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# 1

## Introduction

The first two decades of the twentieth century was a central period in the embryonic Kazak nationalist struggle as many Kazaks organized politically and openly expressed their concerns over, and remedies for, tsarist colonization practices, economic and social dislocation, and national-cultural deterioration. The self-proclaimed national leaders, above all, sought to unify a disparate population that they believed was threatened with extinction unless it could be 'awakened' and invigorated with a new sense of self and purpose. By the early twentieth century, the Kazak intelligentsia had become, to use Edward Said's expression, a people 'conscious of themselves as prisoners in their own land'.<sup>1</sup> Colonization, the intelligentsia believed, had exposed the Kazak nation's weaknesses and threatened its very existence. The intelligentsia demanded that the people rise up to defend it, but not in revolution. The Kazaks envisioned rather a cultural awakening that would unify the people into one nation. The means to do this would be through print and publishing in the Kazak language, increased education, and political organization. Between 1905 and 1917 Kazak language newspapers and periodicals had appeared, schools were enrolling more and more students, and an embryonic Kazak political party called Alash Orda (The Horde of Alash) had formed.

This study was originally conceived as a history of Alash Orda and the origins of modern Kazak nationalism. Questions about the movement, however, were eventually coupled by new ones, in particular about the socio-political foundations upon which the movement was built. Since the demise of Alash in 1920, its history, indeed the history

of modern Kazak nationalism, has been rather superficially analyzed by Soviet and Western scholars. The little that has been written was by and large unflattering.<sup>2</sup> For example, Sir Olaf Caroe dismissed Alash Orda as an organization that was 'never much more than a committee which held congresses and issued manifestos'.<sup>3</sup> Caroe's statement unfairly criticizes Alash Orda and evaluates the movement solely on its failure to achieve long-term independence in the midst of civil war. Furthermore, it fails to answer why the Soviets later, in the 1930s, devoted so much attention to it and regarded it as a dangerous, nationalist, bourgeois, and counter-revolutionary movement.<sup>4</sup> It ignores the circumstances, civil war and famine, under which Alash Orda attempted to create an independent government. His statement, more importantly, diminishes the character and aspirations of the Kazak national leadership and subjectively discards them to the growing trash heap of failed political movements. While political success eluded Alash Orda, its cultural, social, and literary influences persist to this day. This study is the result of an inquiry into the socio-political, economic, and cultural aspirations of the Kazak intelligentsia.

### **Structure of the study**

This work is divided into two halves. Essentially, the first half surveys the historical foundation of the Kazak national movement within the colonial context to determine the socio-political lineages of the early twentieth-century Kazak intelligentsia. Therefore, Chapters 2 through 4 examine Kazak nomadism and culture, Russian colonization and administration, and the genesis of the Kazak intelligentsia in the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. Only through an understanding of this period can the historian of modernization, which is the story of the Kazak intelligentsia, appreciate the resilience of community customs and institutions, whether nomadic or sedentary. As Michael Confino has aptly pointed out, if historians are to understand the effects of the agents of change – for our purposes colonization, settling, and agricultural production versus nomadism, but also including such things as modern communications, transportation, and education – historians should 'carefully analyze the agents of cohesion, the forces of traditions, and the [nomads'] moral and material strategies for maintaining the precarious equilibrium of [pastoral] life'.<sup>5</sup>

The second half of this study examines the social, political, and nationalist views of three of the most influential members of the Kazak intelligentsia: Alikhan Bokeikhanov, Akhmet Baitursynov, and Mukhamedzhan Seralin. Certainly other Kazak intelligentsia wielded considerable influence upon the nascent Kazak socio-political movement, but these three individuals best represent the myriad of views articulated and multiple activities undertaken 'to awaken' the Kazak nation from what they believed was a pernicious national slumber. As individual case studies, these three men embodied the political, educational, and literary objectives of the Kazak intelligentsia, whose members were held together not by common social origin and status, but by a strong sense of injustice and alienation from an uncompromising, autocratic authority. They are prime examples, although not the only ones, of individuals caught between their own national consciousness and the demise of a nation united only by the symbols evident in its oral traditions, customs, and nomadic heritage. More importantly, Bokeikhanov, Baitursynov, and Seralin played critical roles in organizing the Kazak intelligentsia, chiefly through publishing but also in the political arena, prior to the 1917 Russian revolutions.

I have modeled the structure of this work similar to that employed by Richard Wortman in his monograph *The Crisis of Russian Populism*.<sup>6</sup> His study analyzed the socio-political views of three mid-nineteenth-century Russian populists, each of whom contributed to the events, organizations, and political movements that shaped Russia's reform era. Similar to Wortman, I have focused upon the evolution of thought and ideas rather than concentrate on other aspects of the individuals' lives. It must be stressed that these are not traditional biographies, but rather biographical sketches designed to comprehend the vision of the Kazak national struggle reflected by each individual's actions in the literary, social, and political spheres. Despite the collapse of the Soviet Union in 1991, information about the lives of these three men is meagre. Archival and secondary sources remain limited, thus this study chiefly utilizes the collected published articles, short stories, poetry, and other material to develop a better understanding of their views. Since Kazakhstan's independence, however, Kazak scholars have demonstrated greater interest in Alash and the pre-revolutionary era. Thus, an understanding of their views and actions can be gleaned from the literary record and supplemented, when possible, by archival material and other sources.

The three individuals examined in this work emerged from a society divided by geography, culture, language, and religion and, nevertheless, as Edward Lazzarini has noted among other nationalists, 'they were as partial insiders who knew how to turn the dominant discourse against itself',<sup>7</sup> subsequently adopting a variety of methods to preserve the nation. They aspired to use the dominant culture to their advantage, via education and economic advancement, to defend their own nationality and its culture against the encroachment of another. In the minds of the Kazak intelligentsia, it was the rapidity and unevenness of the change embodied in Russian colonization that made them increasingly intolerant of the old order. Economic impoverishment and the disintegration of traditional social structures beginning in the second half of the nineteenth century and accelerating after 1896 compelled many Kazak intellectuals into open enmity to a society and ruling authority that had no use for them and ignored their pleas for equality. These educated Kazaks fit neither with the dominant society that demanded their allegiance, nor with the culture that needed their abilities and energy to inspire innovation and change. It was evident, for example, by the presumably paradoxical role Bokeikhanov had as a member of the Muslim factions in the State Duma and as a Freemason. Baitursynov was both a *zapadnik* (westernizer) and conversely an ardent protector of the Kazak language and literature with its Asian foundations and heritage. Seralin was also a keen defender of the Kazak language and culture, but urged his fellow Kazaks to settle and learn Russian. These seemingly contradictory elements of the Kazak nationalists' characters illustrate the complexity of the questions and issues involved.

### **Intelligentsia and the nation**

In many ways, the pre-revolutionary Kazak nationalists resembled other concurrent national movements in Europe and Asia. Their efforts – organizational, political, social – conform to Miroslav Hroch's 'periodization' theories of national revival, which denotes three definable 'phases'. Phase A was the period of scholarly interest; Phase B was the period of patriotic agitation; and Phase C was the rise of a mass national movement.<sup>8</sup> The Kazak intelligentsia was making the transition from Phase A to Phase B, which Hroch considered the most essential, when the First World War intervened and severely

handicapped their efforts. The 1917 Russian revolutions propelled them into Phase C well before the Kazak masses were ready for their leadership or brand of nationalism. Indeed, it can be argued that Phase C was co-opted and consumed by Soviet nationality policies in the 1920s. The post-Soviet Kazak national revival, which includes the publication of many nationalists' works that had previously been ignored by scholars for ideological reasons, is in some ways an extension and renewal of Phase C, albeit, one that carries heavily laden historical baggage.

Central to this study is the abbreviated transition to Phase B and the critical role the Kazak intelligentsia played in defining the concepts of the Kazak nation and its place in the multi-national Russian empire. The social and political grievances of Kazaks, as articulated by Bokeikhanov, Baitursynov, and Seralin, were manifested by the growth of writing and publishing among the Kazak intelligentsia and the development of the Kazak periodical press as embodied in the journal *Ai qap* (1911–1915) and the newspaper *Kazak* (1913–1918). These two periodicals were the most influential periodical publications of the period – and crucial sources for this work – and were the political and educational vehicles among the Kazak intelligentsia.

The Kazaks were not, however, alone in their reform efforts among national minorities within the Russian empire. Indeed, they were influenced by concurrent struggles in Central Asia, most notably the Jadids. Analogous to the Kazaks, the Jadids concluded, as Adeeb Khalid noted in his excellent study of the Jadidist movement, that the 'formulation of the predicament of Central Asian society was the result of the profound transformation of Central Asia in the fifty years of imperial Russian rule as a response to it'.<sup>9</sup> However, as he notes, in the steppe region the Kazaks were not trying to reform Islam to protect the nation, rather the steppe 'produced its own logic that was a salient feature of Central Asian life in the tsarist period'.<sup>10</sup> The Kazaks were trying to reform a society that was in economic transition, which seriously altered the social and cultural relations among Kazaks. Islam played a more secondary role in the Kazaks' vision, as Khalid commented, because 'the steppe province was under direct Russian rule far longer and subject to different administrative policies than Turkestan'.<sup>11</sup> Similar to the Kazaks, however, Jadidism could not have been possible, indeed was 'inconceivable', without print.

Among the many notions of the nation that deepened among Kazak intellectuals during colonization, the most important was the correlation between a people and its language. However, as Eric Hobsbawm correctly noted:

National languages are ... almost always semi-artificial constructs and occasionally, like modern Hebrew, virtually invented. They are the opposite of what nationalist mythology supposes them to be, namely the primordial foundations of national culture and the matrices of the national mind. They are usually attempts to devise a standardized idiom out of a multiplicity of actually spoken idioms, which are thereafter downgraded to dialects, the main problem in their construction being usually, which dialect to choose as the base of the standardized and homogenized language.<sup>12</sup>

Nevertheless, language becomes for national movements a central feature in their proto-national cohesion. Coupled with the national and territorial imprisonment experienced by the Kazak intelligentsia, literacy in the Kazak language became the most critical means to liberate the people from colonial oppression. According to Edward Said:

the concept of the national language is central, but without the practice of a national culture – from slogans to pamphlets and newspapers, from folktales and heroes to epic poetry, novels, and drama – the language is inert; national culture organizes and sustains communal memory ... it reinhabits the landscape using restored ways of life, heroes, heroines, and exploits; it formulates expressions and emotions of pride as well as defiance, which in turn form the backbone of the principal national independence parties.<sup>13</sup>

For the Kazak intelligentsia, publishing its language in books and periodicals gave the Kazak language a sense of legitimacy and made it more permanent. Thus, many Kazaks published new and ancient poems, tales, fables, and prose from their own history as well as that of non-Kazaks, typically Russian writers and poets, to reinforce the proto-nationalistic notions they wanted to use to disseminate their interpretation of the Kazak nation. They sought to develop a modern nation through print medium.

Many other scholars have recognized and elaborated upon the critical role played by print. Anne McClintock in her work on women in South Africa, for example, noted the constructed nature and inventiveness of nations and the role played by publishing and other social interactions. She argues that

nations are elaborate social practices enacted through time, laboriously fabricated through the media and the printing press, in schools, churches, the myriad forms of popular culture, in trade unions and funerals, protest marches and uprisings.<sup>14</sup>

As nomads, however, Kazaks did not share specifically in some of these social practices, certainly not on a wide scale. To be sure they developed a culture that had its own distinctiveness, but dispersed across a huge territorial divide that led to a host of social, cultural, linguistic, and religious practices. They were influenced not only by their 'Kazakness', but equally by the colonial environment and other forces and societies. Clearly, for the Kazak intelligentsia studied in this work, bridging these differences was the essential goal. How to accomplish this proved difficult and sometimes elusive, but not impossible.

The Kazak intelligentsia undertook a critical self-examination of Kazak society that revealed an internal disintegration that the intelligentsia criticized and sought to reform. Being a Kazak did not mean being a nomad. Kazak-ness, they believed, meant much more. Kazaks had responded to the colonization disorganized, disunited, and thus suffered for it. Unity, in action and thought, they often proclaimed, was the best weapon against colonization, but it was absent from Kazak society when confronted by a more powerful, persistent colonizing state.

These conditions produced a different intelligentsia, yet one that shared a common calling with intelligentsia in other places. As Aleksander Gella noted, intelligentsia 'without respect to their occupations and economic status, were united by one common calling: "serve your nation"'.<sup>15</sup> The eminent sociologist, Karl Mannheim, wrote that 'in every society there are those social groups whose special task it is to provide an interpretation of the world for that society. We call these the intelligentsia'.<sup>16</sup> The Kazak intelligentsia examined in this study shared features, for example, with nationalists in Turkey, who,

Niyazi Berkes argued, were confronted with the urgent task of 'awakening a nation in order to adapt themselves to conditions of contemporary society'.<sup>17</sup> Moreover, the Kazak intelligentsia echoed both the mid-nineteenth-century Polish and Russian intelligentsia, which was described as a social stratum 'alienated from its own society and having feelings of responsibility for at least the moral leadership of its nation'.<sup>18</sup> Bokeikhanov, Baitursynov, and Seralin each received traditional and formal educations, and armed with a new medium of print, they reflected the changes around them using methods which, as Ayse Kadioglu identified, meant reforming the national culture by 'adjusting it to the requirements of progress while at the same time maintaining its distinctive identity'.<sup>19</sup> Therein was the dilemma.

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