 19, op. 1, d. 185, sv. 30, “Delo o vystupelnii kazakhov Vernenskogo, Kopalskogo i Lepsinskogo uezdov protiv pereselencheskoi politiki” and TsGA RK f. 19, op. 1, d. 1410, sv. 147, “O vystuplenii kazakhov Zakuinskoi volosti Przheval'skogo uезда protiv pereselencheskoi politiki.” For use of the term “everyday resistance” see James C. Scott, *Weapons of the Weak: Everyday Forms of Peasant Resistance* (New Haven, CT: Yale UP, 1987).

deeply connected with Kazakhs' perceptions of and aspirations for their position within the colonial empire.

Autonomy, Subjecthood, and Ambivalence: Kazakhs and Political Representation

Foremost among the wishes of intellectual participants in the Revolution of 1905 was the creation of a State Duma, a representative legislative body for the empire, and Russian-educated Kazakh intellectuals, most of them sympathetic to the liberal Kadet party, were no exception to this rule. The 3rd of June electoral system, then, represented a significant blow to the aspirations of this group. It is striking, however, that even in the context of disenfranchisement on the part of the imperial Russian state, and a growing sense of cultural distinctiveness and desire for autonomy among Kazakh intellectuals, the aspirations of the Kazakh intelligentsia continued to consist, primarily, of hopes for cooperation with the colonial state and representation within those of its organs with the greatest influence on Kazakh life.¹³⁷ Whether as citizens of a multi-ethnic empire or subjects of the tsar, they framed their criticisms of governmental policies in terms that suggested a belief in the legitimacy of Russian governance on the steppe, indeed of its potential benefits for Kazakhs if properly done; the presence of such discussions not only in communication with representatives of the state, but also Kazakh-language journals, suggests that they were not simply calculated to achieve a favorable response from colonial administrators. The expression of ideas of political loyalty, even of patriotism, could be used instrumentally, in an attempt to shape the policies of the colonial state, but there was also a sincerity to Kazakh intellectuals' insistence on representation and

¹³⁷ This finding is consistent with the work of the leading post-Soviet scholar of Kazakh autonomism and the nationalist party Alash-Orda, Dina Amanzholova, who has argued that the Alash movement only became a truly nationalist movement in 1917, classifying it between 1905 and 1916 as an oppositional movement within the Kadet party. See D. A. Amanzholova, *Kazakhskii avtonomizm v Rossii: istoriia dvizheniia Alash* (Moscow: Rossiia molodaia, 1994), particularly 185-87.

consultation, an insistence on being treated fully as citizens. The insistence of Nicholas II, Stolypin, and other conservative politicians that Kazakhs remain colonial subjects would take on heightened significance as they made demands of Central Asian Muslims sooner characteristic of citizens of a multi-ethnic polity than colonized people.

Ideas about the distinctiveness of Kazakh culture had been discussed by Russophone Kazakhs dating back to Ch. Ch. Valikhanov. During and after the Revolution of 1905, such ideas were further substantiated and came to be associated with a political program. During the Revolution, several groups advanced the cause of national or confessional autonomy, including Finns, Poles, Latvians, and Muslims; a conference in St. Petersburg in November 1905 brought together representatives of all these groups together to discuss what were perceived as, at some level, their shared problems. Tynyshpaev participated in this conference, arguing before other delegates that “The Kazakh steppe is in completely unique cultural, sociopolitical and socioeconomic conditions” and that Russian colonial administrators had failed to adapt to the unique demands this environment and culture presented.¹³⁸ Arguably Bokeikhanov’s best-known work, an essay written in 1910 and simply entitled “Kirgizy” (Kazakhs), was first published in a volume devoted to the forms of national movements in European states, suggesting that he too viewed his activity as seeking, at least, autonomy, and was motivated by a sense of Kazakh cultural distinctiveness. Baitursynov and other contributors to *Ai-qap* stressed the importance of preserving the Kazakh language despite the incursion of the colonizer’s culture; one author complained, in 1912, that “because there are, beyond Kazakhs, many Russians and Ukrainians [*khaqol*] on Kazakh land, young Kazakhs are forgetting the names of everything, enchantedly saying everything’s

¹³⁸ Qoigeldiev 47, 49, speech of 19 November 1905.

name in Russian, they are forgetting their own language.”¹³⁹ Most of the bilingual Kazakhs who were involved with imperial Russian politics and with what became the Kazakh nationalist movement thus expressed early on the idea that Kazakhs were distinct in language or culture from other ethnic groups, even if their struggles for liberation were comparable. But autonomy, exercised under the auspices of a multi-ethnic state, is different from self-determinative nationalism. The work of Kazakh intellectuals, through 1916, stressed equally the distinctiveness of Kazakh interests and the importance of their being met by, rather than independently of, imperial Russian governance.

Kazakh intellectuals made claims about the failures of colonial administration with respect to the steppe and its inhabitants that were couched, variously, in an affective language of subjecthood, emphasizing the duty of colonial officials in general (and the tsar in particular) to Kazakhs, or alternatively in terms of the new multi-ethnic citizenship granted *de jure* by the October Manifesto. At the Congress of Autonomists in 1905, Tynyshpaev described what he claimed were signs of colonial misrule, such as forced expropriation of land for settlers, extrajudicial punishments by Governors-General, and the closing of mosques and prayer houses as the betrayal of the expectations of Kazakhs who, when accepting Russian subjecthood, believed they had a “right to maternal concern and love on the part of Russia.”¹⁴⁰ After the advent of the 3rd of June system – and, hence, after Kazakhs had both been permitted and denied political representation – Bokeikhanov, in the Kazakh-language press, described the relationship between Kazakhs and the state in similar terms, asking rhetorically, “We have the Duma, we have the

¹³⁹ Subkhanberdina, *Aiqap*, 114. This piece, entitled “Til saqtaushylyq” (“language preservation”) was written by a certain Ualialla Khalili of Kostanai, about whom I have not been able to find further information.

¹⁴⁰ Qoigeldiev 48.

council, we have a just (*ghadil*) tsar, are we not under the government's protection (*memleket panasynda*)?"¹⁴¹ "Protection" does not imply a participatory or consultative role for those who are defended, but represents rather a moral claim on the concern and resources of the protector. In an era where the electoral system had left Kazakhs, in Bokeikhanov's words, "orphaned" (*zhetim*), the colonial state had a particular responsibility, according to these arguments, to look after their interests.^{142,143}

Yet Kazakh publicists also insisted on their inclusion in the Duma, and the invalidity of decisions concerning them taken without their consultative presence. In the pages of *Qazaq*, a little-known figure named Akhmet Zhantalin wrote that, as a consequence of the Russian Empire's electoral system, "We [Kazakhs] have lost all hope of laws benefitting us emerging from this Duma, this will never happen, from the tribune of the Duma our suffering is pronounced," an exclusion he found particularly galling in light of the fact that many of the questions it discussed – the *zemstvo*, schools, land, and religion – had significant bearing on Kazakhs' lives.¹⁴⁴ Bokeikhanov, summarizing the early proceedings of the Fourth Duma, approvingly cited the arguments of Duma deputies Maksudov and Sheshkin that deputies from Turkestan and the steppe oblasts needed to be present for discussion of changes to resettlement laws, concluding, "the foolish (*aqsaq*) 3rd of June law needs to be corrected."¹⁴⁵ Criticizing a proposal from the Holy Synod to prioritize the needs of Orthodox people in resettlement and make the

¹⁴¹ Qoigeldiev 111. Originally published in *Qazaq* as "Zhauap khat" ("Response"), 31 July 1913.

¹⁴² Subkhanberdina, *Qazaq*, 45. Article published in 1913, entitled "Tortinshi дума ham qazaq."

¹⁴³ This language has tempting parallels with petitions to the tsar in the Muscovite era, also centered around appeals to mercy (rather than justice) and invoking, in particular, claims on the tsar's personal, paternal protection. See Valerie A. Kivelson, *Autocracy in the Provinces: The Muscovite Gentry and Political Culture in the Seventeenth Century* (Stanford, CA: Stanford UP, 1996) 11.

¹⁴⁴ Subkhanberdina, *Qazaq*, 87. Article published in 1914, entitled "Duma mangaiynda nege kisimiz zhoq?" ("Why are there none of our people in the Duma?").

¹⁴⁵ *Ibid.*, 57.

spread of Orthodoxy among Kazakhs a state priority, Bokeikhanov similarly deployed Kazakhs' lack of representation as evidence of its impermissibility: "The law of June 3rd, owing to the efforts of people hungry...for Kazakh lands, deprived us of the right of defense from the State Duma."¹⁴⁶ He called on other members of the Duma, in this extreme circumstance, to struggle against what he considered a clear violation of existing laws concerning resettlement. Non-representation was more, however, than a rhetorical device calculated to resonate with a metropolitan audience; rather, equal and participatory government was, during the Third and Fourth Dumas, a part of the Kazakh intelligentsia's aspirations in its own right. Dulatov, in an early issue of *Ai-qap*, wondered how laws passed by the Duma could possibly benefit Kazakhs when there was no one present who could talk about their distinct needs and customs. He wrote approvingly of the First and Second Dumas, to which deputies were chosen regardless of religion or ethnicity, advocating implicitly for a return to this state of affairs.¹⁴⁷ Baitursynov's conviction that "it [is] necessary to ask for a Kazakh deputy to the Fourth Duma" ran deeply enough that he proposed, once it was clear that the steppe oblasts would again be excluded from elections, that the Muslims of the city of Orenburg choose a Kazakh as their deputy.¹⁴⁸ In a later polemic with another Russian-educated Kazakh, Zhihanshakh Seidalin, moreover, Bokeikhanov asked rhetorically what differentiated Kazakhs from Poles and Muslims represented in the Duma, continuing that Kazakhs should actively seek representation there, since "at this time Kazakhs' words are spoken

¹⁴⁶ Nurgaliev 409, "Otkrytoe pis'mo chlenam Gosudarstvennoi Dumy."

¹⁴⁷ Subkhanberdina, *Aiqap*, 62-63. Article published 1911, entitled "Gosudarstvennaia дума ham qazaq."

¹⁴⁸ *Ibid.*, 118. Article published 1912, entitled "Qazaq ham tortinshi дума."

by alien (*boten*) deputies.”¹⁴⁹ The fact that Bokeikhanov made this statement in dialogue with, and opposition to, other Kazakh intellectuals indicates that consensus about the desirability of participating directly in imperial politics was not universal, but at least a significant number of them favored it.¹⁵⁰ However legitimate these aspirations for consultation and representation were, however, they were never likely to be satisfied. Kazakh intellectuals aspired to be part of a multi-ethnic state, but the 3rd of June system made them representatives of a colony, with no clear means of being promoted from that status; arguments about the moral and legal injustice of the situation, the only options available short of armed resistance, fell on deaf ears. The Kazakh intelligentsia was thus in the unenviable and profoundly liminal position of wanting to be part of a state that did not seem to completely want them, at least in its political structure.

The tension between the privileges the imperial Russian state granted to Kazakhs and its expectations of them increased in direct proportion with those expectations. With the onset of World War I, all peoples within the Russian Empire were expected to contribute to the success of the war effort; since many of the Empire’s Muslims, “especially in Central Asia and the Caucasus, were not considered ready for assimilation, at least with regards to military conscription and service,” they were not subject to the

¹⁴⁹ Ibid., 272. Article published in 1915, entitled “Ashyq khat.” Seidalin, a Kostanai-born descendant of a *töre* lineage educated as a lawyer in St. Petersburg, was advocating unsuccessfully to convene an all-Kazakh Congress, which Bokeikhanov considered premature. Short biographical information on Seidalin is in Tomohiko Uyama, “The Geography of Civilizations: A Spatial Analysis of the Kazakh Intelligentsia’s Activities, From the Mid-Nineteenth to the Early Twentieth Century,” Kimitaka Matsuzato, ed., *Regions: A Prism to View the Slavic-Eurasian World* (Sapporo: Slavic Research Center, 2000) 92.

¹⁵⁰ These aspirations also existed outside of the steppe’s journal culture; see TsGA RK f. 15, op. 1, d. 1437, sv. 73, “Delo po khodataistvu musulman g. Karkaralinska ob uvlechenii musulmanskiikh glasnykh v obshchestvennom upravlenii i v dume” and *ibid.*, d. 1326, sv. 65, “Po khodataistvu musulman g. Semipalatinska ob uvelichenii musulmanskiikh glasnykh v gorodskom obshchestvennom upravlenii” for petitions from Muslims in Karkaralinsk (1908) and Semipalatinsk (1905) concerning city councils, both rejected.

military draft, instead paying significantly increased taxes in kind and in cash.¹⁵¹ Indeed, recent scholarship has emphasized the assimilationist and Russifying motivations for “universal” conscription in the Russian Empire (the result of a reform proposed by D. A. Miliutin in 1874) while noting that long-held ethnic stereotypes made the draft less than universal in practice.¹⁵² This emphasis on the state’s prerogatives with respect to military conscription, though, tends to obscure the stakes of a universal draft for those subject to it. Mass participation in a national army implies identification of one’s individual interests with those of the nation; equality before a military draft opens the door for the consideration of and dissatisfaction with inequalities among groups subject to it. As Russian officials’ hands were forced by attrition, and Kazakhs, along with other Central Asian Muslims, formerly considered undesirable soldiers, began to be considered candidates for military service, the question of whether Kazakhs’ interests were identical with those of the Russian Empire, and of their distinct and underprivileged status relative to other ethnic and confessional groups, came to the fore.

Thus, although Kazakh intellectuals were in the main not strictly opposed to the troop duty, the conditions they wished to see fulfilled before endorsing conscription focused on the political status of Turkestan and the steppe oblasts within the Russian Empire, relegated to the role of colonies by the electoral law of 1907. In a 1916 article in *Qazaq*, for instance, a certain Akhmet Zhanteliughly expressed five wishes he hoped to see fulfilled if Kazakhs were to bear the troop duty, the last two of which concerned questions of political representation: “4. Ask for representation in the Duma (*deputattyq*)

¹⁵¹ Dana M. Ohren, “All the Tsar’s Men: Minorities and Military Conscription in Imperial Russia, 1874-1905,” Diss. Indiana University, 2006, 26-27. On taxes, see Subkhanberdina, *Qazaq*, 145 for an article from early 1915 describing to Kazakh readers their new responsibilities in comparison with other tax-paying regions.

¹⁵² In addition to Ohren’s dissertation, see Joshua A. Sanborn, *Drafting the Russian Nation: Military Conscription, Total War, and Mass Politics, 1905-1925* (DeKalb, IL: Northern Illinois UP, 2003).

surau); 5. Introduce the zemstvo and general education (*zhalpy oqu*) [to the steppe oblasts].”¹⁵³ Kazakhs had been, in the parliamentary era, described as temperamentally and intellectually unsuited to and unprepared for national political representation (in the Duma), local self-governance (via the *zemstvo*), and participation in the army. If the latter was to be required of them, then, according to this line of thinking, it was logical that they were also worthy of self-governance and electoral rights. Otherwise, the tsarist state would be demanding significant sacrifices of the Kazakhs without a *quid pro quo*. Citizenship in a multi-ethnic state had to include both political representation and mass mobilization – the former legitimized the latter.

Moreover, the question of bearing the troop duty was connected with a second form of inequality, that embodied by the increasingly Russo-centric policy of resettlement. Kazakh intellectuals tended to reverse the discourse of landholding and military service that characterized conscription in imperial Russia; if being a peasant or Cossack carried the obligation to do military service, then doing military service carried the same right to receive land that those estates enjoyed. Thus most of them responded eagerly, if certain conditions were met, to the idea that Kazakhs should perform military service, as this would provide a final guarantee against further land seizures. Indeed, most of the correspondence that *Qazaq* received on the matter of Kazakh military service took it as a given that Kazakhs should serve; the primary topic of debate was which form of service would prove most advantageous for land-needy Kazakhs.¹⁵⁴ Two schools of thought formed with respect to this issue, one favoring the registration of Kazakhs

¹⁵³ Subkhanberdina, *Qazaq*, 260, article entitled “Soldattyq maselesi.”

¹⁵⁴ *Qazaq* acknowledged that there were many on the steppe who were opposed to giving soldiers, but this viewpoint rarely appeared in its pages. See Subkhanberdina, *Qazaq*, 270, a 1916 article by Dulatov explicating several perspectives on the issue entitled “G. Duma ham soldattyq maselesi.”

performing military service to the peasant estate, the other advocating the registration of those same Kazakhs to the Cossack estate. Advocates of joining the peasant estate argued that the peasantry was, relative to the Cossacks, particularly cultured and favored by tsarist institutions, so joining this estate would vouchsafe Kazakhs' progress.¹⁵⁵ The alternate viewpoint stressed the need for land, rather than direct patronage on the part of the state, and refused the idea that peasants were in any way more cultured than other estates:

“Now let's see, to be a Cossack or a soldier, which would be more useful to a Kazakh? To be a soldier is to be on the same level as a *muzhik*. The *muzhik*'s allotment is 15 desiatinas of good land, the Cossack's allotment (*sybagha*) is 30 desiatinas of good land. If the land is bad, the allotment is two times greater.”¹⁵⁶

In either case, the expectation was that rendering service to the state would have tangible benefits for those who did it, that state and local interests would somehow intersect. Unable to advocate for their own interests pertaining to the land question in the Duma, Kazakh intellectuals saw military service as a potential work-around, earning the property rights of which they considered themselves to have been deprived.

Just as the laws of the Russian Empire were frequently created and reformed outside of legislative assemblies, so too political representation in imperial Russia was never exclusively parliamentary; individuals or groups were regularly consulted, as representatives of larger ethnic or confessional groups, for their input concerning policies that would influence those larger groups.¹⁵⁷ This system allowed imperial officials to

¹⁵⁵ Subkhanberdina, *Qazaq*, 285, article entitled “Asker alsa.” This was a minority view, although it also appeared formulaically in requests for land allotment even before World War I.

¹⁵⁶ Ibid., 291, article entitled “Qaisysy paidaly,” written by a pseudonymous group of “tilshiler” (correspondents).

¹⁵⁷ Some canonical examples of this are the congresses of Central Asian Muslims assembled to answer economic and legal questions compiled by K. K. Pahlen (see TsGA RK f. 19, op. 1, d. 89, sv. 15, “Delo po ekonomicheskomu i pravovomu obsledovaniuu naseleniia Semirechenskoi oblasti”); Steppe Governor-General I. P. Nadarov's 1907 conference of elected representatives of the Kazakh population for discussion

select those *inorodtsy* they considered most intellectually capable and experienced while carrying no obligation to accept those recommendations that turned out to be inexpedient.¹⁵⁸ As World War I dragged on, with significant material and human losses for the Russian Empire, tsarist officials sought the advice of a few well-known Kazakh intellectuals about the advisability and possible implementation of conscription on the steppe. According to his own testimony, Tynyshpaev was first asked to prepare a report on this topic in September 1915, and a group of three Kazakh publicists (two previously considered politically dangerous by some authorities) arrived to St. Petersburg to discuss the question further early in 1916.¹⁵⁹ The recommendations made by all of these men were similar: it would be possible to draft Kazakhs, but best to permit them to serve in cavalry units, for which their nomadic upbringing had prepared them, and only after verification of metrical books (records of births and deaths – this would ensure, theoretically, an orderly and accurate conscription) and in exchange for land.¹⁶⁰ Efforts also needed to be made, it was argued in the Kazakh press, to adapt the demands of modern military service to Kazakhs' particular needs, allowing soldiers a place to pray, a commanding officer who knew their language, and rations free of pork.¹⁶¹ For the small group of Kazakhs involved in these discussions, they represented an opportunity to shape

of its needs (see TsGA RK f. 64, op. 1, d. 1174, sv. 74, “Po pis'mu Turkestanskogo General-gubernatora o dostatvke ekzempliarov chastnogo soveshchaniia o kirgizskikh nuzhdakh Stepnogo kraia”); and Stolypin's invitation of a representative of the Kazakh population to a 1909 conference on the reform of schools for *inorodtsy* (see TsGA RK f. 64, op. 1, d. 1176, sv. 74, “O komandirovanii deistvitel'nogo statskogo sovetnika Alektorova i kirgiza otunchi Al'dzhanova v Sankt-Peterburg dlia uchastiia v Kommissii po peresmotru pravil o nachalnykh inorodcheskikh shkolkh”).

¹⁵⁸ On the qualifications sought in *inorodtsy* for participating in such conferences see again TsGA RK f. 64, op. 1, d. 1176, sv. 74.

¹⁵⁹ Qoigeldiev 201; Dulatov reports on the journey made by Bokeikhanov, Baitursynov, and Nysanghali Begimbetov to St. Petersburg to discuss this question early in 1916 at Subkhanberdina, *Qazaq*, 270.

¹⁶⁰ Qoigeldiev 201; Sabol 85.

¹⁶¹ Subkhanberdina, *Qazaq*, 309-10. Anonymous article from 1916, entitled “Soghys maidanynda qazaq zhumyskerler.” Such a demand represented a very different understanding of the relationship between Islam and the Russian Empire than prevailed in Russian military circles at the time.

service to the multi-ethnic state, a cause in which they believed (as evidenced by their travel to the western front with Zemgor early in 1917), in a direction favorable to their understanding of the distinct needs of the Kazakh people.¹⁶² For the Ministry of War, they represented an opportunity to gain detailed information about the disposition of the Kazakhs, whom many remained hesitant to draft despite pressure from the Duma.¹⁶³ The outcomes of Kazakh conscription ultimately, as we will see, satisfied the aspirations of neither group.

As peasant resettlement to Central Asia accelerated, the absence of deputies from Turkestan and the steppe in the Duma took on tremendous symbolic significance both for the few deputies sympathetic to Kazakh land rights remaining there and for the Kazakh intelligentsia. This latter group, in whose education the Russian Empire had made a substantial investment in the belief that they were civilizable and could usefully serve the empire, forcefully protested against its exclusion from imperial politics. As proposals to conscript Kazakhs for military service were mooted in the Fourth Duma without any Kazakhs present, the contradiction between the Russian Empire's expectations of its Central Asian Muslim subjects and the rights privileges it granted them became clear. These rights and privileges, in turn, were based on what tsarist administrators believed themselves to know about the steppe and its inhabitants, a corpus of information itself full of contradictions. Flawed information, or correct information that was ignored, about the colonizing capacity of Turkestan and the steppe led resettlement officials to

¹⁶² Zemgor is a contraction of "Ob''edinennyi komitet Zemskogo soiuz a soiuz a gorodov," literally "United Committee of the Union of Zemstvos and Union of Towns," an organization chaired by the Kadet politician Georgii Lvov that attempted to aid the wounded and supply troops with food and clothing. For more on Zemgor and the conflict between its efforts and the work of governmental ministries, see O. R. Airapetov, *Generaly, liberaly, i predprinimateli: rabota na front i na revoliutsiiu (1907-1917)* (Moscow: "Tri kvadrata," 2003), especially Chapter 7.

¹⁶³ On official hesitation to conscript the Kazakhs, see Sanborn 77-78.

aggressively expropriate land Kazakhs perceived as theirs. Scholarly and non-academic Orientalism alike, meanwhile, as well as anthropologically-grounded ideas about the economic and cultural primitiveness of pastoralists, fostered the exclusion of Kazakhs (and other Muslims of Central Asia) from the political life of the Russian Empire even as their economic and administrative integration into that polity was accelerated. These epistemologically-grounded “tensions of empire,” a systemic feature of the Russian Empire’s informational encounter with the steppe since the first General Staff surveys of the area, found their greatest expression in the Kazakh rebellion of 1916, which signaled the rapid approach of the end of the Romanov dynasty’s phase of Russian imperialism in Central Asia.¹⁶⁴

A Double Failure: The Rebellion of 1916

In June 1916, in the immediate aftermath of an order drafting the Muslim peoples of Central Asia for military labor battalions, violence spread throughout Turkestan and the steppe; as the order was implemented, riots seized cities and large towns during the month of July, and unrest quickly spread to the nomadic Kazakhs, Kyrgyz and Turkmen during August. According to some sources, more than 2,000 Russians, mostly settlers, were killed during these revolts, and an equal or greater number of pastoralists perished during reprisals on the part of settlers and the colonial administration.¹⁶⁵ Steven Sabol argues that, although there were deeper causes, “the revolt was triggered by the government’s decision to conscript Central Asians for military service”; Daniel Brower has emphasized, rather, that the economic crisis created by heightened war taxes and

¹⁶⁴ For arguments that Soviet rule in Central Asia was also a form of imperialism, as my formulation here implies, see e.g. Shoshana Keller, *To Moscow, Not Mecca: The Soviet Campaign Against Islam in Central Asia* (Westport, CT: Greenwood, 2001) and Douglas Northrop, *Veiled Empire: Gender and Power in Stalinist Central Asia* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell UP, 2004).

¹⁶⁵ Daniel Brower, *Turkestan and the Fate of the Russian Empire* (New York: RoutledgeCurzon, 2003) 162.

mass resettlement, and the pattern of relations that formed between pastoralists and settlers, made rebellion likely regardless of the conscription policy pursued by colonial officials.¹⁶⁶ These perspectives are not mutually exclusive. Rather, the Central Asian rebellion of 1916 represented the failure of the epistemological system the imperial Russian state had developed for its Central Asian territories on two counts. Hasty peasant settlement, on the basis of information that was inaccurate or ignored on the grounds of expediency, impoverished Kazakhs and other Central Asian Muslims, sowing the seeds of discontent; ideas about the unpreparedness of Kazakhs for civic life blocked them from political representation even as they were asked, first by paying taxes and then by rendering military service, to see their interests as identical to those of the Russian Empire. The suggestions that some colonial officials solicited from Russophone Kazakhs about how best to implement conscription were not taken into account by others responsible for compiling the order. The crisis of Russian imperialism in 1916 represented by the Central Asian revolt was, at its core, the result of informational incoherence. As it turned out, colonial officials would not receive a second chance to get things right.

Among local administrators in Central Asia, there had long been a certain consciousness that the aggressive policies pursued by the Resettlement Administration were creating a hostile mood among the Kazakh and Kyrgyz population of the region.¹⁶⁷

As early as 1910, there had been isolated flashes of violent resistance to resettlement

¹⁶⁶ Sabol 136; see also Sanborn 79 for this perspective. For Brower's argument see his "Kyrgyz Nomads and Russian Pioneers: Colonization and Ethnic Conflict in the Turkestan Revolt of 1916," *Jahrbucher fur Geschichte Osteuropas* 44.1 (1996): 53.

¹⁶⁷ The evidence presented in this paragraph makes untenable the assertion that one of the reasons for the severity of the 1916 rebellion was that colonial administrators did not expect violent reprisals from a typically "quiet" native population. See e.g. A. Iu. Bakhturina, *Okrainy rossiiskoi imperii: gosudarstvennoe upravlenie i natsional'naia politika v gody pervoi mirovoi voiny* (Moscow: Rossiiskaia politicheskaia entsiklopediia, 2004), 310.

bureaucrats in Kopal and Lepsinsk uezds, which one oblast governor attributed to “the extremely difficult position of the indigent part of the Kazakh population...resulting from occasional incorrect seizures of their land surpluses.”¹⁶⁸ These claims were repeated in 1913 in a report to the chancery of the Turkestan Governor-General, A. V. Samsonov: “The methodical, year by year seizure from the Kazakhs’ use of the best lands for colonization undoubtedly troubles them, the more, since the land allotment of the Kazakhs themselves is almost exhausted.”¹⁶⁹ These opinions were not universally shared by Central Asian officials; others, simultaneously with the above-cited presentations, gave their recommendations on how best to weaken the influence of “Muslim agitators,” whom they viewed as the true source of Kazakh discontent, when providing nomads with sedentary land allotments.¹⁷⁰ Nor were such claims, apparently, given any more credence in the Third and Fourth Dumas than the Pahlen report had been, if indeed they were even heard there.¹⁷¹ Thus, despite some warning signs, the allotment of land for settlers at the expense of Central Asian pastoralists continued apace; in a Duma where the conviction reigned that “The Russian state...was established not by Kazakhs, Sarts, Catholics or foreigners, but by the Russian Orthodox people,” no other solution was likely.¹⁷²

Indeed, there is tantalizing evidence to suggest that resettlement was, by some distance, the most important recurring issue rousing Kazakhs and Kyrgyz to violence. It has been customary to think of the revolt of 1916 as a significant stage in the Kazakh

¹⁶⁸ TsGA RK f. 44, op. 1, d. 38202, sv. 1819, l. 9, “Po predstavleniiu Voennogo Gubernatora Turkestanskomu General-Gubernatoru o kirgizskom zemleustroistve.” Original report from 1910, restated in a presentation of 23 June 1914.

¹⁶⁹ Ibid., l. 11, 2 July 1913.

¹⁷⁰ Ibid., l. 10, report of the military governor of Semireche oblast, M. A. Fol’baum, 1911.

¹⁷¹ I base this claim on the increased budgets for resettlement and expansion of the rights of Orthodox peasant settlers to land and water in Turkestan and the steppe that characterized the work of the Third and Fourth Dumas – hardly the actions of a parliament behaving with the caution that some colonial administrators recommended.

¹⁷² Maltusynov 1098.

national-liberation movement.¹⁷³ This viewpoint, however, is too quick to associate the views of a few autonomist-turned-nationalist intellectuals with a broader social movement. The actions of those Kazakhs who chose to fight, instead of flee, were directed, in part, at those who had enabled or participated in the seizure of “surplus” land from their use. A Kazakh laborer under the Resettlement Administration gave personal testimony that at least one Russian surveyor working for that administration was killed, despite his protests that he “had offended none of the local Kazakhs,” and others in the work crew were taken captive by the same group. Tynyshpaev, although he deplored the “wild excesses” (*dikosti*) perpetrated by some Kazakhs, considered it significant that “that the first two people killed were settlement bureaucrats, from the institution which laid the foundation of the Kazakhs’ dissatisfaction.”¹⁷⁴ Settlers, too, were heavily targeted, although, as Brower notes, the brutality of their self-appointed militias towards any Muslim unfortunate enough to cross their path only exacerbated the violence.¹⁷⁵ More than 2,000 settlers were killed during the second half of 1916; according to one administrative observer, Kazakhs approaching settler villages “during attacks beat men and women, and sometimes bully them (*izdevaiutsia*), rape women, compel them to kiss their feet, torture them (*ruki pytaiut*). There are cases of murder of children and burning of huts.”¹⁷⁶ These accounts, of course, have their own representational biases, but they indicate neither an ambitious political program nor wanton, directionless violence.

Whatever meanings the revolt of 1916 came to have for the Kazakh intelligentsia, there is

¹⁷³ See, for example, Kh. T. Tursunov, *Vosstanie 1916 goda v Srednei Azii i Kazakhstane* (Tashkent: Gosudarstvennoe izd-vo. Uzbekskoi SSR, 1962) 12-13.

¹⁷⁴ TsGA RK f. 19, op. 1, d. 623, sv. 79, l. 162, “Delo o vosstanii kazakhov v 1916 g.” Statement of the Kazakh Ismagul Tabyldin, 23 August 1916; Qoigeldiev 205.

¹⁷⁵ Brower, “Kyrgyz Nomads,” 44.

¹⁷⁶ TsGA RK f. 19, op. 1, d. 623, sv. 79, l. 179, report of the manager of Dzharkent resettlement sub-region to the manager of Semireche settlement region, 23 August 1916.

no evidence to suggest that most of the participants in the bloodshed of 1916 were anything other than innocent of nationalism. This is not to adopt Edward Sokol's primordialist view that Kazakh violence in 1916 stemmed from a "vigorous return to [Kazakhs'] ancestral tradition of violence and raiding warfare."¹⁷⁷ But it is to argue that, despite the larger meanings of land allotment for the intelligentsia, the majority of participants in this rebellion seem mainly to have wanted the land, independent of any broader political narrative.¹⁷⁸ The immediate cause of the revolt was, likely, the impossibly clumsy handling of conscription by local administrators who, as an extraordinary assembly of Kazakhs in August 1916 claimed, did not explain to those subject to the draft what was being asked of them, or make any provisions for the maintenance of households from which recruits were drawn.¹⁷⁹ Indeed, the initial violence triggered by the conscription order was mostly directed at Kazakh officials responsible for compiling the draft lists.¹⁸⁰ The course it quickly took, though, says much about the underlying motivations of its participants. In the conflagration of 1916, the draft was the spark, land politics the fuel, and the explosion that occurred depended on the presence of both factors.

The call to manual labor for the imperial army and the revolt that followed it had much different meanings for the Kazakh intelligentsia than it did for participants in the revolt. The chief *gendarme* of Orenburg province found no cause to bring Baitursynov,

¹⁷⁷ Edward Sokol, *The Revolt of 1916 in Russian Central Asia* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins UP, 1953), 69, cited at Sabol 85.

¹⁷⁸ Tara Zahra's recent application of the idea of "national indifference" to the historiography of Eastern Europe, long dominated by nationalist paradigms, has been useful for me here. See Zahra, "Imagined Noncommunities: National Indifference as a Category of Analysis," *Slavic Review* 69.1 (Spring 2010): 93-119.

¹⁷⁹ Qoigeldiev 167, "Protokol chastnogo soveshchaniia kazakhskogo naseleniia Turgaiskoi, Uralskoi, Akmolinskoi i Semirechenskoi oblastei o vystuplenii naseleniia protiv mobilizatsii i provedeniia neobkhodnykh meropriiatii po osushchestvleniiu prizyva na tylovyie raboty," 7 August 1916.

¹⁸⁰ Sabol 137

Dulatov, or Bokeikhanov to legal responsibility for the spread of the revolt in August 1916, since “the editorial direction of *Qazaq*...has been the most correct,” and indeed these publicists spent the summer of 1916 attempting to calm their readership.¹⁸¹ The three signed an article published on 11 August 1916 referring to the sacrifices made during the war by the “compatriot Russian people and co-religionist Nogais, as well as other neighboring peoples,” exhorting Kazakhs to do the same.¹⁸² Although Kazakhs were, according to the laws of the Russian Empire, legally different from Russians and Nogays alike in several significant ways (most notably with respect to their rights to land and political representation), Bokeikhanov, Baitursynov and Dulatov argued that a common national interest trumped these inequalities. They also argued, however, that participating in the war would have particular benefits for the Kazakhs with respect to land and legal equality; after the war, they claimed, “everyone will value service. Then those who do not plow or sow will not be able to make a claim on land. If we want to claim equality and justice, we must first think properly. One good turn deserves another (*almaqtyng da salmaghy bar*).”¹⁸³ Since the Revolution of 1905, and with particular vigor after the promulgation of the Third of June system, the Kazakh intelligentsia had decried their unequal status before the Russian Empire. Despite what some of them argued was indeed a lack of culture on the part of many Kazakhs, they always believed that political representation and allotment with land were among their rights. Military service – around which a discourse of Kazakh “unreadiness” similar to Nicholas’ rhetoric

¹⁸¹ Qoigeldiev 172-73, “Iz doneseniia nachal’nika Orenburgskogo gubernskogo zhandarnskogo upravleniia voennomu gubernatoru Turgaiskoi oblasti o deiatel’nosti A. Baitursynova, A. Bukeikhanova i M.-Ia. Dulatova po agenturnym svedeniiam,” 12 August 1916.

¹⁸² Subkhanberdina, *Qazaq*, 321, article entitled “Alashtyng azamaty.”

¹⁸³ Subkhanberdina, *Qazaq*, 323.

in the *ukaz* of June 3rd reigned in administrative circles – offered a chance to prove to imperial Russian policymakers what the intelligentsia had long believed to be true.

In both internal discussions and appeals to local Kazakhs, colonial administrators used similar language. The Temporary Council governing the Bukei Horde, calling Kazakhs to submit to Nicholas' order, wrote: "By this, your participation in the war, you will obtain that attention from the government which the core (*korennoe*) population of our vast Fatherland enjoys."¹⁸⁴ Like the appeal of the Kazakh intelligentsia, the Temporary Council implied a *quid pro quo* for state service and attempted to convince those subject to conscription that their interests were identical with those of the Russian Empire. The problem with such formulations was that such rewards for service, deeply desired by the intelligentsia, were not written into law; Nicholas' *ukaz* of 25 June 1916 was simply an order mandating that *inorodtsy* be taken into the army for manual labor and stipulating which groups were eligible for conscription.¹⁸⁵ The lack of any such provision implies that, for Nicholas and those in the Duma who advocated the conscription of *inorodtsy*, those who served were fulfilling a pre-existing obligation to the state rather than, as the intelligentsia hoped, creating new obligations on the state's part to them; they were not proving anything beyond their loyalty. At any rate, since the *inorodtsy* drafted were formally laborers, rather than soldiers, it is doubtful that a land allotment was ever forthcoming for their service. The collapse in 1917 of the Nicolaevan parliamentary system, moreover, makes it difficult to say what might have happened if another Duma had been called even if conscription had gone smoothly, which it manifestly did not. In the event, the revolt of 1916 dealt a death blow to the

¹⁸⁴ Romanov, Iu. I. *Qaharly 1916 zhyl/Groznyi 1916 god* (Almaty: "Qazaqstan," 1998) 15, document published no earlier than 1 July 1916.

¹⁸⁵ The full text of this proclamation can be found at Romanov 13-14.

intelligentsia's aspirations, remote though they always were, of Kazakh representation in the government and equality before the law.

The outcomes of Nicholas II's conscription order and the revolt of 1916, then, were revealing for colonial administrators and Kazakh intellectuals alike, and not to the benefit of Kazakhs of any social stratum. Despite the revolt, many Kazakhs and other Central Asian Muslims were successfully drafted for manual labor, which they fulfilled in conditions that were, for the most part, miserable, without any of the privileges for which the intelligentsia had previously advocated in *Qazaq*; those who were able to flee to their homes seem to have done so.¹⁸⁶ Although Kazakhs served, they had proven, in the minds of colonial administrators, their unsuitability for service and the privileges that came with it precisely by rebelling after the order came out. Rumors flew, further, that agents of Germany and Turkey had been present in Central Asia, attracting the population to irredentism and aspirations of full independence from Russia.¹⁸⁷ The revolt of 1916 was, under the ideologically-charged circumstances, retroactively ascribed a politically dangerous character, punished harshly by local administrators. The Governor-General of Turkestan, A. N. Kuropatkin, saw it as no less threatening than the Andijon rebellion, and considered it to demand similar consequences:

¹⁸⁶ See TsGA RK f. 19, op. 1, d. 2750, sv. 225, ll. 43-43 ob., "O privilechenii kazakhskogo naseleniia dlia raboty po gidrotekhnicheskim sooruzheniiam v Semirechenskom raione." Although this file concerns the use of Kazakh workers for irrigation works by the Resettlement Administration, the fate of Kazakhs and other Central Asian Muslims taken for manual labor to the army had a bearing on such discussions; the document cited is a telegram from the Governor-General of Turkestan, A. N. Kuropatkin, from early 1917 expressing concern about the conditions to which Kazakh workers on the front had been subjected and noting that more than sixty had been arrested for fleeing work of their own accord (*samovol'no*).

¹⁸⁷ TsGA RK f. 380, op. 1, d. 1, l. 179, from Kuropatkin's report on the rebellion to Nicholas II, 22 February 1917. In a special meeting to discuss the revolt late in 1916, A. F. Kerenskii lampooned such claims (Maltusynov 1129-30). Scholarship on the influence of pan-Turkism on certain intellectuals associated with the Kazakh "national liberation" movement, most notably Mustafa Chokaev, suggests that claims about irredentism were not entirely fantastic, but the influence of such movements on the majority of Kazakhs is highly doubtful. See S. Q. Shildebai, *Turikshildik zhane Qazaqstandaghy ult-azattyq qozghalys* (Almaty: "Ghylym," 2002) and K. L. Esmaghambetov, *Alem tanyghan tulgha: Mustafa Shoqaidyng dunietanymy zhane qairatkerlik bolmysy* (Almaty: "Daik-Press," 2008).

“It is necessary that the native population learns definitively that the spilling of Russian blood is punishable not only by punishment of those directly guilty, but also taking of land from natives, who turned out unworthy to own it, as was done with the guilty of the Andijon rebellion. This principle, decisively carried out with each flare-up from the native population, resulting in the shedding of Russian blood, should compel the sensible part of the population to refrain from attempts to struggle against Russian power by force of arms.”¹⁸⁸

Indeed, he continued, parcels of land had already been seized in two areas.

Kuropatkin’s invocation of the Andijon events was not coincidental. By rebelling against conscription, Kazakhs had confirmed the darkest suspicions of an influential section of Russian officialdom. No perspective arguing that official abuses, peasant violence, or the economic decline caused by resettlement were responsible for the revolt could overcome the idea that Kazakhs were, at core, fanatically hostile to Russian governance in any form.¹⁸⁹ One of the core epistemological failures leading to the revolt of 1916 – uncertainty about Kazakhs’ capacity for participation in imperial politics – was proven true for some, ironically, by the fact that the revolt occurred.

For the Kazakh intelligentsia, in turn, on the cusp of developing a fully nationalist political program, the course of the revolt of 1916 revealed with finality the impossibility of finding a rapprochement with Nicholas II’s government. Their input about the implementation of the conscription order had apparently been ignored, and their aspirations to earn equality before the law through service seemed remote.¹⁹⁰

Tynyshpaev, in a statement given over several days in February 1917, argued that the Kazakhs had in fact been ready to serve the Russian Empire, but that the hurried and ill-conceived conscription order had troubled them, and confirmed the poor impression they

¹⁸⁸ TsGA RK f. 380, op. 1, d. 1, l. 184 ob.

¹⁸⁹ Such perspectives did exist among colonial administrators. See, i.e., the report of a low-level administrator at TsGA RK f. 19, op. 1, d. 2580, sv. 210, ll. 57-58, “O vyiasnenii ubytkov v sviazi s vosstaniem 1916 g.” Report dated 27 December 1916.

¹⁹⁰ The first part of this sentence draws on Sabol 137.

had gained of Russian colonial administration, “an opinion completely definite, final, and supported by facts.”¹⁹¹ “If there had not been such relations to the Kazakhs as there were before the war, and if the mobilization of workers had been done more cautiously,” he concluded, the revolt would never have occurred.¹⁹² The failed conscription of Kazakh workers was thus, for Tynyshpaev, both caused by and the ultimate symptom of colonial misrule. Baitursynov’s celebration of the end of the era of “oppression and force of the tsarist government” in the pages of *Qazaq* after the February Revolution suggests that this opinion was widespread.¹⁹³ This did not, however, immediately rule out the possibility of working with a new, liberal government in a multi-ethnic state (their falling-out with the Kadets would come later).¹⁹⁴ Indeed, many contributors to *Qazaq* signed a statement in support of the Provisional Government in March 1917:

“The Kazakhs now need to organize for the support of the new structure and new government. It is necessary to work in contact with all nationalities, supporting the new structure. The Kazakhs should prepare for the Constituent Assembly and select worthy candidates...Hurry to discuss the agrarian question. Our slogan is “democratic republic” and land to whoever extracts income from it by animal husbandry and agriculture.”¹⁹⁵

Nicholas’ government had provided Kazakhs neither land nor representation; the Kazakh intelligentsia was still willing to make common cause with a government that seemed to promise both.

In the years leading up to the revolt of 1916, many people, both Russian administrators and Kazakh *intelligenty*, suspected that the conscription order serving as its immediate cause, as carried out, would spark violent resistance on the part of those

¹⁹¹ Qoigeldiev 199.

¹⁹² Ibid., 208.

¹⁹³ Cited at Sabol 139.

¹⁹⁴ On this falling-out see Nurgaliev 414, “Men kadet partiiasyndan nege shyqtym?” Bokeikhanov attributes the break to the Kadets’ prioritization of Russian issues and opposition to national autonomy.

¹⁹⁵ Qoigeldiev 219. This statement was issued under the heading “K kirgizam, svobodnym grazhdanam obnovliaemoi Rossii” (To the Kazakhs, free citizens of a renewed Russia).

subject to it. These viewpoints, however, were mostly ignored, and the final result was a bloody conflict that deeply threatened Russian rule in Turkestan and the steppe. The policy of universal conscription implied an equality before the law, and an intersection between Kazakh interests and those of the Russian Empire as a whole, that was contradicted by the expropriation of “surplus” Kazakh lands for the use of Slavic peasant settlers and the exclusion of Central Asia from the political system of the empire. While the Kazakh intelligentsia aspired to secure both of these goals through service to the imperial state, most participants in the revolt of 1916 seem to have only wanted land they viewed as theirs back from settlers. The events of 1916 proved for some colonial administrators, though, both Kazakhs’ continued unreadiness for integration into the body politic of the empire and the need to punish them, in some cases, by confiscating land and arming settlers.¹⁹⁶ Thus the immediate effects of the revolt of 1916 did not satisfy the aspirations of any Kazakhs, whether publicists or pastoralists. In the slightly longer term, the revolt and colonial officials’ responses to it proved equally toxic to the prospects of Romanov governance in Turkestan and the steppe provinces; when the February Revolution came to Central Asia, the old colonial government found itself bereft of support.

Conclusion

For the bulk of the 19th century, imperial Russian officials complained of the paucity of reliable information available to them in support of their attempts to manage the land, and govern the inhabitants, of the Eurasian steppe and Turkestan. As a result of their conviction that more detailed and precise data would necessarily produce better

¹⁹⁶ On arming settlers and providing troops to calm the settler population, see TsGA RK f. 19, op. 1, d. 623, sv. 79, ll. 95, 295. The former was a measure taken for self-defense during the revolt, the latter intended to provide protection and tranquility in its aftermath.

policies, a succession of tsars sponsored wide-ranging research about the land and inhabitants of these regions, carried out by scholars and administrators alike. The corpus of knowledge that emerged from this effort, though, was rife with contradictions; moreover, the autocratic structure of the Russian Empire meant that even reliable information could be shunted to the side when doing so was politically expedient. In the last two decades of Romanov rule in Central Asia, tensions in imperial discourse about the region were superseded by the social, economic, and environmental tensions that they produced there. Uncertainty about the amount of Central Asian land that was truly surplus and useful for agricultural colonization led to the hurried and occasionally violent seizure of land from Kazakhs' use, which in turn produced a significant economic decline among the latter. Anthropological beliefs that Kazakhs were civilizable, intelligent, and potentially useful imperial subjects clashed with other public discourses deeply distrustful of both the political loyalty of Muslims and the intellectual capacity of pastoralists, which resulted in the creation of a small group of state-educated, Russophone Kazakhs who aspired to, but were barred from, participation in the Empire's political system. The Central Asian revolt of 1916 represented the failure of imperial Russian policies there with respect to land and political integration alike. Both of these policy failures were rooted, ultimately, in contradictions in the information that shaped them. The crisis of Russian imperialism in Central Asia in 1916 combined social, economic, cultural and environmental factors, but the root from which each of them grew was epistemological.

After their initial support of the Provisional Government and subsequent break with the Kadets, many among the Kazakh intelligentsia were instrumental in forming an ephemeral republic called the Alash Autonomy, aligned with the Whites and opposed to

the Bolsheviks, whom they had long distrusted.¹⁹⁷ When the Russian Civil War turned against the Whites, though, they came to view negotiation with the Bolsheviks as the best way out of a bad situation; shortly after the final victory of Soviet arms, the Alash Autonomy was disbanded in August 1920, and replaced by the Kyrgyz Autonomous Socialist Republic.¹⁹⁸ This decision was to prove personally unfortunate for Baitursynov, Bokeikhanov, and other members of the Kazakh intelligentsia whose death dates of 1937 and '38 testify mutely to their fate under Soviet power, shot as “bourgeois nationalists” and “enemies of the people.” The mass famine brought on by collectivization and sedentarization of Kazakh pastoralists during the First Five-Year Plan indicates that, whatever long-term benefits urbanization, expanded education, and public health campaigns might have brought the average Kazakh, there were serious costs to this decision for the bulk of the population as well.¹⁹⁹ The Soviet Union had a far more coherent informational apparatus than the Russian Empire, and significantly more coercive force at its disposal to make its vision of governance a reality. It is debatable whether or not the union republics Soviet administrators created on the basis of ethnographic and linguistic data satisfied the aspirations for political representation of

¹⁹⁷ Bokeikhanov was particularly venomous in this respect, equating Bolsheviks with reactionary Black Hundreds. See Nurgaliev 414, “Pamiatka krest’ianam, rabochim i soldatam.”

¹⁹⁸ V. K. Grigor’ev, *Protivostoianie: Bol’sheviki i neproletarskie partii v Kazakhstane, 1917-1920 gg.* (Alma-Ata: “Kazakhstan,” 1989).

¹⁹⁹ More than a million people died on the steppe during a series of famines during the early 1930s. Eloquent personal testimony concerning this era can be found in Mukhamet Shayakhmedov, trans. Jan Butler, *The Silent Steppe: The Story of a Kazakh Nomad Under Stalin* (London: Stacey International, 2006). An excellent recent dissertation about the famine ensuing from sedentarization and collectivization of the Kazakhs is Sarah Cameron, “The Hungry Steppe: Soviet Kazakhstan and the Kazakh Famine, 1921-1934,” Diss. Yale University, 2010. For a sense of the contradictions involved in Soviet modernization campaigns, which juxtaposed, in the long term, improved rates of literacy and infant mortality with tremendous violence, both cultural and physical, see Paula Michaels, *Curative Powers: Medicine and Empire in Stalin’s Central Asia* (Pittsburgh: University of Pittsburgh Press, 2003); David L. Hoffmann, *Stalinist Values: The Cultural Norms of Stalinist Modernity, 1917-1941* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell UP, 2003); Paul Stronski, *Tashkent: Forging a Soviet City, 1930-1966* (Pittsburgh: University of Pittsburgh Press, 2010).

minority autonomists; it seems clear that their statistically-grounded solution to the problem of rural areas' economic inefficiency was not aligned with the wishes of those who worked the land.²⁰⁰ The incomplete, contradictory information according to which the Russian Empire ruled Central Asia and the voluminous data backing Soviet administration there lent themselves equally well to misrule.

²⁰⁰ On the role of purposefully-gathered ethnographic data in the Soviet delimitation of national republics, see Francine Hirsch, *Empire of Nations: Ethnographic Knowledge and the Making of the Soviet Union* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell UP, 2005).

Conclusion

Of Transitional States and Imperial Failures

A strikingly common formulation among Russophone Kazakh intellectuals of the 19th century was that the steppe and its inhabitants were in a “transitional state.”

Altynsarin, arguing for the implementation of his educational reforms in a letter to the Russian administrator V. V. Katarinskii, claimed that “the [Kazakh] people, located now in a transitional state, requires some sort of moral food; and it receives this food, out of necessity, from ignorant hands, eats it up rather greedily and ruins its healthy body.”¹

Even those Kazakh intermediaries who did not explicitly use the rhetoric of a “transitional state” (*perekhodnoe sostoianie*) were all concerned, in some way, with the steppe’s process of becoming something else, and becoming something better than it had previously been. This cohort of Russophone Kazakhs, all of them the products of colonial schools, and most of them serving the colonial administration in some capacity, represented, admittedly, a vanishingly small percentage of the steppe’s population; the voices of more conservative factions, or those of people who left no textual record of their experience of Russian imperialism, are absent in the present work. The specifics of the narratives of “progress” that can be discerned in the works of such intermediaries, furthermore, differ substantially, with both the source of the problem (whether moral crisis or economic failure) and the future envisioned (whether Europeanization or the spread of a purified, modernist Islam) varying with time, place and personal subjectivity.

¹ SSIA t. 3, 49-50, letter to V. V. Katarinskii dated 27 December 1879. For the “transitional state” rhetoric see also the title of Chapter Two, taken from M.-S. Babadzhanov, “Zametki kirgiza o zhit’e-byt’e i uchasti ego rodichei” (Ivlev 104-19).

Still, within this group, a set of important commonalities remains. Adoption of the rhetoric of transition and progress, which would appear not only in correspondence with colonial administrators and metropolitan scholarly journals, but also in the Kazakh-language periodical press of the early 20th century, implies absorption of the colonizer's critique of the steppe as a backward and chaotic place. Further, their specific visions of progress were informed by their participation in the Russian Empire's information-gathering project, just as the writings they contributed to the latter informed its governance in some cases. The extent to which Kazakhs were Muslim, the level of culture and civilization (measured according to a variety of indices) they possessed, the economic systems best supported by the steppe environment, and the changeability of the latter were all questions subject to debate by Russian scholars and bureaucrats, and while Kazakh intermediaries did not parrot metropolitan discourses, they were certainly influenced by these discussions and made their own contributions to them. Finally, all of these subaltern visions of progress, however ambivalent they were about Russian colonialism, assumed the desirability and necessity of the continuing presence of some sort of Russian governance on the steppe, thought of variously as a conduit to other world cultures, the representative of a culture that had, by virtue of its conquest of the steppe, proven superior to Kazakhs', or a source of the financial and institutional resources necessary to move Kazakhs forward in their "transitional state." The impressions they formed of the colonial state, its self-representation, institutions, and practices, thus came to have particular importance in their understanding of the transition the steppe was, in their minds, undergoing.

For many imperial Russian observers, scholarly and otherwise, of the steppe and its inhabitants, the steppe was indeed in the midst of a transformation, though much like the Kazakh intelligentsia and its forebears, the desired nature of this transition was uncertain. On the basis of their observations of geographic and environmental conditions, scholars and bureaucrats argued variously for the steppe's transformation into a second grain-growing center for the Empire, a waystation for the transport of goods among European Russia, China, and Turkestan, or a center of intensified, market-oriented stock raising. Most such views assumed that Kazakhs were loyal subjects, civilizable and capable of participating in whichever sort of economic development would take precedence; with the concurrent assumption that any of these forms of economic transition would involve sedentarization and cultural development, there was an implicit belief that this economic transition would result in Kazakhs' political integration as well. Indeed, the well-born Kazakh intermediaries who were the first products of Russian colonial schools proved to some observers, by their service and their scholarship, that this was so.² Economic and cultural "progress" on the steppe would, in this view, benefit metropole and colony alike, and "civilizing" the Kazakhs, patronizing as it sounds to modern ears, would reward metropolitan investment. Although information concerning the physical environments of the steppe varied and lent itself to disparate assessments of the form that the steppe's transition would take, anthropological observations and, in some cases, personal interactions fostered a belief that it was possible.

Even so, lack of consensus about the specifics of the transition Kazakhs were to undergo had tremendous significance. The question of land privatization, considered a

² See N. A. Iadrintsev's comments that Chokan Valikhanov's success proved that nomads "were capable of perceiving European ideas" in SSCV t. 5, 274.

first step towards a more efficient and sedentary economy, as well as towards the large-scale introduction of agriculture, is an excellent example of the legal and economic consequences of the tensions of empire. The Russian colonial state had long granted plots of land in hereditary ownership to the elite Kazakhs who served it as low-level administrators; Babadzhanov, for example, received a large tract in exchange for his service.³ Yet, as Virginia Martin has rightly noted, scholarly-bureaucratic observers during the 1860s argued that privatizing lands formerly used communally, or under usufruct rights, interfered with pastoral migration and harmed Kazakh nomads' economic wellbeing.⁴ To remediate this growing problem, the authors of the Provisional Statute of 1868 included a provision declaring all areas of the steppe to be "state land" granted to the Kazakhs in long-term communal use. Subsequently, by the Resettlement Act of 1889, governing peasant resettlement to western Siberia and the steppe provinces, state land was designated as free land, available for settlement; when the Provisional Statute was revised into the Steppe Statute of 1891, an understanding that these "free" state lands could be surplus to Kazakhs' use and estranged from them was written into law, without which settlement would have lacked a legal basis.⁵ A law based on the idea that the pastoralist economy needed protection from rapid change produced, in a different context, more politically Russocentric and convinced of the possibility of resettlement, a law that compelled Kazakhs to become sedentary or flee.

Other observers were unconvinced that Kazakhs, their economy, and their culture were likely to change in any significant way. These observers understood Levshin's canonical description of anarchy on the steppe as a permanent condition of Kazakh

³ TsGA RK f. 78, op. 2, d. 1473, sv. 79, "Ob otvode zemel'nogo uchastkasotniuku Babadzhanovu."

⁴ Martin, *Law and Custom*, 133, citing Krasovskii v. 3, 160.

⁵ Martin 70-72, 133.

existence, rather than a phase to be passed through. This view, too, found support in the fruits of the Russian Empire's informational encounter with the steppe. Ideas about Islamic fanaticism did not originate in the study of the steppe, since uncertainty reigned for many years about whether or not the Kazakhs were truly Muslim, but once this was "established," paranoia about Islam contributed to a vision of the steppe as implacably hostile to Russian interests. Lurid accounts of the alleged squalor in which Kazakh pastoralists lived, descriptions of their dishonesty, laziness and sexual licentiousness, and dubious claims about their intellectual capacity suggested, for some, that Kazakhs were not worth the effort of civilizing. The visions of imperial governance spurred by such scholarship were primarily extractive and based on the establishment of internal tranquility and external security. The steppe was indeed in a transitional state, according to this formulation, not from colony to province, but rather from a colony to a more efficiently governed colony, serving metropolitan interests better, and with a more quiescent population. Such ideas were present in scholarly-bureaucratic discourse as early as the 1850s, after the military pacification of what is now southern Kazakhstan, but gained particular fixity in the early 1880s under Alexander III, when both Russification of minority-dominated regions and preference for the interests of ethnic Russians became state priorities. Neither people espousing views opposed to this nor the institutions created on the basis of such views, though, disappeared immediately under Alexander III, which would lead to conflict during the last years of the empire. Even as the political climate of the Russian Empire shifted towards opposition to Kazakhs' political and economic integration into the empire, its schools produced a generation of Russophone Kazakhs who thought otherwise.

Strikingly, few of these informationally-driven views of transition, whether those of Kazakh intermediaries or imperial Russian scholars and bureaucrats, wholly excluded Slavic peasant resettlement to the steppe provinces, the primary source of Kazakh discontent in parliament and on the ground during the last years of the imperial era. All of these visions were Russocentric in the sense that they depended on some sort of metropolitan interaction with the steppe, whether in the form of administrative and educational institutions, financial support, or population transfer. The resettlement of peasants to the steppe could be compatible with any of them. In the form it ultimately took, resettlement was the estrangement of lands from Kazakh pastoralists with token efforts made to allot new lands to them, a solution to the land crisis of European Russia based on the idea that steppe lands were state property, and the state was Russian. This was an extractive colonialism that succeeded and failed on the basis of a mass of statistical and agronomic data. Resettlement, though, was also a part of plans to civilize and increase the economic productivity of the steppe; Kazakh intermediaries, while they decried the abuses they observed in colonial administration, were also able to reconcile themselves with regulated settlement in accordance with the environmental conditions of the steppe biome. That this ideal failed to be realized was one of the chief disappointments of the proto-nationalist Kazakh intelligentsia, which thought of statistical and environmental surveys as a means of controlling settlement and defending indigenous economic interests. The rhetoric of objective measurement and the idea of land norms could serve a range of political programs, but when rapid resettlement at any cost became a high-level governmental priority, only one of these programs was likely to win out.

Indeed, after the revolution of 1905, the ambivalence of Kazakh intermediaries about Russian colonialism was gradually replaced by unstinting criticism of its policies, laws, and representatives. What the previous generation of Russophone Kazakhs had understood as a transition towards economic prosperity, cultural efflorescence, and political integration into a multi-ethnic polity had manifestly failed to occur on all three counts. Resettlement had, they claimed, led most Kazakhs to ruin, and more offensively still, it had been expanded and accelerated after their exclusion from the parliament that approved its expansion. Politically, then, the steppe remained a colony, expressly included from national representation, its local administrative system distinct from the rest of the empire; economically, too, it was a source of the raw material – land – perceived as necessary to solve a metropolitan economic and political crisis, rather than being developed in its own right. The solutions at which they arrived, though, still focused on reforming Russian imperialism – allowing Kazakhs to be included in a range of empire-wide institutions, tailoring those institutions to suit Kazakhs’ distinct culture and lifeways, and allowing them the same rights to land that settlers enjoyed. Only the events leading up to the bloody revolt of 1916, and its aftermath, revealed how remote such hopes were; after the February Revolution, the Kadets proved hardly more accommodating. The results of the Russian Empire’s informational and bureaucratic incoherence were a violent anti-colonial uprising and a period of political autonomy unanticipated even by those who led it.

In a recent dissertation analyzing the rise of the nationalist Kazakh intelligentsia, Pete Rottier has rightly noted that the Kazakh case demonstrates that nationalist thought

does not always seek self-determination.⁶ As accurate as this conclusion is, a broader view of Kazakh interactions with their imperial Russian colleagues and interlocutors permits us to say even more. Not all nationalist thought is anti-colonial, nor is all anti-colonial thought nationalist; moreover, views of communal identity and relationships with the metropole among the colonized need be neither anti-colonial nor nationalist to be original. Rather, the contradictions and tensions inherent in Russian imperialism on the steppe – both scholarly-bureaucratic writings concerning it and the laws and institutions informed by those writings – were instrumental in transforming the ambivalent views of the intelligentsia it created into a program of national self-determination. In the steppe provinces of the Russian Empire, like other European colonial empires, what the empire knew about the region and the people who lived there was an important part of the consolidation, maintenance, and transformation of its rule. Ironically, though, contradictions in this collection of information also produced substantial threats to imperial rule.

⁶ Pete Rottier, “Creating the Kazak Nation: The Intelligentsia’s Quest for Acceptance in the Russian Empire, 1905-1920” (Diss. University of Wisconsin, 2005).

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