

POSTCOLONIAL READINGS OF ORALKHAN BŎKEI'S WORKS

ПОСТКОЛОНИАЛЬНЫЕ ЧТЕНИЯ ПРОИЗВЕДЕНИЙ ОРАЛХАНА БОКЕЯ

ПОСТКОЛОНИАЛДЫҚ КӨЗҚАРАС: ОРАЛХАН БӨКЕЙ ЖАЗБАЛАРЫ

by

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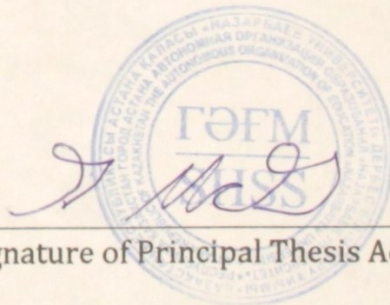
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Note on Transliteration

Kazakh and Russian texts in this thesis have been transliterated according to the Library of Congress transliteration system.

Abstract

This study explores the relationship between literature and the social, historical, political and cultural themes in the literary works of the Kazakh writer Oralkhan Bòkei. It discusses the postcolonial aspects of Bòkei's literary texts and analyzes the themes of colonialism, hybridity, ethnic nationalism, modernization and industrialization, and postcolonial environmentalism in his works. This study argues that postcolonial readings of Oralkhan Bòkei's literary oeuvre can reveal anti-colonial as well as postcolonial discourses existing in post-Stalin Kazakh Soviet literature. Through applying some of the concepts of postcolonial studies such as hybridity, subalterneity, representation, mainly developed in Western scholarship, to the experience of the Kazakh society under the Soviet Union, this work attempts to explore the author's perception of the Soviet Union as an empire and its threat in destroying the national culture of Kazakh society and Kazakh national identity.

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Introduction

This study explores the relationship between literature and the social, historical, political and cultural themes in the literary works of the Kazakh writer Oralkhan Bòkei. It discusses the postcolonial aspects of Bòkei's literary texts and analyzes the themes of colonialism, hybridity, ethnic nationalism, modernization and industrialization, and postcolonial environmentalism in his works. This study argues that postcolonial readings of Oralkhan Bòkei's literary oeuvre can reveal anti-colonial as well as postcolonial discourses existing in post-Stalin Kazakh Soviet literature.

This study will hopefully be an important contribution to the body of English-language scholarship on Kazakh literature. Until recently, there was little scholarly enquiry not only on Kazakh literature but overall in Central Asian languages and Central Asian literatures, which also could be seen as non-existent compared to another fields such as historical, social and political sciences. This can be mostly explained by the linguistic competence among Western scholars, who are much more likely to work with Russian-language texts. However, recently, there have been some significant works which analyzed several Kazakh and Central Asian novels from a postcolonial perspective.¹ There were also debates on the applicability of specific definitions and concepts mainly produced in relation to British and French colonialism to the experience of Russia and Central Asia.² Through

¹Clark, Katerina. "The Mutability of the Canon: Socialist Realism and Chingiz Aitmatov's *I dol'she veka dlitsia den*." *Slavic review* 43, no. 4 (1984): 573-587. Ram, Harsha. "Imagining Eurasia: The Poetics and Ideology of Olzhas Suleimenov's *AZ i IA*." *Slavic Review* (2001): 289-311. Diana T. Kudaibergenova (2013): "Imagining community" in Soviet Kazakhstan. An historical analysis of narrative on nationalism in Kazakh-Soviet literature", *Nationalities Papers: The Journal of Nationalism and Ethnicity*, DOI:10.1080/00905992.2013.775115. Gulnara Dadabayeva & Dina Sharipova (2016) The imagined nation-state in Soviet literature: the case of Koshpendiler, *Nationalities Papers*, 44:1, 165-180.

² For example, Adeeb Khalid and Nathaniel Knight debated the applicability of Edward Said's insights on Orientalism to the Soviet case. See Khalid, "Russian History and the Debate over Orientalism," and Knight, "On Russian Orientalism: A Response to Adeeb Khalid."

employing various concepts from postcolonial studies developed mainly in Western scholarship by the scholars from ex-European colonies, this study aims at engaging the experience of colonialism in Kazakh-Soviet literature. Thus, in John Heathershaw's terms, it aims to come one step closer to 'making the case for greater mutual engagement between Post-Colonial and Central Asian studies,'³ and having engaged in the discussion in postcolonial studies, and especially in literature, as Chino Moore noted, this work attempts 'to remedy the 'geopolitical exclusion' of Soviet and post-Soviet space.'⁴ In this study I do not see postcolonialism as a rigid paradigm. Therefore, one of my aims is the critical selection of relevant concepts of postcolonial studies in the context of Kazakh Soviet literature. In this study, it is assumed that there are many different postcolonialisms, and that Oralkhan Bōkei's works would merely reflect one or some of them.

Oralkhan Bōkei

Among the Kazakh writers of the 1960s to 1980s who were devoted to the exploration of Kazakh villages, Oralkhan Bōkei is widely recognized as one of the most talented and interesting.

Oralkhan Bōkei was a Kazakh writer, playwright and journalist. He was born on 28th of September, 1943 in the village of Shyngghystai of the Qatonqaraghai region of East Kazakhstan. In the year he was born, his father was sent to the front in the Second World War. As a token of hope that her husband would return from war, Oralkhan's mother gave the

³ Heathershaw, John. 2010. "Central Asian Statehood in Postcolonial Perspective." In *Stable Outside, Fragile Inside?: Post-Soviet Statehood in Central Asia*, edited by Emilian Kavalski, 87–106. Surrey: Ashgate Publishing Limited.

⁴ Moore, David Chioni. "Is the post-in postcolonial the post-in post-Soviet? Toward a global postcolonial critique." *Publications of the Modern Language Association of America* (2001): 111-128.

name of Oral to her baby, which in Kazakh means ‘to come back,’ or ‘to return.’ After the completion of high school, he worked in very different jobs in his village (sovkhos), including as tractor driver. He dreamed of pursuing journalism as a career. With that intention, he attended a part-time journalism programme at the S. M. Kirov Kazakh State University in Almaty between 1963 and 1969 while continuing working as a tractor driver. After working as an editor –corrector and translator at some regional newspapers, in 1968 he was invited to Almaty to work for the republican magazine “*Leninshil Zhas*” (Leninist Youth). The person who played a significant role in his becoming a journalist and a writer was another prominent Kazakh writer, Sherkhan Mūrtaza. From 1974 to 1983, O.Bökei was the executive deputy of the prose department of the literary magazine “*Zhūldyz*” (The Star) and from 1983 to 1991 he was an assistant editor. From 1991 to 1993 he worked as a chief editor of the magazine “*Qazaq ādebieti*” (Kazakh literature). He died an untimely death on 17th of May, 1993 in the capital of India, Delhi. His works began to be published from the 1960s. He received a State Prize in 1984.

As one of most prominent Kazakh literary critics Serik Qirabayev notes, despite the fact that the party sessions of 1971, 1976, 1981 and 1986 set as its duty to continue the party-orientedness of literature, there are group of writers who did not follow the party agenda.⁵ They were the ones who brought new national narrative into literature and made it possible to bring and preserve Kazakh national consciousness.

The post-Stalin era Kazakh Soviet literature witnessed the emergence of new wave of young writers who saw the centuries-long history of Kazakh society as their main theme. Among them were I.Esenberlin, Ā.Kekilbayev, M.Maghauin, D.Doszhan, A.Seidimbekov, B.Djandarbekov, S.Sanbayev, S.Mūrtaza and many more. They were the ones who continued the tradition of Kazakh historical novels paved by M.Auezov.

⁵ Qirabayev, Serik. *Kenes dāuirindegi qazaq ādebieti*. Almaty, 2003:134.

According to Qirabayev, Bökei's position among such kind of writers was distinct and unique.⁶ He depicted the actual present condition of the Kazakh society through reflecting on the past and predicting the future. His characters revealed the secrets of the present reality.⁷ He also notes that Bökei's choice of what and whom to write about was also an explored topic among Kazakh authors.⁸ According to Mamaseitov, what distinguishes Oralkhan Bökei from the rest of writers of his era and gives the color of novelty for his writings is his characters. The main feature of Bökei's characters is 'that we could easily encounter these characters in the gallery images of our contemporaries.'⁹

Studies on Oralkhan Bökei

Boshai Kitapbaev, the cousin of Bökei and the hero of Socialist labor, writes about his visit to Dinmuhammed Kunaev in the collection of unpublished articles of Bökei and on Bökei in 2013. He states that during his visit, he met Zaqash Kamalidenov, the secretary of Central Committee, who tells that there were two names proposed to State Prize which are of equal importance: Bökei and Kekilbaev. Asked his opinion whom he considers as the best candidate for State Prize, he answers that both candidates are of equal scale. Kitapbayev tells Kamalidenov that there was no talk about it with Dimash Akhmetovich and he even did not intend to talk about that. However, later they were both given State Prizes, which turns out to be the surprising event for many.

Both Bökei and Kekilbaev were few writers among many who enjoyed the state privilege. The incident above clearly shows that. In the collection of unpublished works of Bökei and on Bökei, Kekilbaev had also an article written in 1973 on Bökei. In this article,

⁶ Qirabayev, Serik. *Talantqa qürmet*. Almaty, 1988: 177.

⁷ Ibid.

⁸ Bökei, Oralkhan. 'Shyndyqtyng shyraghy sönbeidi.' *Zhalyn*, (3), 1986: 3.

⁹ Mämeseitov, T. "Parasat zhyry." *Eki tomdyq tangdamaly shygharmalar*. Almaty, 1994: 4

Kekilbaev notes that although one can see Bökei's tendency to write about the life of village people and their relationship with nature, there is no dialectic portrayal of city and village, which most village prose writers tend to focus. 'Young writer depicts the village and the life of village people as a repository of nation's century-long spiritual experience.'- says Kekilbaev.¹⁰ However, as I suggest in this work Bokei does not state the explicit division between the city and the village in his stories in the 1960s. However, from the 1970s and 1980s, his works express more or less the same negative attitude toward the urban places as most of village prose writers. Moreover, the portrayal of the village as a repository of nation's century –long spiritual experience is another point of similarity with most of the Russian village prose writers.

Another Kazakhstani literary critic, Viktor Badikov, suggests Bökei's distinguished reputation among the Soviet writers and critics who value his works. His works were translated into Russian by writers such as U. Dombrovskii, G. Belger, A.Kim, B. Momyshūly, V. Miroglor.¹¹ With the collapse of the Soviet Union, there was a transition among many distinguished writers who adopted very different language, rejecting 'намеки и аналогий' they used during the Soviet Union.¹² However, as he notes and admires about Bökei is that he was always the 'previous one', whom he was always. Badikov did not notice much change in Bökei's portrayal of post-Soviet village life, in his post-Soviet Altai. Emancipating himself from the chains of the Soviet ideology, he continued even more to refine the phenomenon of national consciousness.

¹⁰ Kekilbaev, Ä. Orman kezip, olzhaly oralghan Oralkhan. Bralinov, D and B. Bolaev eds, *Bizding Oralkhan. Zhinaqtargha enbegen shygharmalary, maqalalar, estelikter*. Almaty:Orkhon,2013: 179.

¹¹ Badikov, Viktor. *Novye vetry. Ocherki*. Almaty, Zhibek zholy, 2005.

¹² Ibid.,

According to Badikov, Bökei's characters are people who are the representatives of 'dark culture', untouched by the technocratic civilization. However, this dark culture serves as a purifying force for those who became alienated because of modernizing projects. Most of his characters go back to their respected communities because one is purified only in one's community. One can achieve the refined character only among one's people.

Dulat Isabekov, another distinguished Kazakh writer suggests that one thing which was peculiar about Oralkhan's writing is his portrayal of relationship between man and nature. I, personally, did not have chance to read Bökei's diary, but from Dulat Isabekov's reading of Bökei's diaries it can be stated that Oralkhan Bökei tried to keep his 'natural purity' and mourned about the 'spiritual degradation' of human beings corrupted by the new technologies of the century. For him, the more people aspired to become technologically advanced and rode automobiles and travelled to space, the more they became remote from themselves. One can realize oneself spiritually in the lap of nature.¹³

Most of the readings of Oralkhan Bökei after the independence try to cast him as a national hero, who fought for the independence of Kazakh nation. For example, Erbolat Zhanat, one of the contemporaries and colleagues of Bökei writes that 'Oralkhan was a deer, Kerbughy, through which he revived the national heritage of the Kazakh society which was lost during the Soviet power. He showed to his people who and what they really are. They needed just to remember the past. After some time, many deer emerged. They started to attack the 'walls of Soviet power' through the path paved by Oralkhan Bökei. The same deer were the ones who fought on the square in December.'¹⁴ This makes one think that Oralkhan Bökei was a radical figure who spoke against the existing Soviet power although it was not allowed. However, my reading and research of the author's texts draws parallels with Russian village

¹³ Isabekov, Dulat. "Ömir degen- ertegi." *Tanğdamaly shygharmalary*. Almaty: QazAqparat, 2013: 5.

¹⁴ Zhanat, Yerbol. 'Altaydyng Kerbūghysy.' *'Astana Aqshamy'*, #80 (2990), 2013: 8

prose writers with whom Bòkei has many similarities. I argue that Bòkei could use the form of Russian village prose in the Kazakh context which was also an accepted form of writing. However, what I suggest his radicalness to be in his opposition of local political power who serves the Soviet-Russian intentions and threatens the loss of Kazakh national culture which he explores through the Altai region and its people.

Central Asia's postcoloniality and postcolonialism

The postcoloniality of Central Asian states is a much contested topic. The first problem arising from it is defining 'when or to what extent Central Asia was, is or will be historically post-colonial.'¹⁵ Was Central Asia liberated after 1917 or was it recolonized by the Soviet Union? One thing which remains distinctive in the postcolonial states of Central Asia is the lack of anticolonial movements before 1991. In addition to the differences between Soviet colonialism and other colonialisms, Central Asia is different from other cases of postcolonialism because its independence was delivered without a struggle. 'The lack of anticolonial movements and the near absence of anticolonial critiques among Soviet Central Asians are undoubtedly hindering not just the emergence of such critiques following independence, but also the formulation of any critique of domination.'¹⁶

Although the Soviet Union emerged as an anti-imperial state, in the last two decades, there has been a huge discussion about the imperial nature of the Soviet Union from different

¹⁵ Heathershaw, John. "Central Asian statehood in post-colonial perspective", 2.

¹⁶ Adams, Laura L. *The spectacular state: Culture and national identity in Uzbekistan*. Duke University Press, 2010:106.

perspectives.¹⁷ The notions of the ‘affirmative action empire’ (Martin), ‘empire of nations’ (Hirsch) and ‘empire-state’ (Beissinger) capture this ambiguity.¹⁸ Laura Adams notes that the Soviet Union did not resemble other empires in economic terms. However, it ‘was like an empire in that it exercised political dominance over territorially and culturally diverse populations and it imposed a hierarchical culture.’¹⁹ There was a culture of the center (Russian) and the culture of the periphery (non-Russian). Having analyzed two anti-colonial discourses, she points the dubiousness of Central Asia’s postcoloniality during the late Soviet era.

However, one needs to be aware about the differences between historical post-coloniality and theoretical postcolonialism which Ashcroft signifies as ‘all the culture affected by the imperial process from the moment of colonization to the present day.’²⁰ Adams describes post-colonialism as a “contextually situated discourse generated by the responses

¹⁷ Mark R. Beissinger, "The Persisting Ambiguity of Empire," *Post-Soviet Affairs* 11, #2 (April- June 1995): 149-84; Francine Hirsch, "Toward an Empire of Nations: Border-Making and the Formation of Soviet National Identities," *Russian Review* 59, # 2 (April 2000): 201- 26; Adeeb Khalid, *The Politics of Muslim Cultural Reform: Jadidism in Central Asia* (Berkeley, 1998); Adeeb Khalid, "Russian History and the Debate over Orientalism," *Kritika: Explorations in Russian and Eurasian History* 4, # 1 (Fall 2000): 691-99; Nathaniel Knight, "Grigor'ev in Orenburg, 1851-1862: Russian Orientalism in the Service of Empire?" *Slavic Review* 59, # 1 (Spring 2000): 74-100; Nathaniel Knight, "On Russian Orientalism: A Response to Adeeb Khalid," *Kritika: Explorations in Russian and Eurasian History* 1, # 4 (Fall 2000): 701-15; Terry Martin, *Affirmative Action Empire: Nations and Nationalism in the Soviet Union 1923-1939* (Ithaca, 2001); Douglas Northrop, *Veiled Empire: Gender and Power in Stalinist Central Asia* (Ithaca, 2004); Paula A. Michaels, "Medical Propaganda and Cultural Revolution in Soviet Kazakhstan, 1928-41," *Russian Review* 59, # 2 (April 2000): 159-78; Yuri Slezkine, "Imperialism as the Highest Stage of Socialism," *Russian Review* 59, #. 2 (April 2000): 227-34; and several chapters in Ronald Grigor Suny and Terry Martin, eds., *A State of Nations: Empire and Nation-Making in the Age of Lenin and Stalin* (Oxford, 2001), including Terry Martin, "Affirmative Action Empire: The Soviet Union as the Highest Form of Imperialism," 67-90; Douglas Taylor Northrop, "Nationalizing Backwardness: Gender, Empire and Uzbek Identity," 191-220; and Ronald Grigor Suny, "The Empire Strikes Out: Imperial Russia, 'National' Identity, and Theories of Empire," 23- 66. Adams, Laura L. "Modernity, postcolonialism, and theatrical form in Uzbekistan." *Slavic Review* (2005): 333-354.

¹⁸ Heathershaw, John. "Central Asian statehood in post-colonial perspective",5.

¹⁹ Adams, Laura. "Can we apply postcolonial theory to Central Eurasia?." *Central Eurasian Studies Review* 7, no.1 (2008): 2-7.

²⁰ Ashcroft, Bill, Gareth Griffiths, and Helen Tiffin. *The empire writes back: Theory and practice in post-colonial literatures*. Routledge, 2003:2.

(both resistant and collaborative) of formerly colonized peoples to the institutional legacies of and ongoing relationship with the colonizer.”²¹ Thus postcolonial thought can very much exist along with colonial power and reveal itself as anti-colonial discourse. For example, both Adams and Heathershaw suggest the emergence of anticolonial sentiments in Central Asia during the second half of the twentieth century.²² This locates the postcoloniality of Central Asia after 1991. However, without any strong decolonizing movements such as in India.

Historical context

In her study Diana Kudaibergenova traces the emergence of nationalist discourse during the 1970s. According to her study ‘Kazakh-Soviet writers found their own way to dispute the colonial arguments and to reject the Soviet claims of their backwardness by the creation of literature that could not openly argue with such dominant discourse but at least could point to the past (maybe partially imagined one) where this nation was not backward but rather *glorious* and *ancient*.’²³ Gulnara Dadayeva and Dina Sharipova also state that Kazakh Soviet intellectuals encountered a dilemma in the 1960s and 1970s with the delineation of a concept of ‘nation’ which was a cornerstone of the nation-building project, then the idea of nation. The authors argue that it was possible to escape from the censorship through writing in Kazakh. In this regard, both articles mentioned earlier analyzes the novel *Koshpendiler* by Iliyas Esenberlin which was one of the first historical novels which gave an interpretation of Kazakh statehood and later continued to be the cornerstone of post-Soviet

²¹ Adams, Laura. Postcolonial theory, 4.

²² Both Laura Adams and John Heathershaw talk about Chingiz Aitmatov’s novel *The Day Lasts More than a Hundred Years* which was published in 1980 and the further rise of decolonizing nationalism during *perestroika*.

²³ Diana T. Kudaibergenova (2013): “Imagining community” in Soviet Kazakhstan. An historical analysis of narrative on nationalism in Kazakh-Soviet literature”, *Nationalities Papers: The Journal of Nationalism and Ethnicity*, p.4

Kazakhstan. However, in his analysis of colonialism, Esenberlin departs from the positive/negative dichotomy, and along with negative assessment of the Russian empire's role in the history of the Kazakhs, he provides 'some positive tendencies in the development of the society due to the presence of Russians in the region.'²⁴ Basically, Esenberlin does not seem to criticize Soviet modernizing projects. For Soviet Kazakh writers historical novels were the tools for indirectly voicing the concerns and problems of 'subaltern Kazakhs,' which seem to be mostly related to the political standing of the elite.

If we look at the emergence of nationalist movements in Russia during the same period, we cannot neglect the importance of village prose writers in fostering nationalist sentiments. In his book *Reinventing Russia: Russian Nationalism and the Soviet State, 1953-1991*, Yitzhak M. Brudny analyzed the emergence of nationalist movements in Russia and explored the role of village prose writers in providing the basis for liberal and conservative Russian nationalism.²⁵ He points to the existence of three types of nationalism: liberal, conservative and radical. While state –sponsored liberal nationalism gave more freedom to the expression of national concerns, radical nationalism's essence lies in the rejection of the Western values that had been penetrating the Soviet Union since the end of the Stalin era. Brudny suggests the conservative nationalists' greatest political evolution in the post-Stalin period. He writes:

'At the core of conservative nationalist ideology stood a highly idealized vision of the traditional Russian peasantry and its moral and cultural values. These values were elevated to the status of the main moral pillar of the Russian nation, and their revitalization was proclaimed to be crucial to Russian national survival. In the 1950s

²⁴ Gulnara Dadabayeva & Dina Sharipova (2016) The imagined nation-state in Soviet literature: the case of *Koshpendiler*, *Nationalities Papers*, 44:1, 171.

²⁵ Yitzhak M. *Reinventing Russia*. Vol. 91. Harvard University Press, 2000.

and 1960s, the focus of the conservative nationalists was on the hardships experienced by the peasantry and on the Stalinist legacy responsible for these hardships. In the 1970s, as rural living standards improved and Russian society became progressively more urban and more Westernized, their focus shifted to criticism of the moral corruption of society brought about by a modern urban lifestyle and the Westernized urban intelligentsia they held responsible for this corruption.²⁶

Thus, the peasant and his way of life became the center of Soviet life. The Russian village became the most promising new subject. It stood for the idea of the whole Russian nation. It was an abode of moral purity, which was under the threat of urban modernity. The radical split between town and country became significant in analyzing the modernizing project of Soviet power.

During the post-Stalin era terror was not a feasible way of getting the intellectuals' support. Communist policies regarding intellectuals during this period aimed to maximize the "loyalty" and minimize the "exit" by granting them a partial voice.²⁷ Also, for Brezhnev it was important to make intellectuals and writers his allies. Therefore, he manipulated nationalist sentiments so that they would not resist regime. He aimed to accomplish his goals through inclusionary politics, which were definitely successful to some extent. However, according to Brudny, the policy of inclusionary politics could not transform Russian nationalist intellectuals as supporters of the regime. ' Russian nationalists were especially frustrated with the party's inability or lack of desire to reverse the process of the depopulation of the countryside, protect the architectural legacy of prerevolutionary Russia, enforce

²⁶ Ibid., 11-12.

²⁷ Ibid., 16.

environmental laws, or stop the moral corruption of Russian society and the progressive penetration of Western social and cultural influences.²⁸

How could we describe the Brezhnev system in Kazakhstan?

Although Kunaev was a full-fledged Party functionary- or apparatchik – of the Khrushchev – Brezhnev mold who worked within the system to both modernize and Sovietize his republic, he was also a native Kazakh whose tenure resulted in greater political influence for both his republic and his people.²⁹ He was the only Central Asian party leader to be a full member of the politburo, and was seen as a patron of Kazakh nationalist aspirations.³⁰ According to Sharipova and Dadabayeva, Kunaev supported national elites and in turn he was also supported by them.

Dave suggests the pervasiveness of patron-client networks during Brezhnev's reign. It was a mutually beneficial collaboration between Moscow and the republic party elites. Local party elites could obtain symbolic control by claiming to represent their ethnic constituencies and for Moscow it was a way of regulating nationalist sentiments. 'As allies and clients of Brezhnev, the leaders of the five Central Asian republics enjoyed considerable leeway in governing their republic in return for compliance with the center's policies and objectives.'³¹

However, no matter how far Kunaev fostered national interests using his position, it does not seem to diverge from the frameworks of official Soviet nationalism, which always

²⁸ Ibid., 18.

²⁹ Stefany, Michael G. "Kazakhization, Kunaev and Kazakhstan: A Bridge to Independence." *Journal of Central Asian & Caucasian Studies* 8, no. 16 (2013)..

³⁰ Dadabayeva, Gulnara, et al. (2016) *The imagined nation-state*:170.

³¹ Dave, Bhavna. *Kazakhstan: Ethnicity, Language and Power*. Routledge, 2007:26.

walked hand in hand with a concurrent project of Soviet modernization, and largely differed from the ethnic nationalism Bòkei stood for. So, Bòkei's voice is a voice protesting against this patron-client relationship. He represents the voice of the subaltern and silenced village people, common, ordinary people. For him, it is the modernization (Sovietization) which also means Russianization to be the root cause of the Kazakh cultural degradation and he also does not feel comfortable with the promotion of national interests, which he seems to find parochial to be able to encompass the reality of village people, and especially of the Altai region.

According to Beissinger, 'empire is a subjective perception, determined by the extent to which a certain group is able to see itself as an integral part of the given order,'³² it becomes clear that the perceptions and assessment of Soviet rule among the different nationalities in Central Asia varied significantly.

I narrow down his argument, suggesting that empire can also generate various perceptions among one group. Heathershaw notes that the 'Soviet Union was more or less foreign or domestic over different spaces, times and media.'³³ In this work, I look at Bòkei as an individual whose voice differs from the Kunaev-approved nationalism of post-Stalinist Kazakhstan. His voice comes from the villages in the Altai region where he was born. His represents the voice of the subaltern and seems to criticize Kunaev's derivative nationalism which jeopardizes common people on whom Soviet modernity has negative impact.

In this study I situate Bòkei in the context of other Kazakh Soviet writer such as Ilyas Esenberlin, and vis à vis Russian village prose writers. Although Oralkhan Bòkei was not regarded as much of a mainstream writer as Esenberlin, it is important to note that their

³² Beissinger, M. *The persisting ambiguity of empire*,155.

³³ Heathershaw,6.

literary careers occupy the same time frame. In contrast to Esenberlin, Bòkei sets his stories in the villages of Soviet Eastern Kazakhstan, and they also have features which resemble Russian village prose.

Throughout this thesis I argue that Bòkei used the accepted forms of village prose, but that he was able to go further to critique the whole Soviet system including local nationalist elite.

Structure of the thesis

Chapter I will focus primarily on the analysis of hybrid characters in Bòkei's works. Here I will apply the concepts of hybridity developed by postcolonial scholar, Homi K.Bhabha, and the phases of national cultural development proposed by Frantz Fanon. I will argue that Bòkei finds the hybridization of the Kazakh people a threat to preserving the purity of national culture and hinders the development of national consciousness. For him, city life and values have a corrupting influence on the traditional and cultural value systems of village people which he believes to represent the true Kazakh soul. Chapter II will explore the representations of Soviet modernity projects. I will discuss the questions of representation suggested by another postcolonial theorist Gayatri Spivak and argue that as a member of the village community, Bòkei spoke against the devastating effects of Soviet modernizing projects on local societies and identified Soviet projects to have a negative impact on Kazakh society. Chapter III discusses the depiction of nature in Bòkei's works and its analysis from the perspective of postcolonial environmentalism.

Chapter I

Hybridity in Bökei's works

Oralkhan Bökei was himself a truly hybrid figure, a Soviet subject, who had roots in Kazakh tradition and cultural ties with the metropole. His contemporary, the writer Quanyshbek Qūrmanghaliev, writes in his tribute that ‘Oralkhan Bökei might not have any dreams left unfulfilled as a writer. His works were published widely throughout the Soviet Union, and many of his stories and plays were translated into Russian, Arabic, English, German, Czech, Estonian, Ukrainian and Japanese. His name was famous in the same countries. Several of his books were published by publishing houses of Moscow such as ‘Molodaya gvardiya,’ ‘Sovetskii pisatel,’ ‘Khudozhestvennaya literature,’ and ‘Progress.’ For Russian readers he was known by his stories published in the journals ‘*Druzhba narodov*’ and ‘*Teatr*.’³⁴ For example, his novellas *Qūm minezi* and *Saytan Kōpir* were published in the journal ‘*Druzhba Narodov*.’ As he notes he did not feel any support from his fellow writers. When he published the former story he was scrutinized. However, he elaborated similar idea in his later novella for which he got the prize of the year.

This chapter will explore the nature of the hybrid characters in Bökei's works. It aims to examine the concepts of hybridity proposed by Homi K. Bhabha and Frantz Fanon, and critically assess their applicability through the analysis of characters in Bökei's novella *Atau-Kere* (The Last Meal)³⁵, the novel *Ōz otyngdy ōshirme* (Do not put out your fire)³⁶ and the short story *Qaidasyng qasqa qūlynym* (Where are you my poor foal?)³⁷ The works I will be

³⁴ Qūrmanghaliev, Q. ‘Zhasyn ghūmyr zhazushy.’ *Zhas Alash*. no. 136 (13555)(28.09.1993): 2.

³⁵ Bökeev, O. ‘Atau- Kere’. *Qazaqstan äielderi*, no.7(198): 26-28. *Qazaq ädebieti*, (14.07.1989): 8-9,13. *Zhūldyz*, no.8-9 (1989): 3-42, 3-76.

³⁶ Bökeev, O. *Ōz otyngdy ōshirme*. *Zhūldyz*, no.8-9-10(1980):24-93,117-174,129-171.

³⁷ Bökeev, O. ‘Qaidasyng qasqa qūlynym’, *Zhalūn*, no.6 (1973): 3-53.

analyzing here were written at different time periods and they reveal the author's changing attitude toward hybrid identities. All stories were set in different villages of the Altai region in Eastern Kazakhstan.

The concepts of hybridity

The term hybridity has become a buzzword in recent cultural and literary criticism.³⁸ It has become a significant concept in the emergence of postcolonial studies, but it can mean many different things. Robert Young claims that the origin of the word is associated with nineteenth century race theorists, who stated that the hybrid was a person of mixed race, just like various animals: 'a hybrid is a cross between two species, such as the mule and hinny, which are female-male and male-female crosses between a horse and a donkey.'³⁹ The most important point here was that these species would become infertile. As a result of this definition, the argument that the different races of men were different species hinged on the question of whether the product of a union between different races was fertile or not.⁴⁰ These assumptions were based on the idea that some races were less than humans. For example, Africans were equated with 'apes' and therefore considered to be inferior species to European human beings. Thus, we should not underestimate the role played by the naturalized myths of racial and cultural origin in the construction of nations and national identities.

In his book *The Wretched of the Earth*, the Martinique - born Afro-Caribbean psychiatrist and writer Frantz Fanon explores the evolution of national cultural identity and delineates three phases.⁴¹ According to him, at the first stage, 'the colonized intellectual

³⁸ Kuortti, Joel, and Jopi Nyman. *Reconstructing hybridity: Post-colonial studies in transition*. Vol. 51. Rodopi, 2007:2

³⁹ Young, Robert JC. *Colonial desire: Hybridity in theory, culture and race*. Routledge, 2005, 7.

⁴⁰ *Ibid.*,7.

⁴¹ Fanon, Frantz. *The Wretched of the Earth*. Trans. Richard Philcox. New York: Grove, 2004.

proves he has assimilated the colonizer's culture.'⁴² At the second stage, which Fanon calls the phase of resistance, 'the colonized writer has his convictions shaken and decides to cast his mind back.'⁴³ Finally, a third stage is a stage of combat, where the colonized subject or writer, 'after having tried to lose himself among the people, with the people, will rouse the people.'⁴⁴ The literature becomes revolutionary and national literatures emerge.

He also sheds light on the significant role of national intellectuals in decolonizing the minds of colonized and urges that the cure be sought in restoring the past, and returning to pre-colonial society. Thus, Fanon seeks fixed forms of cultural identity in order to restore the full human subject.

In contrast to Fanon, Homi K. Bhabha sees hybridity as fluid and unpredictable. Bhabha has been called the 'father of hybridity.' In his best-known essay "Signs taken for Wonders: Questions of ambivalence and authority under a tree outside Delhi, May 1817," he illustrates the example of the Bible in colonial India, and shows how the book had been hybridized among native people.⁴⁵ The English book was 'an insignia of colonial authority and a signifier of colonial desire and discipline.'⁴⁶ Bhabha suggests the analysis of colonial discourse as a mechanism that produces recognition and disavowal of racial, cultural and historical differences. He understands hybridity as a means of resistance: the colonized hybridizes the colonizer's culture in order to undercut it.⁴⁷ Through mimicking and repetition of the powerful, the 'Other' challenges the power structure. Thus, hybridity is a form of resistance,

⁴² Ibid.,159.

⁴³ Ibid., 159.

⁴⁴ Ibid., 159.

⁴⁵ Homi.K.Bhabha. *The Location of Culture*. Routledge Classic, 1994.

⁴⁶ Ibid., 146.

⁴⁷ Ibid., 117.

whereby the colonized challenges the authority of the colonizer. The hybrid is a colonial creation. Bhabha says:

Hybridity is the sign of the productivity of colonial power, its shifting forces and fixities; it is the name for the strategic reversal of the process of domination through disavowal.... Hybridity is the revaluation of the assumption of colonial identity through the repetition of discriminatory identity effects.⁴⁸

Bhabha suggests we see the relationship between colonizer and colonized not as an imposition from the dominant side, but for the two sides to be active agents. However, we should not forget that hybridity is not only the domain of the colonized, but that also the so-called colonizer is prone to be hybridized. For example, in her study of hybridity on the frontier, Jill K. Harper analyzes the types of antagonists who threatened the Empire's power structure and affected the decline of Britain's sovereignty through mimicking the colonized. There were holes in England's national identity, created by imperialism, making the nation vulnerable to a reverse imperialism of the Oriental Other.⁴⁹ Thus, witnessing the hybridity of its objects and subjects, colonial power reveals something different. Colonial power becomes ambivalent. In this analysis Harper draws the same conclusions as Bhabha.

In 'Distancing the Proximate Other: Hybridity and Maud Diver's *Candles in the Wind* (1909),' Loretta M. Mijares talks about miscegenation which had become one of the tropes of colonial discourse. As for her and some critics' analysis of the fictional representations of racial hybrids, they pose an equal threat to colonial rule as the 'natives.' The perceived threat of the 'half-caste' is not simply that he is both other and self, but further that he possesses at times a dangerous invisibility; he can 'pass' as British, demonstrating the permeability of

⁴⁸ *ibid.*, 159.

⁴⁹ Harper, Jill K. *Mapping the monster: Locating the other in the labyrinth of hybridity*. San José State University, (2014): 9.

racial boundaries constructed by the British as indissoluble in order to justify colonial rule.⁵⁰ However, racial hybrid can also be perceived as a threat for the colonized in the national literatures.

Most post-colonial writing has concerned itself with the hybridized nature of post-colonial culture as a strength rather than a weakness.⁵¹ It can be seen from the works of writers such as Chinua Achebe, Salman Rushdie and Arundhati Roy.⁵² For them, hybridity is a point from where they can create new combinations and new ideas. Salman Rushdie's *Midnight's Children* is a central text in understanding the state of postcolonial hybrid.⁵³ The protagonist and the narrator of the novel Saleem Sinai struggles to find his identity in the web of national history and doing so problematizes the possibility of achieving 'authentic identity.' For Rushdie, the mixing of different elements creates some new element which has its own separate identity.

In this chapter, I will focus on the different degrees of hybridization within the storylines and characters, and the author's attitude toward hybridity at different stages of his writing. Thus, I will seek to answer the following questions: Does the author represent hybridity as a strength or weakness of society? What is the role of hybrid identities in the formation of national identities? Does the author resist the Soviet hybridization process and articulate his own identities in opposition to it?

⁵⁰ Mijares, Loretta M. "Distancing the Proximate Other: Hybridity and Maud Diver's Candles in the Wind." *Twentieth-Century Literature*, (2004): 114.

⁵¹ Bill Ashcroft, Gareth Griffiths, Helen Tiffin. *The Post-Colonial Studies Reader*. Taylor & Francis, 2006:137.

⁵² For example, Chinua Achebe's *Things fall apart*. (1958). Salman Rushdie's. *Midnight's Children* (1981), and Arundhati Roy's *The God of Small Things* (2002).

⁵³ Rushdie, Salman. *Midnight's Children*. 1981." London: Vintage,1995.

My analysis of Bòkei's works incorporates Frantz Fanon's theory of national cultural identity and Homi Bhabha's theory of hybridity. Frantz Fanon's chronology, which basically was designed to explain the rise of national consciousness in African countries during 19th and 20th centuries, is applicable, with some changes, to the evolution of the nationalist movements under Soviet Union. I will attempt to see how these stages of cultural identity are resolved from the writer's perspective in different stages of his writing and how far his hybrid characters mirror his viewpoint. I argue that for the author becoming a hybrid man is equated with the idea of a Soviet man. Soviet man leads to the destruction and decay of national culture and national consciousness. In comparison to cultural hybrids, racial hybrids are far more dangerous for the cultural heritage of the Kazakhs in his view. As with Fanon, Bòkei's writings suggest the importance of decolonizing one's mind. Through portraying the dangers of the hybrid cultures, he seeks redemption of national culture. As with Bhabha, Bòkei proposes the reader see the ambivalence of hybridity, which makes cultural confusion possible both for the colonized and for the colonizer, and he struggles to prevent or eliminate the cultural mixing which he finds troublesome.

The Soviet Hero and Hybridity

It is often said in official statements that the essential role of the Soviet writer is to be a propagandist for Soviet goals.⁵⁴ It is a well-known fact that writers were described as the 'engineers of human souls' by Yuri Olesha. Literature played a crucial role in accomplishing the Soviet goal of shaping the New Man. The paragon of Revolution - called a proletarian, a Bolshevik, or a Communist, depending on the speaker and the period- was to become

⁵⁴ Koçaoglu, Timur. "Nationality Identity in Soviet Central Asian Literature: Kazakh and Uzbek Prose Fiction of the Post-Stalin Period" (Phd diss., Columbia University, 1983): 91.

transformed into the “New Man” (*novyi chelovek*).⁵⁵ The image of this New Man had to be portrayed as a ‘positive hero’ of Soviet Socialist Realism. As Katerina Clark notes, ‘the hero was expected to be an emblem of Bolshevik virtue, someone the reading public might be inspired to emulate, and his life should be patterned to ‘show the forward movement of history’ in an allegorical representation of one stage in history’s dialectical progress.’⁵⁶ Thus, the positive hero embodied the ‘future’ and stood for ‘what ought to be’ without losing touch with present reality.

According to Koćaoglu, there were specific characteristics for the Soviet positive hero who embodied the message of the Soviet state. The positive hero should be someone who exhibits the most modern tendencies with advanced thoughts and progressive aesthetic ideals of his (her) epoch, someone who reflects the most important aspects of human character that are necessary for social life, who represents to some extent the best qualities of a nationality or an ethnic group, who struggles against adversaries of life, who fights for the future, and who serves as a positive model for the reader.⁵⁷

In terms of Central Asia and the Caucasus which were emancipated from the colonization of the Russian empire it had to be the start of new life under the Soviet Union. According Francine Hirsch, Soviet nationality policy created national categories which ultimately had to merge into one Soviet state.⁵⁸ She argues that the Soviet Union took shape through a process of selective borrowing, and she traces the transmission of ideas and practices from the West into the Soviet Union. Along with that, the knowledge provided by

⁵⁵ Halfin, Igal. *From darkness to light: Class, consciousness, and salvation in revolutionary Russia*. University of Pittsburgh Press, 2000:1.

⁵⁶ Clark, Katerina. *The Soviet novel: history as ritual*. Indiana University Press, 2000:46.

⁵⁷ Koćaoglu, T. *Nationality Identity*:92.

⁵⁸ Hirsch, Francine. *Soviet Empire of nations: Ethnographic Knowledge and the Making of the Soviet Union*. Cornell University Press, 2005.

former imperial experts such as ethnographers, geographers, linguists and economists played a significant role in the formation of nationality policies. The ‘backwardness’ of these regions in the Russian empire took on another meaning under Soviet rule.

Terry Martin calls the Soviet Union as the world’s first Affirmative Action Empire. It was the first among other European empires to promote the national consciousness systematically. It did this not only through the formation of national territories staffed by national elites using their national languages, but also through the aggressive promotion of symbolic markers of national identity: national folklore, museums, dress, food, costumes, opera, poets, progressive historical events, classic literary works.⁵⁹ Nationalism was a necessary stage on the way to internationalism.

The centerpiece of the Soviet nationalities policy was *korenizatsiia* or indigenization. National elites were to be trained and promoted into positions of leadership in the party, government, industry, and schools of each national territory.⁶⁰ Native languages would make Soviet power intelligible for local societies.

The creation of various national units was intended to make these territories more legible for the Bolsheviks who aimed at drawing together and merging all Soviet nationalities into a non-ethnic Soviet community. In fact, it tried and succeeded in creating a colonial subject which would imitate the Russian elder brother. In his study, Halim Kara finds resemblances between Tsarist Russia’s and the Soviet Bolshevik’s attitude toward the indigenous population of the Central Asia. Despite the fact the Bolsheviks tried to establish a proletarian regime in Central Asia, they thought in terms of superior and inferior cultures. For

⁵⁹ Martin, Terry Dean. *The affirmative action empire: nations and nationalism in the Soviet Union, 1923-1939*. Cornell University Press, 2001:3.

⁶⁰ *Ibid.*, 10.

the Soviet leaders the Revolution meant ‘both modernization along European lines and the opening of a new historic path that the Western world would follow.’⁶¹

Soviet theorists deemed marriages between Central Asian Muslims and Europeans, in particular, an important force for ‘modernizing’ Central Asia and bringing this historically ‘backward’ region into the Soviet mainstream. This question of interethnic intimacies has been researched by Adrienne Lynn Edgar. In her article ‘Marriage, modernity, and the ‘friendship of nations’: interethnic intimacy in post-war Central Asia in comparative perspective’, Edgar compares interethnic and interracial intimacy in the Soviet Union with North America and European – ruled Asia and Africa and re-evaluates the ‘imperial’ elements of Soviet rule, particularly in Central Asia and the Caucasus.⁶²

From the mid- 1930s until the end of the Soviet era, the Soviet state celebrated mixed marriages as proof of the unbreakable ‘friendship of nations’ and a sign of the imminent appearance of a ‘Soviet people.’⁶³ There was a strongly Russo-centric element to the modernity Soviet ethnographers had in mind, since mixed families were more likely to use the Russian language at home and adopt an ‘all-Soviet’ lifestyle that featured Russian-style home furnishings and foods. For example, in Kazakhstan, mixed families tended to adopt the features of standardized ‘all-Soviet’ culture which the local population tellingly called ‘Russian.’ Accounts of mixed marriages by Soviet scholars invariably stressed the positive role of the Russian woman and her role in spearheading social change in native communities. While adapting herself to a foreign culture, learning to cook new foods, acquiring near-native

⁶¹ Quoted in Halim Kara’s doctoral dissertation ‘Postcolonial reading of Suleymon Cholpan’ from Carrere d’Encausse. p. 52

⁶² Edgar, Adrienne Lynn. "Marriage, modernity, and the ‘friendship of nations’: interethnic intimacy in post-war Central Asia in comparative perspective." *Central Asian Survey* 26, no. 4 (2007): 581-599.

⁶³ *Ibid.*, 582.

proficiency in the local language and getting along famously with her in-laws, she also played a civilizing and modernizing role in Central Asian societies; all those flowerbeds, lace curtains, cabbages and radishes showed ‘the direct influence and caring hand of the Russian woman.’⁶⁴ There was a notion that mixed individuals have a special role to play as intermediaries between state and indigenous society. Soviet nationality theorists celebrated diversity and hybridity. By the 1980s, Kazakhstan was glorified for showing the highest percentage of interethnic marriages in Central Asia. Kazakhstan was known as a ‘laboratory of the friendship of peoples.’⁶⁵

According to Koçaoglu’s survey of Central Asian prose fiction of the post-Stalin period, there were specific models of positive characters who were the models of the Soviet identity. ‘Positive heroes-whether they are industrial and kolkhoz workers or local Communist Party officials - work hard to fulfill the Five-Year Plan and struggle against the lazy and negative fictional characters.’⁶⁶ However, Koçaoglu also notes the emergence of young authors in the 1960s who managed to create different characters which were based upon the lives of Central Asian historical rulers, tribal leaders, philosophers, writers, poets and other ‘national’ figures.⁶⁷ His list of these authors includes Ilyas Esenberlin, Pirimqul Qadirov, Audanbek Kôbesov and many others.

There were ‘no major love affairs or other intimate relations portrayed between a Russian and a Central Asian character in either Kazakh or Uzbek prose fiction’ which leads the author to conclude that ‘the infrequent occurrence of Russian and other outsiders in

⁶⁴ Ibid., 590- 591.

⁶⁵ Ibid., 595.

⁶⁶ Koçaoglu, T. Nationality Identity: 96.

⁶⁷ Ibid., 98.

Kazakh and Uzbek novels and stories may also reflect the Central Asian writers' disbelief in drawing-together or merging between Central Asians and outsiders (including Russians).⁶⁸

The analysis of Bökei's works suggests his strong disbelief in the idea of a Soviet man who does not have ethnic or national coloring. He makes this clear through the portrayal of Russian and hybrid characters, which allows us to reach a much stronger conclusion than that of Koçaoglu.

In Bökei's understanding hybrid works is associated with the place where characters belong to. For him, cities and towns are the places from where hybrids emerge. Urban places as a center of Soviet modernization uproot the cultural and traditional value of people and divide them from their roots. The author portrays village as a preserver of traditional life, therefore it is the center of Kazakh culture and Kazakh national consciousness. His main characters usually are the ones who were born in the villages and went to the city. However, city life makes them miserable and turn them into soulless and aimless people. They are cured by returning back to their native places.

Critique of the Old: Embrace of the New.

'*Qaidasyng qasqa qūlynym*' is a story about the journey of a young scientist, Oral, who came to visit his native village from the city for several days. The narrator of the story is Oral himself. While travelling with his father Bökesh, Oral discovers the long kept secret of his father: Oral's old school friend turns out to be his half-brother, Qarshygha. While staying at Qarshygha's house, he and his father, had to experience the most horrifying event of their life: burying Qarshygha's maternal grandfather, Sarqyndy *shal*, alive, at his own request. The

⁶⁸ Koçaoglu, T. Nationality Identity, .112-112.

stubbornness of Sarqyndy shal, makes their work even harder. They had to climb on top of the mountain and find his long time ago buried armors and belongings. Finally, Oral goes back to Almaty and writes letters to his father and brother. The story is set in the Altai region in the 1970s.

In this story, the hybrid characters very much resemble the official positive heroes. We cannot observe that the author makes any clear gesture towards the dangers of assimilation. Rather, his characters are willing to assimilate and embrace the new. The story also renders the author's critique of the past as itself having an impure side.

We see from the outset of the novel that Oral admires his father and has a strong and deep connection with him. Even though he had encountered many people in various cities and villages, he had never met a person like his father. His father is the '*strongest, wisest person, who would live thousands of years.*'⁶⁹ For Oral, the earth is associated with the figure of his father: '*..ol (zher) - barimizding, bar tirshilikting akesi*' (...he (the earth) is the father of everything living and all).⁷⁰ It is interesting to note that usually in Kazakh understanding the Earth is a 'Mother', not father. The Earth is a 'She.' This suggests the author's belief in the patrilineal transmission of culture. The relationship between the father and the son signifies the link between the past and the present and it plays an important role in preserving cultural identity.⁷¹

Bökesh is a decent, well-mannered, brave and honest man, who had worked as a head of the kolkhoz for many years until he retired. He feels great affinity with Moscow, which he

⁶⁹ Bökei, Oralkhan. *Shygharmalary. Povester, änggime-khikaiyattar, p'esalar*. El-shezhire, 2013. Vol. 5: 4.

⁷⁰ Ibid., 5.

⁷¹ In his analysis of Chingiz Aitmatov's novel, David Coombs finds the same pattern of cultural transmission in Kyrgyz society. Coombs, David Sweeney. "Entwining Tongues: Postcolonial Theory, Post-Soviet Literatures and Bilingualism in Chingiz Aitmatov's *I dol'she veka dlitsia den*." *Journal of Modern Literature* 34.3 (2011): 47-64.

had been dreaming to visit. Definitely, Oral wants to be like his father. There were several times from his childhood, when Oral was teased by his friends that his father was too ideologically invested in the government: ‘*Seniŋ äkeŋ ökimetshil,*’ ‘*Bökesh tym-tym ökimetshil*’ (‘Your father is an ideologue’, ‘Bökesh is a complete ideologue’).⁷² It did not diminish his belief in his father, rather he felt proud of him.

Oral, is a positive character, who symbolizes the real Soviet man. He studied in Almaty and became a sophisticated scientist. He even visited Moscow, by which he made his father’s dream come true. After his visit to Moscow, he seems to have a different idea about the center or metropole and his previous expectations seem to be destroyed. There is a dialogue between him and his father:

- *Sen Moskvagha baryp qaitтым deding-au osy bir khatyngda:*

- *Iä.*

- *Ye, qandai eken?*

- *Tamasha. Biraq....*

- *Ne? Biraq?*

- *Biraq, küzdi kuni bolghan song ba, men barghanda qalyng tüman astynda tūmshalanyp zhatty. Ülken-ülken üilderding qūr beinesi ghana suldelenip, ashyq azharyn zhasyryp qalady. Tūman Altaydaghydai aq tūbit emes, qorghasynday sūrghylt ta sūsty, äri dymqyl, tynysqa tar, al köshelerinde byzhynaghan mashina- zherding astymen köbirek zhüresing.*

- *In one of your letters you mentioned your visit to Moscow?*

⁷² Ibid.,12.

- Yes.

- So, how is it?

- Wonderful. But...

- What? But?

- But, may be because it was autumn, when I went, the city was under thick fog. High blocks of houses hid their real faces, showing only a dim silhouette. The fog was not as clear and white as in Altai, but it was dark and grey as lead, it was mild and hampering and the streets were full of cars-one has to walk under the earth.⁷³

From this dialogue, we see the negative impression which Moscow left on Oral.

However, it does not prevent him going back to the city and sending a letter from there.

There are some unspoken things which bother Bökesh from his past. The author makes it evident to the reader through his thoughts. He cannot talk about them loudly. He thinks: *‘Ülyma, bugingi ūrpaqqa tarikhtyng zhyqpyl-zhyqpylynda zhatqan, tarikhtyng qoynau-qaynauyna öz qolymyzben tyghyp zhibergen asyldarymyzdy korsetuge bola ma, zhoq pa?’* (Is it possible to make evident the lives of our nobles whom we hid and buried in the pages of history to our current generation and to my son?)⁷⁴ Throughout the story, he remains inactive. He blames the past for its rigidity and takes it as a lesson for himself to be flexible in order to survive. So, the author makes it clear that Bökesh does not oppose the demands of the new times, rather he feels sorry for those who could not reach this peaceful life, which they dreamed of. That life he dreamed of is manifested in the life of his son, Oral.

⁷³ Ibid., 16.

⁷⁴ Ibid., 10.

The characters of Sarqyndy *shal*⁷⁵ and Analyq symbolize that past. They are an embodiment of Kazakh traditions, culture and Kazakh society. However, the past cannot be taken for granted. It also has its pitfalls. In Soviet Kazakhstan, these cultural heritages are extinguished. Upon entering the room where Sarqyndy *shal* was lying, Oral says: ‘*Degenmen men ūsh dūnienīng dāurenī ōtkenin, endi qaytip eshkimge daryta almay, qor bolyp qūritynyn bildim. Ol- Analyqtyng aru didary, Sarqyndy shaldyng alyp bitimi, anau tot basqan kumis beldik, zhez moyin pyshaq*’ (I came to realize that these three things had passed their time, and they would die worthlessly losing their earlier significance. They are: the beautiful image of Analyq, the heroic stature of Sarqyndy *shal* and those rusty silver belt and brass knife.)⁷⁶ Who is at fault? Sarqyndy *shal* kept everything in himself and could not adjust it into the current usage.

The tragedy of Sarqyndy is his choice. It is resolved through Sarqyndy *shal*’s wish to be buried alive with all his treasure. It ends with the burial of the past, of traditions. His treasure is symbolic of national identity. However, he is victimized as he could not negotiate between old and new.

Thus, this short story reflects the author’s ambiguity regarding the past. The narrative expresses pity for Sarqyndy, who could not adjust to the new demands of the time. He could not be flexible enough. He is rigid and it is his rigidity which makes him fall as a character. His rigidity is manifested not only in his wish to be buried alive with all his arms and warrior’s belongings, but his clinging to his Chinghisid blood and demanding others to bow in front of him. He always mocks Bökesh for his working as a postman and Oral for studying in the city leaving his village behind.

⁷⁵ Kazakh word which refers to an old man.

⁷⁶ *ibid.*, 21.

The protagonists of the story willingly embrace the new ideals of the time. Even when they have a connection with village life, they feel more connection with the metropole. Oral, who is an embodiment of the desires of everyone, who dreams of going to the city, and having a connection with the center, returns back to the city. He even writes a letter from the city, thus connecting and becoming a bridge between the two shores. From one side, the author calls his protagonist Oral, which in Kazakh means ‘return or come back,’ which might suggest us to interpret that the author subconsciously wants him to return back.

The writer seems to hint that hybridity is necessary to some extent in order to survive. In this story which was written in 1972, Bökei does not give any radical solutions rather he gives the positive sides of assimilation into metropolitan Soviet modernity. This phase in his writing can be described as a ‘phase of assimilation’ in the terms of Fanon’s national cultural theory. His hybrid characters feel ambiguous about their identity but are eager to imitate the man of the center.

Critique of the new: rejection of the present

Written in 1980, the novel *Óz otyngdy óshirme* (Do not put out your fire) narrates the perplexed life of a railway worker called Darkhan who lives between his memories of the past and the present. The story is set in the village of Qūlandy in the 1970s, but the action shifts back to the 1930s.

The novel at its best reveals the author’s disavowal of Soviet power and Soviet identity. If the previous story shows the characters’ willingness to assimilate, this novel is more skeptical about the changes occurring around. At this stage, Bökei’s characters explicitly come to realize their ironical condition and start questioning the current regime and their

identity. The novel can be best described as a ‘phase of rejection’ of cultural dominance and assertion of one’s identity.

The central character of the novel, Darkhan is a railway worker, who has toiled at the train station at Qūlandy for more than 40 years. He passed through the process of assimilation and is now in muted rejection of Soviet power. The construction of the railway was important in the formation of his identity. He believed that the train would make this small village into an industrial center, thus people there would become normal Soviet citizens. Forty years ago he was one among thousands to sing ‘Long Live, Turksib!’⁷⁷ and to await the beginning of the new life. After forty years, he understands the ugliness of the train. Its ugliness reproduces the ugliness of the worker who believed in those ideals.

For the young Darkhan the sound of the train was like two strings of *dombyra*⁷⁸, ‘*mynau zhalpaq dalanyñg ghasyrlar boyghy qystalanyp kelgen mūng qayghysyn, būgingi quanyshyn, ertēnggi baqytyn kii qylyp shertken; bayagyda qūlan zhortqan tūzde qan tamyrnyday tirshilik zhūregin soqtyrghan shoyin zhol bar zhañgalyq, barlyq zhañga omirdi ala keldi de, qazaqtyng keng-baytaq dalasyn ulken ālemmen zhalghastyrghan*’ (Like two strings of dombyra, the railway played a sorrowful melody of the wide steppe which was kept for centuries, it played the present joy and the future happiness of these lands as a *kii*; As a blood vessel which brought life, railway was also a source of goodness and the source of new life; it connected the huge Kazakh steppe with the world.)⁷⁹

However, now, he perceives the presence of the train as a distraction and as a destructive force. The sound of the train is not melodic as before, rather it is annoying: ‘*Tūn*

⁷⁷ Bōkei, O. *Ōz otyñgdy ōshirme*, 16.

⁷⁸ Kazakh traditional musical instrument which has two strings.

⁷⁹ Bōkei, O. *Ōz otyñgdy ōshirme*, 15.

qoinauynan suyryla shyqqan zhalghyz kózdi zhalmauыз syqyldy ysyldap-pysyldap ūmtylghan poezdyng taqyldaghan taᅇᅇdayi Darkhannyng miyna shege bop qaghylyp, zhuregi loblydy. Kózi qarauytyp basy aynaldy. Eki shekesin syghymdai ūstap shóke túsip otyra ketti'(As a one-eyed *zhalmauыз*,⁸⁰ who came out of nowhere at night, the sound of the train was felt like a pin in Darkhan's brain. He puked. He felt dizziness and could not see anything. Pressing his temples hard, he sat abruptly).⁸¹

The disbelief and questioning of the Soviet agenda comes with the death of his wife, Gŭliya, who was killed by Ospan, who is a head of kolkhoz. Gŭliya embodies that Kazakhness before whose spirit, the Kazakh nation is in debt. There was an incident when a camel went mad and attacked people. However, the construction workers who were building Turksib were not informed about it. So, Gŭliya decides to rescue them by making the camel chase her. Thus, everyone remains safe, and Gŭliya is also rescued. However, finally she is killed by Ospan, who represents the Soviet bureaucracy.

At the end of his life, when he is nearly seventy, Darkhan is in a miserable condition. His dream of becoming a real Soviet man is shattered and now he feels deceived by the system. He does not see any change in his surrounding, except those of degradation. The only way for him to have peace is by restoring what he neglected in the past. Once, in order to help build a railway station he destroyed the tomb of a saint, Kengir baba. Kengir baba embodies his connection with his ethnic and national past which he had once lost or betrayed. He seeks his redemption in restoring what he had destroyed. As Fanon says, at this stage the colonized goes back to the old days. In the same way, Darkhan's starting to attend Kengir Baba's grave embodies his identification with the things he had forgotten.

⁸⁰ *Zhalmauыз kempir* is a female monster from Kazakh mythology, who is usually depicted as an old hag and cannibal. Inzhuna Karazhanova explores the construction of *Zhalmauыз kempir* in Kazakh mythology in her forthcoming master's thesis 'Monstrous Femininity in Kazakh Folklore.'

⁸¹ Bökei, O. *Óz otyngdy óshirme*. p. 13.

As we have seen from the previous chapters, the role of Soviet woman was also important in the process of modernization. *Óz otyňgdy óshirme* has two central female characters, Gúliya and Dúriya whose lives are contrasted and paralleled. The author seems to act as a moral judge for these characters, and describes Dúriya as a less pleasant character than Gúliya. What makes Dúriya different from Gúliya? And what is the reason for her being less powerful?

Dúriya is a perfect model of a Soviet woman. Although born in the village, she had successfully transformed herself into an urbanite. Her education in the city of Semei was crucial in her performing the gender role expected of her. The narrator says: ‘*Osy zhaňga minez, qalalyq qasiet äsirese, Dúriyagha erte daryp, zhûris- tûrysynyňg erkekke tãn erkin boluy, azdap bolsa da tzivilizatsia kôre qalghandyghynan edi*’ (This new, metropolitan manners were acquired by Dúriya faster and her way of behaving herself freely which made her resemble to a man, was because of her experience of civilization.)⁸² Thus we see that Dúriya is perceived as a man-like woman and the narrator sounds sarcastic in relating it with civilization. Her difference is also articulated through a change in how she dresses. The narrator says: ‘*Qaladan shashyn qyrqyp, zhaňgasha kiinip, shabyttanyp oralghan sekildi. Bûrynnan da ashyq-zharqyn edi, qazir tipti taňgdayi taqyldap qûlpyryp alghan. Atqa sidam zhãne nyq otyrady, bûtynda shalbar..*’ (It seems she came back from the city with inspiration, she cut her hair, adopted modern dress. She was a sincere person earlier, but now she is more beautiful. She sits on the horse skillfully and she wore trousers.)⁸³ She is portrayed as a seductive woman.

⁸² Ibid., 42.

⁸³ Ibid., 222.

In contrast to her, the author describes Gūliya as a more rewarding figure. She is a paragon of characters who symbolize the epic, ancient, authentic feature of Kazakh woman who did not fall victim of seductive city life, which Dūriya stands for. '*Qaladaghy oqu, aidarynan zhel ösken zhelökpe tirlik Gūliyagha āserin tigize qoimaghan; tym kōne, tipti epostyq minez-qūlyghynyng qaimaghyn būza almady. Būzghysy kelgeni emes, būza almady*' (The education in the city, the labor did not affect Gūliya; it could not destroy her very ancient and epic behavior. It is not that it did not want to destroy it, but it could not).⁸⁴

Being a progressive woman punishes Dūriya. She cannot have the same life as Gūliya had. She cannot be loved and liked as Gūliya by Darkhan. She does not have enough features which make her resemble Kazakh woman which Bōkei describes to be more beautiful than the hybridized Kazakh Soviet woman. She does not have children and could not live up to the expectations and norms of the society. At the end, she loses everything and becomes a drunkard.

These characters realize how far they were detached from their own culture and they also know what their faults are. If Darkhan could reject the dominance of Soviet culture and restore his native consciousness, Dūriya could not do that, and for this she is punished.

Resistance to the present: claiming the past

The novella *Atau-Kere or Qauipti Budan* (The Last Meal or The Dangerous Hybrid) was partially published in 1989 in the journal '*Zhūldyz*' and was published as a book in 1990. It tells the story of a beekeeper called Yerik, who lives with his family in the Altai region. Yerik has a mother, Niura Fadeevna and a wife, Aina. The story gets twisted when he meets his old friend Taghan, who in search of his identity, becomes a drunkard.

⁸⁴ Ibid., 42- 43.

This novella is one of the last works published by the author. Here, Bôkei expresses his radical opposition to hybridity and most explicitly resists Russian domination over the Kazakh community. As it is the fact that by 1989, there were significant changes in the political arena, and *perestroika* offered many

The central character, Taghan, who once was a truly Soviet hybrid, now utterly rejects this and becomes an ardent nationalist figure. Through the portrayal of Yerik, the author warns about the dangers of racial hybrids. He also suggests that one's ethnic identity prevails over other identities, as, Niura Fadeevna's case demonstrates. We also observe the author's embrace of a rigidity which the hunter *shal* embodies. Thus, the author wants to restore the pre-revolutionary Kazakh values which he had rejected in the story *Qaidasyng qasqa qūlynym*.

Among all the characters Taghan is the most assimilated character, who was best at 'mimicking' the metropolitan / Russian elder brother. He is a Kazakh who has assimilated to the dominant culture and renounced his national identity. It was through the Russian-language education that he could imitate the ways, fashion, language, tastes of the Russian man or Soviet man. According to Homi K. Bhabha, colonial discourse 'generates the seed of its own destruction',⁸⁵ because however perfect the imitation may be, it is not accurate. It turns out to be ironical when Taghan is 'almost the same but not quite.'⁸⁶ Irony lies in Taghan's acceptance by the Russians as one of them.

Taghan's education makes him undermine the truth of the system. He has access to the same archive of knowledge as any Russian. Taghan thinks the way the Soviet man or Russian

⁸⁵ Homi.K.Bhabha. *The Location of Culture*, 225.

⁸⁶ *Ibid.*, 86

man thinks. His scientific minded nature takes him to explore the topics which make him ‘enemy of people.’

Taghan is a scholar, and an historian. While doing a research he reads some negating statements against the agenda of the Soviet Union. He was shocked when he read these lines from a Soviet history book, which the author does not indicate: ‘*Vsia istoria Rossii predstavlyaet iz sebya kartinu postepennogo prodvizheniya slavyanskogo plemeni na vostok i assimilyatsii im menee kul'turnykh narodnostei*’ (The whole history of Russia is a history of gradual expansion of Slavic tribes into the East and assimilating less cultured nations).⁸⁷ Is this not in contradiction to Lenin’s methodology of the persistence of each nation’s difference, its language and religion, genetics? Is it not against ‘*zemlya tomu- kto ee otrabatyvaet*’ (the land is for those who work on it)’?⁸⁸

When Taghan wrote his second research paper on the history of the nations who inhabited the Altai, he was accused of being an ‘enemy of people’ and an *ultshyl* or nationalist. However, he could not explain what it meant to be ‘*ultshyl*’ and ‘*ultzhandy*’ or patriot of one’s own nation. He says:

‘Aghalar-au, men osy dissertatsiamdaghy mysaldardyng birde-bireuin oz zhanymnan shygharghanym zhoq, tugeldei orys ghalymdarynyng engbekteri ishinen “istoria russkoi kolonizatsionnogo dvizhenia” degen soilem alsam, ol da sol qalpynda oryssa teksten koshirilgen zhane mening aityp otyrghanym- Sovettik emes, patshalyq Rossiyanyng saiyasaty ghoi’.

‘Dear brothers, none of the examples I illustrate in my dissertation are created by me, all of them are from the works of Russian scholars, even the sentence ‘the history of

⁸⁷ Bökei, O. *Shygharmalary. Roman, povester*. El-shezhire, 2013:189.

⁸⁸ *Ibid.*, 191.

Russian colonial movement' was taken from the texts in Russian language and the things I discuss are not about the Soviet politics, but about Tsarist Russia.'⁸⁹

This knowledge of the power structures makes Taghan a threat to the regime. His being of other than Russian blood becomes dangerous and therefore he had to be eliminated from academia. This is how he becomes a drunkard. In one scene, he thinks about the word 'internatsionalism' and wonders why when people say this word they have to express it in Russian. The author blames Soviet policies of Russification for Taghan's lost identity. It is Soviet ideology which uprooted Taghan from his native culture. This is explained by his ignorance about his ancestors. After his rejection of the Soviet legacy, he returns back to his native village.

His embrace of radical national consciousness is delivered through his joining and accepting the rigid past, which is represented through the hunter *shal*. *Shal* adopts two children- a boy and a girl- from the orphanage, and starts living by himself. I interpret this as the author's solution for rescuing the nation from hybridization by bringing up pure ethnic Kazakhs who are not affected by any other external forces. It is also significant to look at the names given to these children- Qozy Kōrpesh and Bayan Sūlu,⁹⁰ symbolizing the epic lovers who would be the beginning of the new Kazakh nation which *shal* wants to create. *Shal* calls it as 'his country' and invites Taghan to join it. This is what Taghan also needs in order to purify himself from his hybrid nature: '*Anghy shaldyng posol'stvosyna baryp, sol memleketting azamattyghyn alu*' (Go to the embassy of the *shal* and take the citizenship of that country).⁹¹

⁸⁹ Ibid., 191-192.

⁹⁰ Epic lovers from Kazakh folklore.

⁹¹ Bökei, O. *Shygharmalary*:192.

Taghan acts as a mouthpiece of the narrator and the author. Only the reader can know and listen to what Taghan thinks and says. The author gives long mournful speeches to Taghan which recur several times, and express the central thought of the novella. In their form these speeches very much resemble official speeches of the Party, but, their content is different. ‘WHY HAVE WE BECOME LIKE THIS?’ These speeches which are forbidden lie at the core of Taghan’s unhappiness and his loss:

‘Ne ushin òmir sùru kerek? Bălkim, ūrpaq ūshin, ūlt ūshin... Biraq sol ūltqa men sekildi “alqash”, zhoq bolmasa Yerik sekildi topas toqyshar ūrpaq kerek pe? NEGE BIZ OSY ūrpaqtyñg rukhy myqty, deni sau, daulesker de kuresker, ana tilin ghashyghynan da ardaqtaytyn asyl tektiligi ūshin, izgilikti āreketter ushin tārbielemeimiz?’

Why do we need to live? May be, for the next generation, for the nation... but does the nation need the drunkard like me or the stupid and mean Yerik? WHY DO NOT WE bring up a generation who is healthy in spirit and body, who is a fighter and brave, who reveres his mother tongue more than his lover?⁹²

He further continues his speech:

‘Biz kŭni buginge dein ūlttyq adamgershilik, imandyq bet-beinesi men bolmysyn, kelbeti men layiqtylyghyn anyqtai almay zhŭrmiz. Āsirese, qazaqtardyñg.... Eñg aueli bizge kimder keregin, iyaghni ūltymyzdyng ar-ozhdandyq idealyn bilmeimiz’

Until this day we could not define for ourselves our national solidarity, what it is to be a nation. Especially, Kazakhs... first of all, we do not know whom do we need, we do not know the ideology of the dignity of our nation.⁹³

⁹² Ibid., 183.

⁹³ Ibid., 183-184.

Thus, Oralkhan Bōkei constructs an image of a national hero who abandoned his Soviet self behind and starts everything anew.

What had happened with Taghan is not the case of just one person, rather the author assigns Taghan the task of representing the whole nation. This is the fate of everyone, who was lost like him.

In contrast to Taghan, for Oralkhan Bōkei the most dangerous character of the twentieth century in this novel is a character of Yerik. The dangerous hybrid which the title of the novel refers to is Yerik. Yerik's father is Kazakh and his mother is Russian. According to official discourse, racial hybrids were the best intermediaries in bringing modernization into national territories. However, Bōkei does not seem to agree with this assumption. The racial hybrid is a lost generation, and he is a monster who threatens to destroy the cultural heritage of the Kazakh society. He is an intermediary for exploiting the natural resources and cultural values of Kazakh community.

Bōkei's figurative use of the term '*dubara*' is significant here: *dubara* refers to a person who is someone negatively hybrid, who is lost and therefore dangerous. As the author proposes, Yerik is a *dubara* who does not know who he is. The term is something similar to the term 'mankurt' by which Chyngyz Aitmatov identifies a rootless person, whose 'memory of his tribe and lineage had been eradicated.'⁹⁴ If a 'mankurt' does not remember anything, a '*dubara*' remembers his roots but does not value them.

The novel starts with Yerik's coming to the village on one of his trading trips to sell honey. From the outset of the novel one can see that he is not a welcome person in that community. People have a hostile attitude towards him: '*Būrynghydai emes, bül auyldyn*

⁹⁴ Coombs, David Sweeney. "Entwining Tongues: Postcolonial Theory, Post-Soviet Literatures and Bilingualism in Chingiz Aitmatov's *I dol'she veka dlitsia den'*." *Journal of Modern Literature* 34.3 (2011): 53.

adamdary būldana esendesetindei, beine bir kisikiik kōrgendei kōzderining astymen sūze qaraydy, ne bolmasa bayqamaghansyp, bayirqalamay asyggys öte shyghady’ (The things are not as they were earlier, people of this village seem to greet him aggressively, they look under their eyes as if they saw a wild person or they pass along very quickly pretending not to see anything).⁹⁵ We clearly sense that he is not seen as a member of the community. He senses this change in people, however, he does not long for their attention either. Rather, Yerik imagines himself as a snake, crouching among these people who are ‘ *mop-momaqan*’ (so placid and docile).⁹⁶ The symbol of the snake is usually associated with evil in Kazakh cultures, which makes it effective for both Yerik and the society to best describe the danger which hybridity poses.

Yerik identifies himself with Russians. First of all, as a beekeeper, he chose to continue doing something which is specific to Russian culture, for it was Russian settlers who introduced bee-keeping among the Kazakhs. The author seems to be critical of Yerik’s choice. He could have also bred horses, which the author sees as ‘authentic’ Kazakh livelihood. However, Yerik’s choice seems to justify current power relations where everything Russian is seen superior to everything non-Russian.

Secondly, he obtains these bees through his Russian friend. His pilot friend, Prokhor Aleksandrovich, brings them from Africa. The Africanized bees were very productive as they could work much better than common bees and produce more honey. However, these bees were really dangerous as they could kill people. After Yerik brings them to the Altai, the local

⁹⁵ Bökei, O. *Shygharmalary*, 6.

⁹⁶ *Ibid.*, 8.

bees were quick to interbreed with the new bees. As a result, a new hybrid – the Altai-American-African bee - emerged.⁹⁷

Thirdly, he calls his Russian friends ‘tamyr’ (literally meaning ‘root’) which is usually used for siblings or very close friends, and of the same nationality in Kazakh society. The relationship between Yerik and Prokhor can be best seen in this scene, where Yerik gifts the skins of two bears, which he killed the day before:

‘*Kakoi ty molotok, Yerik... Eto mne?*

- *Da, tamyr. Eto vse tebe. Moi podarok.*’

(-Well done, Yerik. Is this for me?

- Yes, tamyr. This is all for you. My gift).⁹⁸

In this example, the author notes the use of Kazakh words to refer to Russians and again reinforces the threat of hybrid subjects to national culture.

Along with that, Yerik’s hostile attitude toward Kazakh cultural heritage makes him a more monstrous subject. For example, one of the commodities which Yerik inherited from his father is a *qorzhyn*. It is a kind of bag made of leather, which can hold liquids. It is an item which was coming down through several generations, and therefore it has to be preserved with great respect. However, it does not make any sense to Yerik. It is useful for him to use it for honey and for carrying beer and vodka. We see the distortion of the cultural meaning of the *qorzhyn*. It does not have the same value for him as it does for native Kazakh people. We see this also at the point where he uses the *kubi* for making beer. Usually, the *kubi* was used for processing milk. Thus, the hybrid characters like Yerik make threat to the development and preservation of national culture.

⁹⁷ Ibid., 65.

⁹⁸ Ibid., 198.

Yerik's mother, Niura Fadeevna, is described as a woman, who transgressed all the boundaries. People call her Nurke *kempir*.⁹⁹ She is from the community of so-called 'kerzhakh'¹⁰⁰ people. In Kazakh language, the word kerzhakh is comprised of two words: ker or kerī – means wrong or conservative and zhakh – side. Niura Fadeevna does not know why they came to be called kerzhakh people. While she was at school, she met Khandayur, a Kazakh man. They got married, though - her parents never accepted their marriage.

Khandayur introduced Niura to all the Kazakh traditions and customs. She spoke fluent Kazakh. She started praying five times a day, and thus, this Russian woman became Kazakh. The author emphasizes the fact that she was 'more Kazakh than any other Kazakh.' When Tagan sees that Nurke *kempir* reads namaz, he laughs: '*Orys namaz okidy...hi-hi-hi.*' (The Russian reads namaz... hi-hi-hi)¹⁰¹

However, there is also something concealed in this type of hybridity. This invisibility of true identity is beyond one's choice. It reveals itself spontaneously. We see it when towards the end of the novel, Niura Fadeevna starts to think in Russian. She felt scared. Why? The woman who had become a Kazakh long time ago, felt scared at the sentence which came to her tongue suddenly: '*Liubym sposobom vyzhit!*' (Survive at any cost!)¹⁰² '*Qudaydyn kudireti, alzhyn dedim be, keingi kezde keibir narsege oryssa oilanyp jurgenim?*' (By the grace of God, am I losing my mind, why do I think of some things in Russian in these days?)

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⁹⁹ *Kempir* is a word used to refer to an old lady.

¹⁰⁰ This refers to a social group of Russian people who kept the customs and traditions of the 'old belief' and known as 'old-believers.'

¹⁰¹ Bökei, O. *Shygharmalary*:75.

¹⁰² *Ibid.*, 108.

¹⁰³ *Ibid.*, 109.

She is killed by the sting of Yerik's Africanized bees. Her invisible Russian identity becomes visible at her deathbed. Sitting next to her mother-in-law, Aina is shocked. Niura Fadeevna started doing something which is against Islam. '*Ananyng sũtimen rukhyna sinnggen senim tũpting tũbinde b̄aribir zhen̄gip shyqqan edi*' (The belief which was given by her mother's milk finally won the battle.)¹⁰⁴ Niura Fadeevna started to make a cross and speak in Russian asking the mercy of God: '*o, gospodi, prosti svoego greshnego...*' (oh, God, forgive your sinner.)¹⁰⁵

Later, Aina wanted to see the belongings her mother-in-law had left behind. 'Before opening the chest, Aina unconsciously started saying 'Bismillah': '*Sandyqtyng ishinde ōzinen zhasyrghan mol "bailyq" zhoq eken, tek en̄g tũbinde shetin kestelegen aq oramaldyng orauyn zhazghanda, ōz kōzine ōzi senbedi, adamzatqa baquraiya qaraghan kōnetoz ikondy qoly qaltyrai alyp, bũryshqa aparyp suiep qoidy*' (There was no such 'treasure' there, but an ancient icon which was folded inside of the white shawl. She could not believe her eyes. With trembling hands she took it and put on the corner.)¹⁰⁶

We see the tone of distrust for the characters like Niura Fadeevna, no matter how much she is 'more Kazakh than any Kazakh', a phrase which is used ironically by the author, cultural hybrids like her cannot act as the transmitters of culture.

¹⁰⁴ Ibid., 210.

¹⁰⁵ Ibid., 210.

¹⁰⁶ Ibid., 212.

Conclusion

This chapter has examined the concepts of hybridity proposed by Homi Bhabha and the national cultural identity suggested by Frantz Fanon and justified their applicability in Oralkhan Bokei's works through the analysis of hybrid characters. Bøkei's works provide insights into the operations of colonialist and anti-colonialist ideologies. The three works analyzed here which were written at different time periods allow us to see the possibility of resistance narratives within those political contexts.

In Russia, during the post-Stalin era, as Yitzhak M. Brudny notes, there emerged Russian village prose writers, who were actively involved in Soviet politics and wrote fictional and non-fictional accounts of the social realities of the Russian countryside.¹⁰⁷ These works criticized the Stalinist legacy and urged the necessity of reforming Russian agriculture.¹⁰⁸ Bøkei's works which were published under Brezhnev's regime between 1964 and 1982 also seem to offer a venue to explore these changes. Like Russian village prose writers, he calls for the revival of the Kazakh countryside. However, these writings were more implicit in their agenda and the writer's position also is more ambivalent. The characters in the story *Qaidasyñg qasqa qūlynym* written and published in 1972 were the most in conformance with the ideals of the positive hero. However, the position of the writer toward hybridity is very ambiguous. If one takes into account that the story was written during the Brezhnev's leadership, the author seems to be very implicit in his assumptions. This stage corresponds to the 'assimilationist' phase, which Fanon sees as an inevitable stage in the development of national identity. He seems to promote the idea of Soviet modernization within the framework of Soviet regime under Brezhnev, era of stagnation.

¹⁰⁷ Brudny Yitzhak. *Reinventing Russia: Russian Nationalism and the Soviet State, 1953–1991*. Harvard University Press, 1998.

¹⁰⁸ *Ibid.*, 17.

The novel *Óz otyngdy óshirme*, published in 1980 reveals more explicit resistance to the Soviet regime, and particularly to the memory of Stalin. The stories go back to the past and criticize the past. However, this does not prevent the writer from shedding light on the present situation. He is more doubtful about the promises of Socialism. His characters are more conscious of their nationality and there is questioning of Soviet modernization policies which had already left or never reached the Kazakh *auls*. Characters like Darkhan and Dũriya understand the futility of their life as a Soviet man and woman and their neglect cultural legacy and heritage of the past. They long for the past and try to restore what was once destroyed.

As we notice, by 1989, the time when Bõkei had published the novella *Atau-Kere*, the political context was altered. The *glasnost*' era allowed writers to speak out. Gorbachev, the new leader of the Communist party, wanted to bring about the economic reforms of *perestroika* or economic restructuring. As Kevin O'Connor notes, the freer conditions brought about by *glasnost*' made possible a more truthful evaluation of the state of Soviet society, which in turn contributed to an increase in ethnic tensions in the Soviet republics.¹⁰⁹ It was at time when Russian village prose writers lamented for the distorted present of rural Russia. The author resists Soviet hybridization which he finds to be Russianization and articulates the new national identity. He expresses deep longing for the past and embraces that rigidity. Thus, it creates a kind of the circular motion in the restoration of Kazakh national consciousness. He glorifies the idea that cultures ground their identity on an inherited and unique history and hold to that identity without change, exiling people who do not live up to the inherited model. Bõkei abhors the racial hybrids like Yerik calling them *dubara*, and

¹⁰⁹ O'Connor, Kevin C. 'From Words to Deeds: Russian Nationalism and the Conservative Opposition to Perestroika, 1985-1991.' Phd Diss. Ohio University: 2000.

warns about the impossibility of cultural hybrids like Niura Fadeevna. He calls on his Kazakh readers to decolonize their minds and to raise their national consciousness.

Chapter II

Representations of Soviet Modernity

Introduction

With postcolonial theory as a background, this chapter studies the representations of Soviet power from the native community's perspective in Bökei's works. My analysis of these works shows the oppressive and destructive nature of the Soviet industrialization and modernizing projects to native societies as portrayed by Bökei. Through the criticism of Soviet modernizing forces, the author acts as a voice of the silenced and the marginalized indigenous people. Bökei's implicit criticism of Soviet power structures during Khrushchev's leadership starts to acquire harsher and stronger tone by the end of the Brezhnev's reign, and during the *perestroika* he attacks the Soviet regime with utter bitterness and openness. Therefore my main research questions would be: How does Oralkhan Bökei represent Soviet power and the modernization policies brought by the Soviet regime? How far were the Soviet promises fulfilled?

In most cases postcolonial scholarship is concerned, in one way or another, with the representations of the colonizer and colonized, or dominant and dominated. In his 1997 essay *The Work of Representation*, Stuart Hall discusses the relationship between power and representation.¹¹⁰ According to him, representations are the mediums through which people who share the same culture construct meanings, associations, and values. Cultural representations carry the image people have of others and of themselves.

In his book, *Orientalism*, Edward Said talks about the representations of the East in Western historical and literary productions and traces the recurring image of the non-Western

¹¹⁰ Hall, Stuart, ed. *Representation: Cultural representations and signifying practices*. Vol. 2. Sage, 1997.

as the Other, very opposite of what the West is: irrational, savage, inferior.¹¹¹ Through asserting the civilizational backwardness of the East, West also claims its difference from it, by the same also justifying its 'civilizing mission' to enlighten the dark corners of humanity. Despite its criticism by different authors, the book was a fundamental contribution to the studies of earlier colonized societies. Although Said specifically analyzes the representations of Middle-Eastern people in the works of Western authors, which also can be relevant to the discussion of the portrayal of Africans and Indians, this does not deny the fact that the same constructions are present in the representations of Central Asian people and societies in the Russian empire and the Soviet Union.

According to Terry Martin, the USSR was a multi-ethnic state, which tried to promote the national identity and self-consciousness of non-Russian populations of the Soviet Union and ended up imposing policies which privileged the position of Russians and Russian culture in the development of the entire USSR.¹¹² State bodies functioned in the Russian language, and it also increased the perception of the center as Russian and the periphery as non-Russian. Accusing central officials of Russian chauvinism, then, could easily be interpreted as resisting legitimate centralization and as an expression of 'localism.'¹¹³ For example, in his article Adeeb Khalid tries to locate the Central Asia's experience of the 20th century, and suggests Central Asia's experience under Khrushchev and Brezhnev as a case of Third Worldism¹¹⁴ which characterized former European colonies such as India and African continent as underdeveloped. Laura Adams examines the case of Uzbekistan under Soviet

¹¹¹ Said, Edward. "Orientalism. 1978." New York: Vintage 1994 (1979).

¹¹² Martin, Terry Dean. *The affirmative action empire: nations and nationalism in the Soviet Union, 1923-1939*. Cornell University Press, 2001.

¹¹³ *Ibid.*, 259.

¹¹⁴ Adeeb Khalid (2007) Introduction: Locating the (post-) colonial in Soviet history, *Central Asian Survey*, 26:4, 465-473.

rule and claims the discourse of domination which constructed ‘a hierarchy that privileged the culture of the center over that of the periphery.’¹¹⁵ Douglas Northrop talks about the representations of Central Asian societies as primitive, despotic, and exotic - ‘as something utterly unlike Europe’ (Russia)- in the works of Russian writers.¹¹⁶

The idea of representation is further elaborated in the postcolonial scholar Gayatri Spivak’s theories. In her essay ‘Can the subaltern speak?’, Spivak links the representation of marginalized sections of the society to their position in social, political, economic, and gendered space.¹¹⁷ The central concern in Spivak’s work is the impossibility of the intellectual to give voice to those whom he or she is speaking for. The silenced others cannot be spoken for, however noble intentions the intellectual might have.

As an example of this, Spivak illustrates the case with *sati*, the Hindu practice of burning a widow on her husband’s funeral pyre. British policies which banned the exercise of *sati*, tried to give voice to the subaltern and marginalized Hindu women. Although the prohibition of *sati* in 1829 ‘has been canonized by colonialist and nationalist texts as a founding moment in the history of women’s emancipation in modern India’,¹¹⁸ underneath it reinforced the initial claim which asserted the difference between British ‘civilization’ and Indian ‘barbarism’ by the same upholding the existing gender norms and colonial hierarchies. Women were neither subjects nor even the primary objects of concern. They were, rather, the

¹¹⁵ Adams, Laura. ‘Modernity, Postcolonialism, and Theatrical Form in Uzbekistan’. *Slavic Review*, Vol.64. # 2. (Summer, 2005):334.

¹¹⁶ The article ‘Nationalizing backwardness: gender, empire, and Uzbek identity’ appeared in the book *A State of Nations: Empire and Nation-Making in the age of Lenin and Stalin* edited by Ronald Suny and Terry Martin published by Oxford University Press in 2001.

¹¹⁷ The concept of subaltern was employed by Spivak from Antonio Gramsci to refer to the section of society which has been socially, politically and geographically excluded from the hegemonic power structures. Spivak was one of the scholars of Subaltern Studies School which emerged in South Asia. This school saw themselves against the dominance of both colonial and nationalist history-writing.

¹¹⁸ Mani, Lata. *Contentious traditions: The debate on sati in colonial India*. University of California Press, 1998.

ground for a complex and competing set of struggles over Indian society and definitions of Hindu tradition.¹¹⁹ In the same way, postcolonial studies aim to liberate the other which had been denied its voice. Can today's intellectuals avoid a similar condescension when they represent the oppressed? Spivak clearly says no.

The impossibility of representing the marginalized society by the members of the political and nationalist elite seems to cast a shadow over the possibility of the representation of the subaltern by a member of that community. Bôkei belongs to the same community and acts as a voice of Kazakh village society who are subalterns to the Soviet regime and the political and nationalist elite which speak from the city centers. Himself having been born in the village of Altai region in the east of Kazakhstan, almost all his stories are set in the region and almost all his characters are people with whom he shares similar histories, history of Altai region. Along with that, his works are largely autobiographical. This makes him peculiar and his position evident in seeing himself as one of his characters and raise his community's voice through his writings against the Soviet power as well as Kazakh political elite who promote homogenized history of state nationalism. Bôkei does not seem to contend with the fact that Altai people can relate themselves to that history which is being promoted by the Brezhnev and Kunaev led regime.

Therefore, I argue that intellectual can represent the voice of the marginalized sections of society, if he or she is a member of the society. Bôkei is able to give an accurate portrayal of some of concerns and tensions within Kazakh speaking society of Altai region. Altai is a major source of inspiration for his stories and he sets almost all his stories in that environment, which is familiar to him most.

¹¹⁹ *Ibid.*, 2.

In this work I find it relevant and justifiable to discuss the images of Soviet modernity which aimed at enlightening Kazakh ‘backwardness’, and I argue that for Oralkhan Bòkei the images which the Soviet regime used to portray Kazakhs vis-à-vis justifying Russia’s ‘noble’ image became a cornerstone of his harsh criticism of the regime. Bòkei seems to scrutinize the modernizing policies of the Soviet regime which deranged and degraded the cultural heritage of the Kazakh society, claiming their backwardness.

Soviet anti-religious propaganda

The ideal Soviet citizen had to be an atheist. He or she was expected to have belief in ideology, but not in religion. Any kind of religion hindered the development of Soviet socialism and was regarded as backward. However, it was tolerated to some extent. People who exercised different types of religions had to be rescued from backwardness and darkness. Religion hindered the path to becoming a modern and socialist state. The practice of any religion and the exercise of ‘superstitious’ rituals like visiting the graveyard of the ancestors, the worship of holy men and pilgrimages to sacred places were seen as derogatory to the ‘noble’ image of a Communist state. As the antireligious campaign was imagined and discursively presented, improved agricultural productivity, rising living standards, and the spread of scientific- atheist education would go hand in hand with the disappearance of religion among the rural population.¹²⁰

Douglas Northrop talks about the anti-religious campaign of the Communist Party with regard to Central Asian women. Party activists in Tashkent launched this campaign in 1927, on the socialist holiday of International Women’s Day (8 March), calling it a *hujum*, or

¹²⁰ Stone, Andrew. ‘Overcoming Peasant Backwardness’: The Khrushchev Antireligious Campaign and the Rural Soviet Union. *The Russian Review*. Vol.67, #2 ,2008.

assault, against the ‘moldy old ways’ of female seclusion and inequality.¹²¹ To Bolshevik activists removing the veil ‘represented their ‘civilizing mission’ and embodied all that was backward and primitive about Central Asia.’¹²² The indigenous population had to receive this ‘help’ from above for their good and the positive characters among them had to embrace it.

In his book, Adeb Khalid argues that the Muslim communities of Central Asia ‘found themselves at the center of a massive project to achieve a different kind of modernity, one without markets and liberalism, and one which had little place for Islam- or any other religion- in it ,’ and he argues that the Soviet project succeeded to a great extent.¹²³ For Bolsheviks, the irrationality of religion coincided neatly with its anti-revolutionary and exploitative essence, and it had to be rooted out.¹²⁴ The question of religion was always regulated and controlled until 1941. Due to the start of the war, the Soviet power needed the support from its ‘citizens.’ Starting from 1943, the Soviet state permitted the establishment of an official organization which was called the Spiritual Directorate for the Muslims of the Central Asia (SADUM), which was responsible for observing religious activities in the region. The question of religion was controlled and tolerated to some extent. According to Khalid, ‘Soviet Islam became localized and was rendered synonymous with tradition.’¹²⁵ Family took a central importance in the transmission of Islam.

Under the leadership of Khrushchev, there was a renewed anti-religious campaign which attempted ‘to combat superstitious and unsupervised religious practices among the

¹²¹ Northrop, Douglas Taylor. *Veiled Empire: Gender & Power in Stalinist Central Asia*. Cornell University Press, 2004:12.

¹²² *Ibid.*, 13.

¹²³ Khalid, Adeb. *Islam after communism: religion and politics in Central Asia*. University of California Press, 2008:126.

¹²⁴ *Ibid.*, 132.

¹²⁵ *ibid.*, 134.

rural population' in order to improve the material and cultural conditions of the Soviet countryside.¹²⁶ This was a return to the practice of the closure of prayer-houses in the 1920s which was presented as 'the result of the mobilization of social opinion.'¹²⁷

Indeed, each Soviet regime throughout its history has attempted to gain the loyalty of the intellectuals through a variety of means, be it terror, coercion, or co-optation.¹²⁸ In order to gain support for his side, Khrushchev encouraged local elites and gave them more freedom in dealing with the local concerns. However, the Brezhnev era or 'the era of mature socialism', which Gorbachev called the 'period of stagnation' was marked to finally establish Communism in all parts of the Union republics. The arrival of 'mature socialism' supposedly meant that all contradictions within society had been resolved and that classes had been replaced by three groups- workers, peasants, and intelligentsia-living in harmony.¹²⁹ During this period also national party elites had greater freedom to run their affairs locally, as long as they fulfilled their economic responsibilities. It allowed the national territories to supply local needs under Soviet guise.

In the context of Kazakh SSR, Michael Stefany examines the process of Kazakhization or 'second nativization' during the career of Dinmukhamed Kunaev (1912-93), First Secretary of the Communist Party of Kazakhstan from 1960-62 and 1964-1986.¹³⁰ Although Kunaev was a full-fledged Party functionary- or apparatchik – of the Khrushchev – Brezhnev mold who worked within the system to both modernize and Sovietize his republic,

¹²⁶ Andrew Stone. 'Overcoming Peasant Backwardness':297.

¹²⁷ Roi, Yaacov. *Islam in the Soviet Union: From the Second World War to Gorbachev*, New York, 2000: 211.

¹²⁸ Brudny, Yitzhak M. *Reinventing Russia. Russian Nationalism and the Soviet State, 1953-1991*. Harvard University Press, 2000.

¹²⁹ Khalid, Adeeb. *Islam after communism*, 86.

¹³⁰ Stefany, Michael G. "Kazakhization, Kunaev and Kazakhstan: A Bridge to Independence." *Journal of Central Asian & Caucasian Studies*. 8.16 (2013).

he was also a native Kazakh whose tenure resulted in greater political influence for both his republic and his people.¹³¹ Kunaev's tenure had provided political benefits for Kazakhs partly because of Brezhnev's stagnation period and partly because of Kunaev's reputation among Kazakhs and non-Kazakhs. According to Stefany, the 1986 Alma-Ata events were the result of Kazakh people's national consciousness which was the inevitable result of Kunaev's long career and its significant to 'prepare his country for independence by sponsoring the political careers of fellow Kazakhs, thus instilling in them the confidence necessary to govern themselves.'¹³² However, this point could be questionable as Kazakhstan by that time was most modernized among other Central Asian countries with the majority of Russian population and Russian-speaking population. No matter how far Kunaev fostered national interests using his position, he does not seem to diverge from the framework of official nationalism, which largely differed from the ethnic nationalism Bökei stands for.

According to Khalid, the concentration of power in local hands made it possible for 'localized solidarities' to grow. It was these solidarities that provided the basis for the dissemination of Islam in Soviet Central Asia.¹³³ On the one hand, it was significant in the exercise of religion in the Soviet period, on the other hand it shaped religion in different ways. 'Belonging to Islam became a marker of national identity, for which no personal piety or observance was necessary.'¹³⁴ In the antireligious space of Communism, the Muslimness of Central Asians became de-modernized.

However, in his review of the book, Devin Dewese finds it problematic to see religion primarily as a marker of ethnic identity and solely a 'component' of national culture

¹³¹ *ibid.*, 50.

¹³² *ibid.*, 67.

¹³³ Khalid, Adeeb. *Islam after communism*: 137.

¹³⁴ *ibid.*, 137.

from the 1950s through the 1980s.¹³⁵ He also rejects the claim that there was no campaign of mosque or shrine- destruction after Khrushchev's time, pointing out Gorbachev's intensified antireligious work which destroyed a considerable amount of shrines in Central Asia.¹³⁶

According to him, it would be misleading to define 'issues of communal identity solely on the basis of modern notions of the nation and of national and ethnic identity and he questions Khalid's claim about the survival of Islam merely as an element of national culture.'¹³⁷

As Douglas Northrop suggests 'most Central Asians did claim an identity as Muslim, but that common label masked a vast variety of local customs and religious practices.'¹³⁸ The matter of which identity was most salient in a particular situation (man? Muslim? Uzbek? Sart? Farmer? Father? From Tashkent? Surqosh?) depended on the precise issues under consideration and the individual in question, and frequently was impossible to pinpoint.¹³⁹ The question of religion as a matter of faith which Deweese talks about or as a marker of national identity as Khalid suggests also depended on the position of the speaker or the author in particular political and social context.

The analysis of Bökei's works seems to place him on the same platform with Khalid, who claims that 'Soviet-imposed isolation turned Islam in Central Asia into a purely localized affair synonymous with custom and tradition.'¹⁴⁰ Following this context, in this section I argue that in his works Oralkhan Bökei represents the Soviet regime as a destroyer

¹³⁵ DeWeese, Devin. "Islam after Communism: Religion and Politics in Central Asia By Adeb Khalid." *Journal of Islamic Studies* 19, no. 1 (2008): 133-141.

¹³⁶ *ibid.*

¹³⁷ *ibid.*, 138.

¹³⁸ Northrop, Douglas. *Veiled Empire*, 17.

¹³⁹ *ibid.*, 17.

¹⁴⁰ Khalid, Adeb. P.82.

of religion in Kazakh society. Religion for Bökei is a way of reclaiming national identity and stands against colonialism and the oppression of national values which are understood in terms of religion.

The novella *Saitan Kōpir* (The Devil's Bridge)¹⁴¹ exemplifies the narrative of resistance, where Bökei portrays the Soviet regime to be a system based on the oppression of local communities. He criticizes the propagandist nature of state ideology and the suppression of religious practice. The story is about the struggle of a man who lost his legs because of an avalanche under which he was trapped for a week. Aspan, who is in his late sixties, wants to prevent his son from suffering the same fate. In order to pass to the other side of the bridge which connects Engbek village with the Alatai region, one has to say 'bismillah' without fear. Written and set in Engbek in 1980, the story is a rhetorical depiction of evil and the hostile nature of the state ideology which made people fear to acknowledge what they are and who they are. The novella criticizes Soviet antireligious propaganda and its negative and corrupting influence on local population.

In the novella, there are a set of symbols that represent the Soviet regime and its influence over the national territories. The image of the bridge symbolizes the Soviet power which has an evil and demonic nature. The loud YELL (AIQAI) which caused the avalanche that made Aspan lose his legs while passing the bridge embodies the Soviet ideology and Soviet propaganda which threatens people and intentionally leaves them in moral, political, and cultural difficulties. The village of Engbek stands for the Soviet village which has lost its Kazakhness while the Alatai region where some horsemen live and lead nomadic way of life seem to symbolize the Kazakh way of life. The utterance of the word 'bismillah' is highly symbolic of embracing one's identity which had been suppressed by the Soviet power. Bökei sees the confession of one's faith and belief is a way of claiming one's identity, which here he

¹⁴¹ The novella was first published in the journals 'Zhūldyz' and 'Zhalyn' in 1982.

connects with the national identity. Thus as Khalid suggests, the embrace of religion is seen as a part of one's national identity.

As the title of the novella suggests the bridge is a devil's bridge. The image of the bridge has a largely negative connotation for the narrator and for the characters. Usually, the image of a bridge is connected with something positive which connects two shores, or past with present. However, in the novel, the bridge is not seen as a connecting line, but as a dividing one. The other part which is distanced from the people of Engbek village is the place of the horsemen, which signifies the Kazakh society which is kept uninfluenced by the dictates of the Soviet power at the same time left to live isolated to live its harsh winter.

The bridge plays a central role in the characters' development. It is the mediator and connector of the two destinations, which signifies the communication between these two places to be that between the colonizer and colonized. We come to know that the bridge was built more than seventy years ago, before Soviet power was established in the region. It existed when Aspan's father was alive. This signifies the persistence and continuation of the Tsarist inheritance in the region, and the author questions the promises of the new power to fight against the old structure, which is the imperial legacy. The author tries to undermine the basis of the Soviet system which defined itself against the colonial powers who subjugated the local population, and it took on itself a mission of eliminating the imperial inheritance, but eventually ended up reinforcing the same constructions with regard to the former colonies of Russia. It could not and it did not destroy the legacy of the empire which the narrator renders through the depiction of the bridge. Its old and dangerous look made Aspan scared to pass it. *'Būdan qyryq zhyl bŭryn tūtqyndar salghan aghash kōpirden aryq-tūraqtardy bir-birlep zhetelep ōtkizbese, ābden keteui kete eskirgen aghash kōpir kōtere almai synyp ketedi'* (If not to carry the exhausted cattle one by one, the bridge which was built forty years ago and

very old wooden bridge which lost most of its parts would be broken apart.)¹⁴² What is more dangerous is an avalanche. Even when people know about the danger they would encounter along this bridge, they still pass through it. *‘Biraq osy qauipti bile-seze tūra Alataigha qystaityny qalai, osy qauipti bile-seze tūra ‘Saitan Kôpirden’ ôteteri qalai?’* (But why do people go to spend their winter in the Alatai region when they are aware of this danger, why do people pass the devil’s bridge when they are aware of its danger.)¹⁴³

Aspan thinks that he could have passed the bridge if he had not feared saying ‘bismillah’ aloud: *‘Tardyng ũstindegi “Saitan kôpirden” “bissmillany” aitpai ôtem dep, qar kôshkinning astynda qaldym’* (Because I passed the ‘devil’s bridge’ without saying ‘bismillah’, I had to suffer under the avalanche).¹⁴⁴ Thinking about his son, Aspan utters: *‘Saitan kôpirden qoryqpai ôtse, aman oralar edi’* (If he passes the bridge without showing fear, he will come back).¹⁴⁵ Aspan is afraid that his son would face the same situation and lose his legs. Aspan remembers his earlier attitude to religion and now he is more conscious what it means for him to be able to utter ‘bismillah’. *‘Ras, Aspan anda-sanda oqystan ‘alla’ dep aityp qalghany bolmasa, eshqashan da Qūdaigha senip te, siynyp ta kôrgen zhoq, ôzine-ôzining boiyndaghy adamdyq ruh pen kushke sengen.’* (That is true, though Aspan sometimes would call ‘Allah’ without meaning it, he never believed and worshipped the God. He believed in himself and in the human power in himself).¹⁴⁶

Throughout the novel, the author seems to select the specific language and incidents which signify the role of one’s religion in everyday life. Religion is a way one identifies the

¹⁴² Bôkei, Oralkhan. *Shygharmalary, povester. Vol.3.* Almaty: El-shezhire, 2013: 31.

¹⁴³ *Ibid.*, 32.

¹⁴⁴ *Ibid.*, 17.

¹⁴⁵ *Ibid.*, 17.

¹⁴⁶ *Ibid.*, 46.

world and sees it. Religion teaches the way one copes with the evils of life. The use of words like ‘bismillah’, ‘alla’, ‘assalaumaghaleikum’ and their use only in isolated places gives as an understanding that the utterance of them aloud would be dangerous. Therefore, the voice of the native was silenced and marginalized. He could not be who he is.

There is also one scene when Aspan was seeing some ghost-like figures, which points to the belief of Aspan in superstitious beings. He believes that he saw them and when he said ‘bismillah’, they disappeared. ‘*Perishte me? Su iesi Sūleimenniḡ sūlu qyzdary ma? ... ‘bismillah’ dep kūbirlep edi, ālgi saitan bolyp elestegen appaq sūldeler zym-ziya zhoghaldy*’ (Do not know whether it was an angel. Or were they daughters of the master of water, Suleimen? When I whispered bismillah, the things which were seen like demons disappeared).¹⁴⁷

The author also uses the symbol of the AIQAI¹⁴⁸ or LOUD YELL which caused the avalanche. AIQAI stands for the Soviet ideology which is following him everywhere. It encompasses all the realms of his life. He cannot get rid of it. At the beginning of the novella, the author starts identifying the role of ideology in people’s life. ‘*Aiqai – zhaḡḡhyryqqa teḡ. Al zhaḡḡhyryqtan bizder, bisdiḡ is-āreketimiz, oi-maqsatymyz, tipti būkil dūnie, kulli adamzattyḡ barlyq tirshiligi, ōmiriniḡ mǎn-maghynasy zharatylghandai*’ (The cry is equal to the echo. We, our actions, thoughts and aspirations, even the whole world, the existence of the humanity and the meaning of the life seems to emerge from that echo).¹⁴⁹

The author uses the word THAT (ANAU) to refer to those who make LOUD YELLS. They are the ones who make the AIQAI heard, and reach more and more people.

¹⁴⁷ Ibid., 31.

¹⁴⁸ Capitalization of the word is in the primary text itself.

¹⁴⁹ Bökei, Oralkhan. *Shygharmalary, povester. Vol.3: 3.*

The incessant yells are connected with the head of the village, who is the Soviet official. This yell sounds like the yell of the head of the village. And THAT (ANAU) is responsible for that. The head of the village is also there, and belongs there. ‘*Auyl bastygy- ANAU*’ (The head of the village is THAT).¹⁵⁰ He uses the word ANAU (that) to refer to the Soviet system. ANAU – THAT is everyone and everything which is connected with Soviet regime. It is a head of the auyl, it is Soviet ideology and propaganda. Wherever he goes he is followed by the AIQAI (YELL), whose origins he cannot trace.

Aspan’s identity is not only tied to his religious belief, but also to the horses. His dream of having his own horse did not come true. The narrator says: ‘*Sūmbiledei sūlu at minsem’- dep armandaghan qazaqtyñg biri Aspan edi*’ (Aspan was one of the Kazakhs who dreamed of riding beautiful horse like a Sirius.)¹⁵¹ His father was also a horseman whom Aspan sees as a model for himself. Bōkei criticizes the Soviet collective farms for making people lose what they once dreamed. One thing which Aspan cannot forget is the death of his horse, which the author might be referring to the famine of 1932-1933, during which millions of animals were killed. ‘*Zharyqtyq zhanuar da AIQAILYŃG qūrbany boldy*’ (Never-to –be forgotten animal was the victim of the same loud YELL).¹⁵²

Aspan says: ‘*Men ANAULARDY köpten bilemin. Biraq onyñg naghyz zymiyan, qulyq saughan sūmpaiy müskin, adamzattyñg qas zhauy ekenin tiri zhangha tis zharyp aitqan emen. Anaulardy men ghana emes, zhūrttyñ bari biledi, olar da ũndemedi. Sen solsyñg dep betine basqan emes. Adam balasyn alzhastyrar, es-aqylynan aiyrar AYQAY-dy estimegen kisi joq*’ (I know them for a long time. But I have never spoken out that it is a real evil, sly enemy of the mankind. Not only I, but everyone knows this, they also keep silent. No one had told

¹⁵⁰ Ibid., 49.

¹⁵¹ Ibid., 55.

¹⁵² Ibid., 55.

them that they are THAT. There is no one left who listened that yell which makes them mad).¹⁵³ What perplexed Aspan and people is that who is that person or thing which makes that YELL? THAT. The price of being liberated from that yell was his legs.

However, everyone seems to know who was behind the yell which made the snow move. One of the characters, Yerik believes that the accident that happened to Aspan was intentionally planned by some people and urges Aman to tell him about that. *'Estuimshe, Aspan atamyz, 'saitan kôpirden' ote bergende äldelim ädeii aighailap qar kôshkinin qūlatqan deidi... Ol kim?'* (As I heard, when Aspan ata was just passing the 'devil's bridge' someone made the snow collapse by intentionally YELLING).¹⁵⁴

He further continues: *'Siz bilesiz kim ekenin, biraq omir baqi da aitpaisyz. Songymnan tûsip, pälege ūshyrarmyn, -dep qorqaqtaysyz'* (You know who it was, but you would never reveal. You fear that they would follow you and never let you go).¹⁵⁵ Yerik's character stands for the growing generation of Kazakh society, the youth who demands that the truth to be told. He says to Aman: *'Mine bizderdi- keingi urpaqy qinaityn da, osy zhūmbaghy sheshilmei bara zhatqan shyndyqtaryngyz'*. (What bothers us- the coming generation- is the truth, a puzzle which is not solved).¹⁵⁶ And the case with Aspan is only one instance of this. Thus, the author points out the existence of truths to be told and revealed to the next generation which are not supposed to be told now but silenced.

Finally, we see that Aman could safely cross the bridge. He could do it only after he says 'bismillah' and is led by his father's voice and lost legs, which give him the bravery and

¹⁵³ Ibid., 50.

¹⁵⁴ Ibid., 72.

¹⁵⁵ Ibid., 73.

¹⁵⁶ Ibid., 73.

courage not to repeat his fate. The matter of faith for Bôkei is a matter of one's identity. One's religious identity is a part of one's national identity, of claiming who you are. The anti-religious propaganda which threatens the existence of the local population silences their identity. Only through acquiring belief can one assert one's identity.

Turksib and Soviet Industrial modernization

One of the key manifestations of the establishment of the Soviet power in the Kazakh lands was through the railway. The construction of the Turkestan-Siberian (Turksib) railway was a defining moment for the Soviet state as a step toward bringing civilization to the so-called 'backward regions.' As Lenin writes, railways *'это гвоздь, это- одно из проявлений самой яркой связи между городом и деревней, между промышленностью и земледелием, на которой основывается целиком социализм.'* (Railways are the nail, one of the manifestations of the connection between the city and the village, between industry and agriculture, on which Socialism is based)¹⁵⁷

Along with the construction of the Dniepr Dam, the Turksib would be one of the first of the great stroiki, or building projects, of Stalin's industrialization drive. Built from the December of 1926 to January of 1931, the railroad employed up to 45000 workers to lay more

¹⁵⁷ Lenin, V. I. *Polnyi sbornik sochinenii*. Vol.36:271-272.

than 1400 kilometers of track.¹⁵⁸ It was an embodiment of the ‘Bolshevik ideals of building socialism’-creating a modern, industrial society free of class, gender, or ethnic animosities.’¹⁵⁹

According to Payne’s study, Soviet nationality policy had a contradictory side: on the one hand, Soviet nationality policies seemed to protect the previously oppressed minorities and marginalized populations of the Soviet Union. On the other hand, there were also destructive policies which had fatal consequences for the same people.¹⁶⁰ During the construction of the railroad Kazakhs were seen as a backward people who were not fit to work on construction sites, which ‘in part stem from the Turksib’s alien milieu for many Kazakhs; railroad building was not much like sheep herding.’¹⁶¹ Although the attitude of Turksib managers and Russian workers toward the native population was persistently colonial, for Kazakhs who chose to work there it was a tool for social mobility, one of what Terry Martin characterizes as ‘affirmative action’ policies of the Soviet Union.¹⁶²

According to Katerina Clark, following the progress which was stated by Marx and Lenin to depend upon electrification, Stalin urged the industrialization of the entire country.¹⁶³ Electricity was a symbol of technological progress. The machine became the symbol of Soviet society which stood for harmony, progress, and control. ‘ Society was a ‘ train ,’ rushing forth into space to shorten the distances in that vast land, to collapse time and advance Soviet

¹⁵⁸ Payne, Matthew J. (2001) “Viktor Turin's Turksib (1929) and Soviet Orientalism,” *Historical Journal of Film, Radio and Television*, 21:1, 39.

¹⁵⁹ Payne, Matthew J. "The Forge of the Kazakh proletariat? The Turksib, Nativization, and Industrialization during Stalin’s First Five-Year Plan,” *A State of Nations: Empire and Nation-Building in the Age of Lenin and Stalin* (2001): 224.

¹⁶⁰ *Ibid.*, 224.

¹⁶¹ *Ibid.*, 229.

¹⁶² Martin, Terry Dean. *The affirmative action empire: nations and nationalism in the Soviet Union, 1923-1939*. Cornell University Press, 2001.

¹⁶³ Clark, Katerina. *The Soviet novel: history as ritual*. Indiana University Press, 2000.

society rapidly over the hundred years it lagged behind the West, so that it could catch up in ‘ten years.’¹⁶⁴

The novel *Óz otyngdy óshirme*¹⁶⁵ (1982) explores the theme of railway construction through the Kazakh steppe and the contributions of Kazakh people in building the railway. As the novel suggests the construction of railway played an important role in the Kazakhs’ identifying themselves as a part of Soviet proletariat. At the initial stage, this new identity and the hard toil of the Kazakh workers was celebrated and glorified. Through focusing upon the Soviet regime’s intention to modernize the Kazakh land, the novel is a criticism of these modernization policies. For Bökei, the train represents the Soviet power as a pretentious system, which justified the existence of existing hierarchical power relations, casting Russians more equal than any other Central Asian nationalities.

The train is a recurrent image, and mostly it signifies the destructive nature of the regime, perceived as something external and an outsider to the Kazakh landscape. At the initial stage there is certainly an elevated and glorified image of the train, which was seen as the promise of modernity. Later this attitude changes into a disbelief and distrust of these ideals.

In *Óz otyngdy óshirme* the narrator, Darkhan, who worked on the railway site for 40 years, contrasts his perception of railway while it was being built and after forty years of its construction. Through this comparison Bökei describes the change of Darkhan’s attitude toward the railway from positive into something destructive. Early modernization policies are seen to have a positive effect for the Kazakh people but later the author criticizes this view.

¹⁶⁴ *ibid.*, 96.

¹⁶⁵ Bökei, Oralkhan. *Shygharmalary*. Vol.1. El-shezhire, 2013.

The novel goes back to the end of the 1920s and the beginning of the 1930s when there were the first steps of building socialism. The author describes this event as the start of building the Soviet proletariat, and the Kazakh working class. The construction of the railway was celebrated. However, thirty years later it is a failed project. The labor of Kazakh workers who toiled on construction site was not acknowledged.

Qūlandy is one of the small stations along the Turksib. When the construction had just started, the Kazakh working class embraced the change. For them the railway was a road to a New World - the promised world of equality and prosperity. The author seems intentionally to emphasize the faith of the Kazakh nation in Soviet power and its idea of modernization. It was the symbol of industrialization. In the eyes of the Kazakh workers, Soviet power stood for the new reality. *‘Būl zhol- bolashaq zholy. Būl zhol – baqyt zholy.* (This road is the road for the future. This road is the road for the happiness.)¹⁶⁶

Portraying Darkhan’s initial perception of the building of the railway seems to intensify what the Soviet regime was thought to be. The railway is romanticized and there is a recurrent image of the dombyra when Darkhan thinks about it: *‘Dala tōsine shirei tartylghan qos rel’s- qazaqy dombyranyng qos ishegi syndy: tarta ber zaman kuin, sherte ber aizyng qanghansha angyratyp, qhūmyryng zhetse. Ār shpal, ār perne syqyldy. Qarangyzshy qandai ūqsastyq. Qazekemning on sausaghy, endi temir zhol boyimen oinaidy; kōr de tūr, ūstinen su tōgilmes zhorghagha mingendei taipangdatar-ai.’* (Two railroads which were lying on the steppe seemed like two strings of Kazakh *dombyra*¹⁶⁷: do not stop playing the *kui*¹⁶⁸ of the modern century until you can. Each of the ties looks like a fret. Look -what a similarity. The ten fingers of the Kazakh now plays on the railway; watch, it would do as fast as riding a

¹⁶⁶ Ibid., 253.

¹⁶⁷ Kazakh traditional musical instrument with two strings.

¹⁶⁸ Melody played on *dombyra*.

horse.)¹⁶⁹ For the author, dombyra seems to hold a special place as a part of national cultural heritage. This projects Bökei's initial belief into the motto 'national in form, socialist in content,' and he later undermines the Janus-facedness of the Soviet power.

Darkhan was even worried that the construction would soon finish and they would be left out. He needed to work on the construction site. The narrator says: *'Turkisib osynshalyq tez bitip qalmai zhalghasa berse ghoi, sheksizdikke sozyla berse ghoi, Darkhan da kökeindegi tausylmas armanynan airylmas edi. Zholdyng bitkeni quanyshy-aq, biraq Darkhansyndy beinetqor zhigitke taghy da sondai aiyانبai kiriser alyp qurylys kerek edi'* (May the Turksib continue till infinity, then only Darkhan's wishes are fulfilled. It is good that the construction of the railway is over, but a hard-working man like Darkhan needed the same construction, to engage himself fully in that.)¹⁷⁰

The narrator's voice seems to coincide with Darkhan's wishes. The narrator says: *'Bül zhol- qazaq zhūmyskerlerining rukhani kúshin salmaqtar synaqshy ispetti edi. Biz sol shaqta qairat tanytqan Darkhan siyakty mungdaghan qarapayim azamattardying aty-zhònin bilmeimiz, äldeqashan ūmytylghan, qara zherding qoinyna kirip zhasyrynghan; bizding biletinimiz-Darkhan siyaqty ūldarymyzdyng Turkisibke shpal bolyp tòselip, keingi ūrpaq ūshin bolashaqqa aparar ūly zhol salyp berip ketkeni ghana- tarikhta Turkisib qalady, Darkhandar qalmaydy'* (This road seemed to test the spirit of Kazakh proletarian. We do not remember thousands of people like Darkhan who toiled there, they are forgotten long ago, they are hidden under the earth; what we know is that our sons like Darkhan lie like a fret and

¹⁶⁹ Bökei, Oralkhan. *Shygharmalary*. Vol.1,253.

¹⁷⁰ *Ibid.*, 290.

that they are the ones who built this road for the future generation. Turksib would remain in history, but not Darkhans.)¹⁷¹

Initially Kazakhs saw the railway as an embodiment of Kazakh spirit, which was elevated through making comparisons between the *dombyra* and the railway. The narrator emphasizes this point by several repetitions. However, later this attitude changes.

Now, when forty years passed the train is a disturbing presence on the Kazakh steppe. The novel opens with sentences ‘*Sakharany dūr silkindirip taghy bir poezd ötti. Sol poezdyng ishinde kimder ketip barady eken...*’ (One more train passed shaking the Sakhara. Who might be going inside this train...)¹⁷²

What is the image of Qūlandy which had to become ‘civilized’ and modernized? ‘*Qūlandy ālemdegi bar zhaṅgalyq, zhaqsylyq ataulyny arqalap tasyr kure zholdyṅ ustinde otyrsa da, oqta-tekte elegizip, āldekimdi kutkendei eleṅdep, ishqūsa kūide zhalghyssyrary da bar edi. Kei kunder Darkhan dāl qazirgidei qashagha sūienip, oṅasha oidyṅ kūzetinde tūrghanda ‘osy shoyin zholdyṅ tamyershysyndai shaghyn auyl- Qūlandy tōrtkūl dūniedegi tolayim zhaqsylyq pen zhamandyqtan qūralaqan qalyq, dūbārā tirshilik keship zhatqan zhoq pa?’–degen azghyryndy pighilgha baryngqyraityn.*’ (Even when Qūlandy was situated on the road which carries all the news and goodness of the world, sometimes it used to feel as if it was left alone. Some days, Darkhan standing as now, leaning on the fence, would ponder whether Qūlandy was living a lost life.)¹⁷³ Qūlandy did not become the place Darkhan thought it would be.

¹⁷¹ *Ibid.*, 311.

¹⁷² *Ibid.*, 11.

¹⁷³ *Ibid.*, 12.

Qūlandy had become a degenerated place. ‘*Temir zhol boyindaghy zhiyrma shaqty uili raz’ezding bolmys tirshiligi, kûn-kôris tûrmysy zhaily eshkim bas qatyryp oilamai, ûstinen zhaily oryn, saluly tōsekte zhatqan kulkitoq zholaushylar anau syrty qotyr-qotyr toqal tam, anau moiny soraighan zhalghyz qūdyq, zhalghyz esek, zhalangayaq, zhalangbas qarala-torala bop topyrlap zhurgen qazaq balasyn kōzge ile bermeushi edi*’ (No one bothered about the life of the twenty-housed station along the railway. They would pass along the station lying on those comfortable beds without noticing the broken houses, with the barefoot Kazakh boys and a single well.)¹⁷⁴

Finally, Darkhan sighs: ‘*Tāngirim-au, qalai ghana shydap kelgem?*’ (Heavens, how have I been tolerating this?)¹⁷⁵ The condition of workers is not improved. On the contrary they live a poor life.

Soviet Urban Modernity

One of the important factors in the development of international relation in the USSR and the merging of all nations under it into one Soviet nation was the process of urbanization. Cities had a specific progressive function in the formation and enhancement of Socialist Soviet society. Cities were the carriers of Marxist-Leninist ideas of civilization and the centers of culture.¹⁷⁶ Cities were the major sites for building a new socialist society, and the transformation of the local population into ‘new Soviet men and women.’ The daily life of the urban population was supposed to be ensured by the modern facilities: education, industrial

¹⁷⁴ Ibid., 17.

¹⁷⁵ Ibid., 17.

¹⁷⁶ O.I.Shkaratan eds., *Etnosotsial’nye problemy goroda*. Moscow, 1986: 5.

working sites, healthcare, migration to urban places. All these urban facilities were eventually meant to produce a Soviet man.

In her article, ‘Soviet and post-Soviet Moscow: literary reality or nightmare?’ Dina Khapaeva talks about the significance of Moscow as the first socialist city to be built and thought to mirror the transformation of the society.¹⁷⁷ According to her, Moscow was not only the center in administrative, financial and cultural respect, but it was also significant in the symbolic sense. It was ‘the place that every socialist city was supposed to emulate, and the city that every citizen was supposed to love and cherish more than his or her own birthplace.’¹⁷⁸ Moscow in all ways was a manifestation of communist ideology and the organization of the city was a justification of Socialist values, through which state propaganda was legitimized. Moscow carried the idea of a special Soviet space. By the 1930s, Moscow was transformed into ‘a (the) model socialist city.’¹⁷⁹

Paul Stronski explores the city of Tashkent which had become the ‘flourishing garden’ of Uzbekistan during Soviet power.¹⁸⁰ ‘Tashkent in official Soviet discourse was becoming the center of Soviet Asia and a symbol of the prosperity, abundance, and progress that the socialist system provided to the region.’¹⁸¹ Under the leadership of the Communist party, Tashkent became a clean city with ‘office workers carrying portfolios’ who walked on paved roads or drove automobiles. It was as modern as any city elsewhere. Thus, its expected transformation was a symbol of the Communist party’s efforts to bring the light to backward

¹⁷⁷ The article appeared in the book edited by Mark Bassin and Catriona Kelly which is called *Soviet and post-Soviet identities* published by Cambridge University Press in 2012.

¹⁷⁸ *Ibid.*, 171.

¹⁷⁹ *Ibid.*, 173.

¹⁸⁰ Stronski, Paul. *Tashkent: forging a Soviet city, 1930–1966*. University of Pittsburgh Press, 2010.

¹⁸¹ *Ibid.*, 2.

Central Asia, and the creation of the new industrialized urban space ‘showcased the ‘liberation’ and ‘prosperity’ of Uzbek people under socialism.’¹⁸² According to Stronski, Soviet urban campaigns were primarily intended to destroy the traditional social relations, thus making it easier for the state to control its citizens. ‘Building a ‘Soviet city’ was not the end goal in itself but the means to change the society it housed.’¹⁸³ Tashkent had become like Moscow- ‘an immensely powerful political, economic, and cultural center that could act as the ‘capital’ for international socialism.’¹⁸⁴

The establishment of these kinds of cities reminds Katerina Clark of Peter the Great’s attempt to Westernize Russia by building a new model city, St. Petersburg.¹⁸⁵ By bringing the ‘city’ to the countryside, the Soviet government hoped to quicken the pace of modernization. ‘There was also planning of small-scale ‘socialist’ or ‘green’ towns or anti-urban settlements. For the urbanists electricity meant , above all, ‘light’ (order, progress, knowledge, technology); for the anti-urbanists it meant , above all, energy – the force that would drive trains at such speeds that the distances between settlements could be broken down and the country deurbanized and decentralized.’¹⁸⁶

In these ways cities were regarded as the major sites for the emergence of new men, and it was an especially important factor in accomplishing the ‘civilizing mission’ in the ‘backward’ nations of Central Asia. Along with the big cities, the Khrushchev era was important for starting to build the socialist towns and villages in abundance. However, what

¹⁸² *Ibid.*, 3.

¹⁸³ *Ibid.*,4.

¹⁸⁴ *Ibid.*,7.

¹⁸⁵ Clark, Katerina. *The Soviet novel*, 95.

¹⁸⁶ *Ibid.*, 96.

can the representations of urban and urban-like places tell us about the attitude of local population toward city life?

In almost all of Bōkei's works, the urban space is represented as having a transformative power over its inhabitants. Their transformative power can be seen in either a negative or positive sense depending on the author's attitude toward the dangers of the city life. As in the official discourse, cities were depicted as having a multi-ethnic population that speaks Russian. To some extent, the author seems to resist urbanization as a corrupt force for local communities, which leads to the conclusion that cities and all the facilities which city offers have depredating influence upon the local people.

In the story '*Qaidasyng qasqa qulynym*' (1972),¹⁸⁷ initially the author glorifies Moscow as a perfect place for everything. People get high quality education there, they have better health facilities. Bokesh, the father of the main protagonist Oral, had a dream to visit Moscow. Oral says: '*Moskva! Men saghan ghashyq edim. Baqytym da, shattyghym da, tipti bolashaghym da saghan taueldi dep estitinmin. Ākem aityp otyratyn: 'Būl elding kōzin ashyp, kōkiregin oiyatqan, zil bolyp basyp zhatqan qaighynyng, qasiretting qara tūmanyn seiltken-Moskva!'- dep.*' (Moscow! I was in love with you. I used to hear that my happiness and joy, and even my future was dependent upon you. My father used to say that it was Moscow which awakened the eye of the mind of this nation, and which dispersed the dark fogs of the despair and unhappiness).¹⁸⁸ In Bōkesh's mind, Moscow is almost personified. When he becomes ill, he is told that the only chance of recovering is if he goes to Moscow and gets treatment there. As he does not have money, Bōkesh and his family could not go to Moscow. However, he is healed by a local traditional healer, who magically prepares a secret medicine

¹⁸⁷ Bōkei, Oralkhan. *Shygharmalary*. Vol.5.El-shezhire,2013.

¹⁸⁸ *Ibid.*, 13.

which cures Bökesh and saves him from death. The healer rewards Bökesh with 20 years of his life and dies himself. '*Äkem Qarzhau zhasap bergen dārini qyryq kün ishkende auruynan qūlan taza aiyqty. Eñg ghazhaby, qyryq künnen song Qarzhau dyñg özi qaitys boldy*' (My father got completely recovered in forty days after taking the medicine which Qarzhau made himself. Miraculously, after forty days Qarzhau himself passed away.)¹⁸⁹ Symbolically, this incident suggests the author's view on the existence of the alternative ways of medicine, which are based on unscientific methods of healing.

Later, when Bökesh's son, Oral goes to Moscow, he finds a contrasting image of Moscow, which was very bright in his imagination for all these years. The author uses the shades of grey and dirt to describe Moscow. Its atmosphere is intimidating. The transport is depicted as a major source of pollution. The author also questions the cleanliness of the city. Certainly, this gloom has a symbolic meaning. Moscow is certainly not the place which he thought to be.

However, Bökesh does not seem to wish to move to the city as he feels wary about the thought that the city derives people from their roots, which he believes to be in the village. '*..myna zhalghyz ūlym men ūshin zhylyna bir ret kelip qaitady Altaigha, äkesin zhanyna köshirip alsa, at izin salmai, zhatbauyr bolyp keter dep zhane sekemdenemin*' (.. my an only son comes to Altai just to visit me once a year. If I move with him to the city, I am scared he would become an alien to this place.) Village is described as a witness of change which people like Oral, who went to the city, bring about, but still are not accepted as a part of the village community.

One of the ways which we can see the descriptions of the cities is in the author's contrast of urban places to rural places. The urban places have an intimidating atmosphere

¹⁸⁹ *ibid.*, 16.

whereas rural places turn out to regenerate the characters who happen to realize the purity of rural places in comparison to the former, which also is experienced by Bökesh.

Oral belittles the urban life in relation to rural life. He could get education while he was in the city. However, now when he walks along the lake, when he sees the beauty of the native land his mind is transformed. He feels different. His mind is cleared from the exhaustion of the city life. ‘Biz *Āulieköldi zhaghalai zhurip arghy betke qūldaghandā, mening oqu mūzhip, aq zhemin shygharyp tastaghan miym zhaṅga bir quatty nūrgha shomylghandai*’ (It was when we started going down the Auliekol, that my brain exhausted from studying seemed to acquire new light.)¹⁹⁰ The author seems to suggest that the education which Oral obtained while he was in the city had failed to transform him. The promise of the city which is manifested in better education is scrutinized as a failed project. Oral says: ‘*Endi mening sanam tughan zherimning agharyp atar tangyndai taza , zharyqtyq Aulieköldei maida ghana erkelei tolqidy*’ (Now my consciousness is clear as the clear dawn of my native place, it flutters as gently as the dear Auliekol).¹⁹¹

Urban life is also depicted as making Oral feel lonely and isolated from people. ‘*Men özimdi āmende zhalghyz sezinetinmin, qaida barsam da, qaida zhurse de bireumin, aitalyq maṅymda byzhynaghan adamdar, biraq tek özim ghana soqaiyp zhuretin sekildimin. Nege? Al qazir muldem basqa...*’ (For all the time until now, I used to feel myself lonely, wherever I go, wherever I am alone, even when I was surrounded by the crowds of people, I felt lonely. Why? But now it is completely different)¹⁹²

¹⁹⁰ Ibid., 27.

¹⁹¹ Ibid., 27.

¹⁹² Ibid., 29.

Russians and Russia

The final destination of all ethnic groups under Soviet power was to drop their ethnic identities. All the major and minor nationalities of the USSR would become one, equal human beings who did not belong to any race, gender and class. However, who would act as a model for them to emulate?

In his paper 'From Savages to Citizens: The Cultural Revolution in the Soviet Far North, 1928-1938,' Yuri Slezkine focuses upon the establishment of Bolshevik power among the indigenous inhabitants of the Arctic and sub-Arctic zones of the Soviet Union, who were designated the 'small peoples of the north.'¹⁹³ He traces the historical background to the treatment and attitude of the Russian government toward these people and comes to the conclusion that there was a persistent depiction of different communities who resided in these areas as backward and savage. From the Bolsheviks claim for them to be at the stage of primitive communism, with Stalin's second revolution of 1928, the 'small peoples of the north' had to be civilized at once.¹⁹⁴

The process of Sovietization meant Russification. Russians acted as models of emulation. Russian content was privileged over everything non-Russian. The 'backwardness' would have been conquered when Russians made new people in their own image.¹⁹⁵

As I discussed in my previous chapter, in her works Adrienne Lynn Edgar claims the Soviet state's policies were Russo-centric. Soviet people would become one nation with a shared Soviet history and Russian language as a lingua franca. The idea of Russians being

¹⁹³ Slezkine, Yuri. "From savages to citizens: The cultural revolution in the Soviet Far North, 1928-1938." *Slavic Review* 51.1 (1992): 52-76.

¹⁹⁴ *Ibid.*, 57.

¹⁹⁵ *Ibid.*, 76.

‘elder brothers’ generated conflict that some people in the non-Russian republics would reject ‘drawing together’ and ‘merging’ as a form of Russification.¹⁹⁶

In his short story, *Qasqyr ūlyghan tūnde*, (The night when the wolf howled) published in 1977 in the literary magazine “*Mädeniet zhāne Tūrmys*” (Culture and Byt), the author draws parallels between villages with Russian and Kazakh populations. In his obituary, five months after Bökei’s death, Zăkir Asabayev, the colleague of the editor of “*Mädeniet and Tūrmys*” remembers Bökei’s close relationship with the editor Ōtebai Kanakhin. Kanakhin by that time was the chief editor of the magazine and prior to that he was the head of the Ideological management department of Central Committee.¹⁹⁷ During one of his visits, Oralkhan brings the long story *Qasqyr ūlyghan tūnde*. What is interesting though is that the story was not checked as Bökei’s intimate relation with the chief editor, the work was sent to production within ten days. Each publication of the magazine took four to five months to get prepared. So, when the magazine came out into public, Bökei expressed his gratitude toward the magazine editorial board for their brave action and worried about the consequences of its publication. Asabaev remembers that one of the most prominent Kazakh writer, whose name he did not indicate, called and told that if it had been the year of 1937, the whole editorial would have been persecuted. What we know from this, is that the story generated huge debate among the readers and it also sheds light on the prohibited topics being circulated among the writers and readers. Also, this case is also significant as because of his personal ties with the chief editor, his works could be published. Asabaev says that the whole editorial did not expect this much reaction from readers.

¹⁹⁶ Edgar, Adrienne. ‘Marriage, modernity, and the ‘friendship of nations’: interethnic intimacy in post-war Central Asia in comparative perspective.’ *Central Asian Survey*, 26:4, 09.05.2008: 586.

¹⁹⁷ Asabaev, Zăkir. ‘Eske alu.’ *Parasat*. 9 (423), 1993:9.

The story is told through the first person narrative of a journalist, who by the order of his director, goes to the village of 'Novostroika' (New construction) which was the perfect model of a Soviet village. The journalist had to write an article about this modernized village which very much resembled city life. On the bus, he meets a girl who lives in a village neighboring of Novostroika. The village with Kazakh population did not have the same technologically advanced facilities.

The author delineates the discrepancy between modernization policies depending on the nationality of the people who live in those places. There was regular transport to Novostroika, whereas the Kazakh village had none. Because of this, a girl who got off on the road was eaten up by wolves. Novostroika had electricity. This town had library, theater, and school. People here seemed more joyous and happy. However, the situation for the Kazakh village was different.

The author seems to express his anxiety over the corrupted nature of a Soviet regime which discriminates against Kazakh society and gives a privileged position to the Russian population. The girl who was eaten up by the wolves is the victim of a Soviet policy which treats people unequally.

The same process of privileging Russian workers is seen during railway construction. Darkhan (*Óz otyngdy óshirme*) is one among many who toiled for nearly 40 years on construction site. However, he is not rewarded for his job, while Sobolev who was the administrator and who did not have such hard work as Darkhan, is given a medal. Although the Kazakh proletariat was celebrating the Turksib railway's construction as an achievement, it was not perceived that way from the center. The voice of the workers who built the railway is silenced and their work is marginalized. Thus the author questions whether the workers were rewarded on the basis of their nationality or the honest work which they believed to be

the quality of real Soviet man. Oralkhan Bōkei seems to react to the portrayals of the Kazakh workers who were depicted as a passive background for the active Russian modernization campaign in the documentary shot by Victor Turin.¹⁹⁸

In ‘*Qaidasyng qasqa qūlynym*’, the author portrays the superficiality of relationships between Kazakhs and Russians. For Bōkei, it is impossible to create an international community, because of the fact that there would always be the memory of the past. The situation is elaborated between Matvei and Bōkesh. Although Matvei lived among Kazakhs for 50 years he is not able to understand them. He also speaks Kazakh, but he is not able to grasp the essence of Kazakh language. We sense the presence of unresolved tension between the Russian and Kazakh characters.

Matvei is the only one who can remove the antlers of the Maral deer, the symbol of the Altai. The removal of antlers was significant, as drinking the fresh blood from the antlers was seen as a source of valuable vitamins (pantocrine) for health. When he comes and tries to greet Bōkesh by shaking his hands, Bōkesh says: ‘*kerzhaq, seniḡ*’ *qolyḡ āmānda qan sasiḡ*’ (Kerzhakh, your hands already smell of blood.)¹⁹⁹

The conversation proceeds between them further:

- *Ilip- shaluyḡdy qoimaisyḡ-au, tamyр. Elu zhyl bir zherdiḡ suyn iship, bir sherdiḡ dāmin tatyp ghūmyr keshsek te, aḡdysuymyz ben arbasuymyz qashan qalar eken,- dedi taza qazaq tilinde. Ākem kengkildep kuldi.*

¹⁹⁸ Payne, Matthew J. (2001) “Viktor Turin's Turksib (1929) and Soviet Orientalism,” *Historical Journal of Film, Radio and Television*, 21:1, 37-62.

¹⁹⁹ Bōkei, Oralkhan. *Shygharmalary*. Vol. 5, 32.

- *Oi, Matvei-ai, ózing de balasyng-au, zhoqtan ózgege búrtya qalasyng. Ózing aitqandaiyn elu zhyl osy Altaidan ot ottap, su ishseng de qazaqta qalzhyng degenning bolatynyn úqpai-aq kelesing, bätir,- dep, ózi de kerbūghygha qarai zhüre berdi.*

(You do not stop mocking me, tamyr. Even after we have shared the water and grain of the same land for fifty years, when do we stop scheming and hexing each other!?- he told in pure Kazakh language. My father laughed out loudly.)

(Oi, Matvei, you are like a child, you become swelled up so easily. As you have told, after having lived in Altai for fifty years you still do not understand the jokes of Kazakh people, hero,- said father, going toward the deer.)²⁰⁰ Thus Oralkhan Bokei demythologizes the idea of nations merging into one and the significance of history in repeating itself.

In the novella *Zhetim Bota*, (An Orphan Colt) (1982) the well-reputed architect, who had built the city of Aqtau, comes back to the city in a search of inspiration. He feels something lacking in his creativity. The building and the architectural structures he had designed seem to have no attraction and they do not give him a sense of accomplishment for. Finally, after encountering an orphan girl who always goes with a camel, he starts to see the world through the national prism. As an architect, he starts seeing the creativity in discovering the national culture and traditions. The author seems to feel an enduring trauma and guilt for leaving behind the village which stands for his roots.

Conclusion

In his book, Yitzhak Brudny points out the necessity of differentiating the types of nationalisms.²⁰¹ In the context of post-Stalin Kazakh society, one can see the existence of

²⁰⁰ *Ibid.*, 34.

²⁰¹ Brudny, Yitzhak. *Reinventing Russia*.

official nationalism under Kunaev which did not go beyond the expectations set from the center. However, much it might have liberated local Soviet officials in fostering national interests, it does not seem to win the support of native intellectuals like Oralkhan Bòkei. In contrast to this type of nationalism, Bòkei actively calls the necessity of nation-shaping nationalism, which would give equal privileges to Kazakhs who live in the villages.

As we have seen in the first section of this chapter, for Bòkei, Soviet anti-religious propaganda did not only instill fear in people, but also uprooted the worldview of people through which they see themselves and acknowledge their roots. The AIQAI which symbolizes the Soviet ideological propaganda seems to follow people everywhere. ANAU refers to the state bureaucracy who exercise power over village people. It is not only Russians, but also local Soviet officials who are also ANAU.

Train, which symbolized Soviet modernizing projects failed to fulfil its promises. It is a disturbing presence on the Kazakh steppe. The promised modernity destroyed the usual habitat of Kazakh society. The rushing modernity broke the continuity of Kazakh values and Kazakh traditions. Bòkei calls for the raising of independent national consciousness which would again go back to the roots, to the pre-Soviet Kazakh way of life in order to uplift the moral consciousness of Kazakh society.

The Soviet city, whether it is Moscow, Tashkent, Almaty or Aqtau, is a dangerous place for the preservation Kazakh purity. The author seems to feel guilty for leaving behind the village which was the source of his identity. The urban places have become Russo-centric, and for the author it is painful to give the privilege to one nation while ignoring the needs and values of the other.

Chapter III

Nature in Oralkhan Bôkei's works

This chapter explores the representation of nature in Oralkhan Bôkei's works. It analyzes nature in these texts from the perspective of postcolonial environmentalism. It examines the Soviet Stalinist discourses on nature in colonial terms and tries to establish connections between Russian village prose writers' portrayal of nature and man's relationship and the depiction of man-nature relationships in Bôkei's narratives. It constructs the counter-narrative to dominant discourse about the nature with concern to the local community. I will seek answers for these questions: How does Bôkei describe the inner and outer realms nature in their interaction with human beings? What do different animals, rivers, and mountains stand for in Kazakh understanding? Why is this relationship important?

The Postcolonial understanding of the Soviet discourse on nature

Postcolonial Environmentalism is a huge movement within the field of postcolonial studies. It was and still is a crucial movement in analyzing the impact of European colonies on local environments.

As Alfred Crosby argues, territorial conquest and dominance not only led to disease, the destruction of native flora and fauna, deforestation and land clearing, but it also changed the way people see and understand the nature and environment around them.²⁰² Although Richard Grove agrees with him on the damages brought by colonial powers, he claims that 'it indeed should be acknowledged that the environmental thinking and planning in these regions

²⁰² Crosby, A. *Ecological Imperialism: The Biological expansion of Europe 900-1900*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1986.

became possible owing to colonial administration and European scientists and naturalists.²⁰³ For Australian ecofeminist Val Plumwood, the consequences of colonialism cannot be measured only by material effects, but also by the transformation of indigenous ontologies and epistemologies, redefining for much of the world the very nature of human beings and land, flora and fauna.²⁰⁴ Progress is an ultimate overcoming, or control of, this ‘barbarian’ non-human or semi-human sphere by the rational sphere of European culture and ‘modernity’. This rationalist ideology of European colonization was applied not only to indigenous people, but also to their land, ‘which was frequently portrayed in colonial justifications as unused, underused, or empty- areas of rational deficit.’²⁰⁵

The same attitude can be observed from the view of the Russian empire toward the Kazakh Steppe and the people who inhabit it. Ian Campbell explores the Shcherbina Expedition of 1896-1903 into Kazakh Steppe, which aimed at collecting necessary knowledge about Kazakh nomads’ land requirements and preparing statistical data on the ‘surplus’ land available for Russian settlers, which was one of the expansionist policies of the Russian empire.²⁰⁶ The research was conducted in twelve *uezds* (counties) of Semipalatinsk, Akmolinsk, and Turgai *oblasts* (provinces). It was assumed that sedentary agriculture stood unambiguously above mobile pastoralism in the hierarchy of world civilizations, and sedentarizing was important in the Russian empire’s fundamental goal of creating a settler colony. In Russia’s imperial mind, turning Kazakhs into a sedentary agricultural society from mobile pastoralism was seen ‘as a move from inefficiency to rationality, filth to hygiene, and

²⁰³ Grove, R. *Green Imperialism: Colonial Expansion, Tropical Islands Edens And the Origins of Environmentalism*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1995.

²⁰⁴ Plumwood, Val. "Decolonising Relationships with Nature." *The post-colonial studies reader*. Psychology Press, 1995: 503.

²⁰⁵ *Ibid.*, 503.

²⁰⁶ Ian W. Campbell (2011) "Settlement promoted, settlement contested: the Shcherbina Expedition of 1896–1903," *Central Asian Survey*, 30:3-4, 423-436.

uncertain poverty to stable prosperity.’²⁰⁷ Consequently, Kazakh nomads who lived in this steppe were seen a ‘backward’ mass of people who needed more cultured forms of living. As a result of the expedition, there emerged different attitudes toward the efficiency and necessity of sedentarizing Kazakhs. Shcherbina himself concluded that not always and not everywhere was sedentary agriculture a superior form of economic organization, and that the attempts to turn the Kazakh Steppe into sedentary agricultural land would have disastrous consequences.

As the case above shows, human attitudes toward nature are structured from the perspective of the masculinist, ‘reason-centered culture’ that once helped secure and sustain European imperial dominance. Thus, the ideology of the colonization of nature becomes anthropocentric, where the native adopts the rationale of the colonizer. From an anthropocentric standpoint, nature is a hyper-separate lower order, lacking any real continuity with the human.²⁰⁸ Nature is represented as inessential and widely denied as the unconsidered background to technological society.²⁰⁹

American environmental philosopher Deane Curtin gives us the concept of environmental racism which defines the connection between the race and the environment so that the oppression of one is connected to, and supported by the oppression of the other.²¹⁰ Plumwood suggests that racism, sexism and colonialism build on each other based on ‘hegemonic centrism’, consequently directed at exploiting nature while ‘minimising non-human claims to a [shared] earth.’²¹¹ Thus she suggests the inseparability of anthropocentrism

²⁰⁷ *Ibid.*, 426.

²⁰⁸ Plumwood, Val. *Decolonizing*, 504.

²⁰⁹ *Ibid.*, 505.

²¹⁰ Curtin, Deane. *Environmental ethics for a postcolonial world*. Rowman & littlefield publishers, 2005:145.

²¹¹ Plumwood, Val. *Decolonizing*, 504.

and Eurocentrism which justify the forms of European colonialism that see 'indigenous cultures as 'primitive', less rational, and closer to children, animals and nature.'²¹²

For Robert Welling Smurr, Soviet official ideology very much resembled this European Enlightenment. Ushering in the Age of Reason, with its direct challenge to religious dogmatism, the European Enlightenment placed faith in the capacity of the rational human mind to order and conquer all - suggesting a superiority of mind over matter and of humans over 'non-rational' nature.²¹³

Comparing environmental movements in the USSR with those in the USA, Douglas Weiner seems to be justified in asserting that the USSR gave a low priority to the natural environment, despite its centrally planned economy and proclaimed commitment to community well-being.²¹⁴ For example, in the context of Kazakhstan one can refer to the nuclear testing near Semipalatinsk and the drying up of the Aral Sea.²¹⁵ According to Weiner, USSR's approach to nature was scientific. As Lenin remarked, the workings of nature would be less efficient than human technology on the road to becoming an industrial society: 'To this end science had to be enlisted as an ally in economic planning: pure science to expand our knowledge into enhanced productive capacity.'²¹⁶

According to Bernd Richter, the party was also the mediator between environment and society and it legitimized the technocratic view of nature 'as little more than a toy of the

²¹² Ibid., 505.

²¹³ Smurr, Robert. "Perceptions of Nature, Expressions of Nation: An Environmental History of Estonia." Phd diss. University of Washington, 2002:3.

²¹⁴ Weiner, Douglas R. *Models of nature: ecology, conservation, and cultural revolution in Soviet Russia*. University of Pittsburgh Press, 2000.

²¹⁵ Edward A. D. Schatz (1999) Notes on the 'Dog that didn't Bark': ecointernationalism in late Soviet Kazakstan, *Ethnic and Racial Studies*, 22:1, 136-161, DOI:10.1080/014198799329620

²¹⁶ Ibid..23.

engineering profession.²¹⁷ All plans and programs against nature justified themselves by claiming that the old regime had left things in a state of rural primitiveness.

As Bolotova notes ‘the hegemonic discourse defined nature as meaningless unless it was exploited for human needs.’²¹⁸ Nature had to be exploited for the sake of building industrial centers. Exploration and exploitation of nature were expected to serve the human purposes. She remarks as best example of altering nature and taming the harsh winds from the deserts of Central Asia the ‘Stalin Plan for the Transformation of Nature or Great Plan for the Transformation of Nature from October 24, 1948.’²¹⁹ After the Second World War, notions of ‘war with nature’ and the ‘conquest of nature’ became more prominent.²²⁰ Bolotova notes the homogenous and repetitive rhetoric of conquering nature in newspaper articles. ‘According to the hegemonic discourse, nature does not make any sense by itself: it is devoid of any inherent rationality, let alone intrinsic value.’ Nature in these narratives is depicted as a dark and senseless entity. Nature had to be awakened from its long sleep.²²¹ For example, in Viktor Turin’s documentary film about the construction of Turksib gives the clear perception of Central Asia as a dark part of the world which is in a deep sleep and therefore lagging behind.²²²

What is important is the fact that along with training and teaching people what and how to be a proper Soviet man, literature’s role was significant in shaping the relationship

²¹⁷ Bernd Stevens Richter. “Nature Mastered by Man: Ideology and Water in the Soviet Union.” *Environment and History*, Vol.3, № 1 (February 1997):80.

²¹⁸ Bolotova, A. “Colonization of Nature in the Soviet Union. State Ideology, Public Discourse, and the Experience of Geologists.” *Historical Social Research*, Vol.29, 2004: 104.

²¹⁹ *Ibid.*, 109.

²²⁰ As a matter of fact, the ideas of mastering and reconstructing nature dominated in Soviet literature until the 1960s and 1970s, when the political ‘thaw’ allowed critical voices to come forward.

²²¹ *Ibid.*, 112.

²²² Matthew J. Payne (2001) “Viktor Turin's *Turksib* (1929) and Soviet Orientalism,” *Historical Journal of Film, Radio and Television*, 21:1.

between man and nature. Before the 1950s, literature tried to depict nature as a spontaneous being which should be mastered. Clark notes the ambiguous position of Soviet writers toward nature in the 1930s and 1940s. However, during the post-war era literature offered different dimensions of interaction with the natural environment. One of the dimensions was portrayed in the village prose. In contrast to urban places which represented the achievements of Soviet modernization and industrialization, villages stood for the purity of human soul, and for lost moral values of pre-revolutionary Russian society. Nature was portrayed as a savior of Russian soul. Peasants who lived in the villages came to be seen as the core of Russian nation. Their lives were determined by the changes in the nature. Their characters were built in relation to the land on which they toil and with animals they work with, which was perceived as something backward before the 1950s. Nature is also portrayed as a purifier of human soul.

For Clark, the literature of the fifties sought a regeneration and wanted to revive the old rural Russia. She says:

‘By the late fifties, writers were feeling increasingly less constrained to transplant their jaded urban types into a kolkhoz or construction site in order to restore them. A vogue developed for wild, remote settings, untouched by most aspects of twentieth century life. The hero could, as in Nagibin's tales, be on a hunting expedition, or he could, as in many short stories by Kazakov, go to the wilderness on vacation or for a quiet sojourn. Once there, he would come into contact with essences both wild and pure.’²²³

The Russian village acquired a new meaning as a pure, beautiful, and uncorrupted space which was unlike the city. She calls village prose writers ‘lobbyists for environmental

²²³ Clark, K. *Soviet Novel*, 242.

control', who attempted to restore the ecological balance of Russian society through ameliorating the conditions of rural folk.²²⁴

According to Geoffrey Hosking, in fiction written before the death of Stalin, the peasants were portrayed as a backward and anonymous mass, who are certainly not the 'bearers of a way of life worth preserving for what it could contribute to the modern world.' They were the population which had to be modernized.²²⁵ However, this trend starts changing during post-Soviet era. Having analyzed Solzhenitsyn's *Matryona's House*, Hosking arrives at the conclusion that the moral values which he connects with the village 'seem to grow out of the peasant's close experience with the soil, of plants and animals, and of the seasons.'²²⁶

Village prose writers were diverse in their attitudes toward Soviet Industrial modernity and its depiction in their literary texts. Brudny discusses this diversity among village prose writers and categorizes them on the basis of their nationalist ideology. According to him, the 1960s and 1970s witnessed the rise of conservative nationalists who saw Russia's national soul in the Russian village. Along with objecting to industrial modernity, the Soviet state itself was critiqued as a colonial power which based its modernizing projects in the same pattern as Europeans. In this context, Bókei's works can be analyzed through various types of nationalist lense: he sometimes seems to strongly oppose industrialization and modernization whereas the late texts reveal him even more radical eco-nationalist.

²²⁴ Ibid., 249-250.

²²⁵ Hosking, G. "The Russian Peasant Rediscovered: "Village Prose" of the 1960s." *Slavic Review*, Vol.32. 4 (December, 1973):707.

²²⁶ Ibid., 712.

Having set his stories in the villages of the Altai region, Oralkhan Bòkei returns to tell the story of his fellow villagers again and again in all his works. For me, Bòkei's treatment of nature very much resembles the above-mentioned writers' works discussed by Clark, Hosking and Parthe, which sharply diverge from the Stalinist discourse on nature.

In Bòkei's understanding, the relationship between man and nature acquires distinct meaning in connection to the space where the stories are set. Bòkei seems to relate the rural setting as an inner space of Kazakh society, whereas the nature outside of the rural setting belongs to the realm of outer circle. The village life embodies the traditional lifestyle of its inhabitants which is closely connected with the soil or animals. Some animals were portrayed to be a witness of existence of Kazakh society therefore sacred in preserving the memory of the past. Along with that, there is an outer space which extends beyond the village. It can be wilderness, forests and wild animals. This wild nature is glorified by the author. It is sublime, and has its own life beyond the human life. Human beings are just a part of the bigger nature. The portrayal of both inner and outer spaces of the nature to be destroyed suggests Bòkei's concern about the environmental pollution and degradation which was brought by the various Soviet modernizing projects as well as people's changed attitude to exploit natural resources. The question of environmental question acquires the central concern of Bòkei's works because nature be it inner or outer circles as they both belong to the national territory.

Inner Circle: The Sacred Nature

In Bòkei's stories, the inner realm of nature is connected specifically with the rural setting, in which village person is dependent upon the ways in which he interacts with the animals. The animals or rivers in the rural setting are closely connected with the traditional lifestyle which seems to be understood as hereditary for Bòkei. However, contemporary

ecological degradation disrupts that relationship and endangers the existence of traditions and Kazakh cultural values.

‘*Bura*’ (Camel) which was published in 1968, tells the story of a camel which found the village he had stayed in for a long time to be no longer tolerable. The story is narrated from the perspective of an omniscient third person narrator, who seems to deeply understand the camel’s sorrow. Through portraying and contrasting two forms of life in the past and present, from the memory of the camel, the author laments the loss of Kazakh moral values which he primarily sees in the relationship between Kazakh society and the camel. Kazakh man, his character and his livelihood were dependent upon the camel. What is at the root of this decay is the Soviet industrialization projects.

From the outset of the story, the author creates an atmosphere of grief and melancholy which is pervading the camel’s mood. The village from where he is escaping is called the village of Qazaqbai, which symbolically represents Kazakh society. ‘*Bura Qazaqbai auylyn talaq tastap, qashyp shyqty.*’ (Bura renounced the village of Qazaqbai by escaping from it).²²⁷ He was one of the last camels left in this village. He was an only and lonely camel in Qazaqbai, and belonged to Ābish, who was a camel breeder and worked for the kolkhoz. However, his loneliness is not the cause of his escape from the village, rather the intolerable behavior of the people made him leave this place: ‘*Bura ‘aghaiyndarynan’ aiirylyp dumandy shaqtaryn tolastatqanymen, ne zhūlaghan, ne bozdaghan emes.* (Although Bura had lost his joyous days when he lost his ‘siblings’ (his ‘people’), he had never cried and lamented over his loss)²²⁸ The village which once seemed for him as a paradise is no longer a place of inhabitation: ‘*Ol bül auyldai zhanatty zherdi dūniening qai-qai tūkpīrinen de taba*

²²⁷ Bōkei, O. *Shygharmalary*. Vol.4, 2013: 190.

²²⁸ *ibid.*, 190.

almaq emes. (He cannot find the heavenly place like this village from any corner of the world.)²²⁹ Bura longs for the past which is a source of joy and happiness. As was typical of Russian village prose writers, Bókei looks at the past as a source of people's identity. This identity seems to be linked with the camel, which somehow symbolizes the Kazakh soul.²³⁰ The author alludes to historical moments when Kazakhs and camels shared the same fierce fate because of Zhungar invasions.

What is the cause of misery for the camel which made him abandon his 'native' place? As we clearly see, the camel has lost its significance in Kazakh society because of industrialization projects. This is represented in the construction of railway, when a lot of camels were taken to build the railway. The 'siblings' of Bura were the ones who took the hardships of building this long railway although their contribution was left unacknowledged. Bura was the only camel which survived as he was a new-born at that time. However, he is not protected from the harm of industrial society. Finally, he is killed hit by a train.

Another factor which made the camel's life miserable is the society itself which became very dismissive in their relationship with camels. Ābish urges the Sovkhoz chairman to look for his camel and to give a horse to him in order to find Bura. His request was left unanswered. Through this, the author gives a picture of Kazakh society which had lost its 'traditional' way of understanding the camel and its relationship with man.

If this story is analyzed from a postcolonial perspective along the lines of Crosby's argument, Bókei seems to justify the point that the Soviet industrialization and modernization-which he perceives to jeopardize nature's role in human life, destroys not only the flora and fauna of the region, but also changes the way people see and understand the

²²⁹ *Ibid.*, 191.

²³⁰ Chyngys Aitmatov also depicts the camel as a source of Kazakh identity.

nature and environment around them. For him, in the Kazakh understanding camels are not only resources utilized like machines. The camel is an integral part of Kazakh identity which Bökei links with the nomadic way of life of Kazakh people in the past which had been lost with the death of the camel. Moreover, the Soviet project of industrialization disrupts the meaning of nature and relationship with nature in Kazakh society. Therefore, people become less caring for the conservation of nature as a society, where only one person like Äbish still preserve deep bonds with the camel.

Outer circle: The Sublime Nature

If nature in the inner circle of the Kazakh society is linked to the traditional lifestyle and therefore sacred to keeping the national memory alive, then outer circle acts as a sublime and mysterious force, in which presence human being acquires freedom and gets purified.

One of the brightest examples of sublime nature in Bökei's works is rendered through an image of a deer. Deers of different kinds are of specific interest for Bökei. The first of his works to discuss about the deers is the short story '*Kerbūghy*,' which was published in 1972 in "*Zhūldyz*." Deers have their organization and social structure in their community. The individualism of deer seems to be highly appreciated by the author. They are of more superior order than that of human beings who are jeopardizing their life. Bökei is worried about the extinction of deers which became a usual practice used for human purposes. The story tells about the old deer Kerbughy, through that depicting him as a representative of the wild nature which is not controlled by men, but affected by men's actions for their personal purposes.

For him, there is no other evil and cruel creature more than human being. Men disrupted their peaceful life in the mountains and they are the ones who take away the most

beautiful things they have, their antlers. The author depicts the deer to be the part of nature, from whom humans can learn a lot.

Another symbol is a forest. In his novella *Qar Qyzy* (The Snow-girl) which was written and published in 1978, Bökei portrays the degradation of forest life. Set in the Altai region of the 1970s, the story blends the myth about the snow-girl, and the journey of three young men who set off to rescue their co-farmers who were left under the snow. On their way to their destination, they meet an old man, Qongqai. Qongqai is a negative character, who lived alone and isolated for forty years in the forest. However, he exploits all the treasures of the forest and sells them to people who live in the cities and works in high official positions.

In contrast to him, the protagonist of the novella *Nurzhan*, leaves his work in kolkhoz in order to fight with Qongqai who jeopardizes the national treasure. For him, forest is a way of understanding the mysteriousness of life. Forest is a place which gives answers for his many questions and where he meets his lover.

The character of Yerik in *Atau-Kere* (1989) stands for the ambitions of the modern society too. Yerik, who is racially mixed, jeopardizes the natural resources which Bökei sees as national and profits from it a lot. There is a scene when he kills two bears in order to give his Russian friend so that his friend can put it as a rug on the floor of his living room. The American-European hybrid bee is an embodiment of Yerik himself and his being meagre money minded capitalist. In contrast to Yerik, other three characters, Taghan, *Shal* and Aina, whom I see as mouthpiece of the author, act as defenders of nature and environment. For Taghan, who returned from the city, and found his long lost Kazakh identity, the nature acts as a purifier. The author seems to state his position clearly when he calls Taghan *Qara Bura* or Black camel.

Through portraying different modes of exploiting the natural resources in Kazakhstan, the author seems to highlight the bigger issues existing there. For example, the hunter *shal* (Atau-Kere) goes far away into the mountains to live with his two children. The reason of his escape from the city of Semey, where he lived before, is the fatal consequences of nuclear testing in that region. Although Bokei does not explicitly and elaborately talk about the damages of nuclear testing, I think, he does not see any difference in any kind of exploitation of nature and natural resources. Be it the flora and fauna, or inner or outer circles of human interaction with nature in Kazakh society, primarily he understands the exploitation in terms of national territory. For him, there is no such thing as more or less exploited. There are different kinds of environmental crisis and what he discusses in his literary creations shed light on the state of Altai region which he knows best.

Man Machine vs Man Deer

The previous story from the 1960s portrays the moral and environmental decay as a consequence of Soviet modernizing industrial projects like railway construction with which Bökei alludes to the building of Turksib railroad. In the novella *Mūztau* (Glacial Mountain) subtitled as *The Last Fairy-tale* and written in 1975, the author portrays the dilemma of a young man called Aqtan whose inner self is divided into two: his animal/hunter/spontaneous self and his Aqtan-human/rational self. In this story Bokei talks about the two concepts which daunt him. He asks: who to be? The *kisi-māshin* (man-machine) (*homo machinis*) or *kisikiik* (man-deer)?

The novella *Mūztau* is his literary work which made his name famous, and he was recognized by many as a ‘talented writer.’²³¹ It is set in the village of Arshaly, which is located on the border with Russia. It tells the story of an old man Asan, who has been dead for a long time now, from the memory of a young man Aqtan, who decided to stay in the village when everyone else left it. Aqtan is 30 years old. There are two inner sides of Aqtan, which fight with each other: one is Aqtan and the other is a hunter. One is a man-machine and the other is a man-deer.

The novella starts by describing the village where fifty nine houses were left but only one house is still lighting a stove. It seemed as if the village is asleep. The narrator says: ‘*Ol ras ta, ötirigi- auyıl üiqyda emes, köship ketken ortalyqta, tütün shyqqan mürzha Arshalynyng ghana emes, mūqym orman-toghaidyng kûzetshisine qalghan.*’ (It is also true, but the lie is that the village is not in a sleep, they shifted from the village to the center, the house from which chimney the smoke is coming had become the guard of not only Arshaly, but also of the whole forest)²³² Here Aqtan lives with his deaf and dumb mother. All the inhabitants of the village left it because of the centralization of all auls into one sovkhov. The doors of the abandoned houses were locked with crossed woods. His inner conflict erupts when he struggles with the necessity of shifting to the place to which everyone had moved by then.

The Sovkhov where everyone lives is a place of developed and modern technology whereas Arshaly is a remote village located in the foot of the mountain. Aqtan sees village people as corrupted Kazakhs who have forgotten their native place. The author juxtaposes the lives of Aqtan and one of his fellow villagers. Although Aqtan lives without any facilities of

²³¹ Baltileuova, G.A. “Oralkhan Bökeiding romandary turaly.” *Vestnik KazNU*, 2:92, 2006.

²³² *Ibid.*, 665.

novel life, his life is not diminished nor is it inferior. In contrast to people like himself, Aqtan calls other kind of people as man-machine.

Another name given for Aqtan is *Āng* (Animal). One of his friends says: *‘Sen adam emes, āng sekildising; zhūris-tūrysyng, qylyghyng, tipti qazirgi qangghybas tirliging de. Oilanatyn, ot tūtetip, ortalyqqa kōship keletin uaqyt jetti emes pe?’* (You do not look like a human being, you are like an animal; you character and behavior, even you wandering lifestyle. Don’t you think that time has come to think, to build a family and move to the center?)²³³ The animal-like character of Aqtan gives us perspective to see how the division of human and non-human works in the same way as civilized and backward. His life resembled the life of the deer, animals and rivers.

In contrast to European colonial rhetoric which portrayed natives to be ‘savage, cruel and violent’ as animals, in Bökei’s understanding the animal side of the human is associated with emotional growth of the person. For Aqtan, accepting oneself as a part of nature is a way to learn to feel. He thinks *‘Qazir biz balalardy bilimge ūiretemiz, biraq tabighatty sezinuge ūiretpeimiz. Sondyqtan oi-ōrisi ōsip, sezim-tuisigi byqsyp bara zhatyr; sondyqtan da qatal, aiyashylyq sezimnen zhūrdai.’* (Now we educate our children, but do not teach them to feel the nature. Because of that they are intellectually developed, but emotionally not, because of that they are cruel, devoid of any feeling of compassion)²³⁴ Being in the nature is being emotional or more sensitive. Nature teaches the innocence and the purity of human soul. The hunter in him says: *‘Men āzir bilimimdi emes, sezimimdi tārbieleu saparyndamyn’.* (Now I am in the journey of training my emotions, not my knowledge)²³⁵ The root of this emotionally

²³³ Ibid., 691.

²³⁴ Ibid., 695-696.

²³⁵ Ibid., 697.

backward and cruel society is a technologically developed Soviet lifestyle which he associates with the center and with the city.

The one thing which bothers him is the tales of *Asan shal*, who used to tell many stories, myths and fairy tales about the past of the village. For Aqtan, *Asan shal* was the last tale teller who used to tell beautiful lies. Aqtan finally comes to the decision that he would also be the last tale teller, because he chose to be a man-deer not man-machine. Other people who forgot their past still see it as a lie. For Aqtan, becoming a man-deer is finding connection with his inner self which had been forgotten.

As Plumswood noted, the consequences of colonialism cannot be measured only by material effects, but also by the transformation of very nature of human being and land, flora and fauna. Soviet modernity requires and forces the indigenous population to be a progressive man, who is rational and who is the conqueror of nature. Plumswood says: 'Progress is the progressive overcoming, or control of, this 'barbarian' non-human or semi-human sphere by the rational sphere of European culture and 'modernity'.' However, as Bòkei's narrative suggests, man is not a master who looks upon the nature, but he is only small part of it. The man-machine, who is a modernized man, had lost his touch with nature. Therefore, he is emotionally retarded. Thus, in Bòkei's understanding, the mystic, superstitious figures like *Asan shal* and Aqtan are real characters. For him, it is the way through which Kazakh society established its connection with nature and natural world.

Conclusion

This chapter looked at the ways in which Soviet Stalinist discourse on nature can be analyzed from a perspective of postcolonial environmentalism. As from the viewpoint of various environmental theorists, we can conclude that the interaction with nature is culture-

specific. European imperial policies justified their ‘noble’ intentions claiming that ‘backward’ societies also had the ‘backward’ attitude to nature and environment. In the context of the Soviet scientific attitude toward nature one can assume the same tendencies to induce the human-centered view of nature on different populations of USSR. This ‘civilized’ attitude, as Bökei suggests, had been successful enough in destroying the ‘native’ ways of interacting with nature thus transforming the very basic episteme and ontology of Kazakh way of seeing nature.

Bökei divides the natural world in Kazakh understanding into two spheres: inner and outer. The inner circle seems to highlight the significance of some animals and places in the preservation of national history and national culture. The outer circle is an abode of sublime and freedom. However, the endangering of both these circles makes the author assert the assumption that nature and nation are interlinked. Environmental degradation of Altai is of direct concern to the lives of people who live there, and this is the thing which is being neglected by not only Soviet power which he sees as primarily Russian, but by local political and national elites.

First of all, as village prose writers, he seems to find the Soviet modernizing projects to have harmful effects on the rural places. Importantly, the life of village people who have close interaction with nature and natural world suffer the most. Secondly, he seems to be outraged by political elites’ passiveness with regard to this issue. Thirdly, he seems to criticize some environmental projects, specifically, Nevada-Semipalatinsk, which adopts internationalist agenda rather than nationalist.

Having analyzed Bökei’s works I come to conclusion that he as Dawson’s suggestion, came to understand the environmental degradation in Kazakh society as the ‘cries

of colonized nations against the antidemocratic incursions of an imperial center.’²³⁶ And it is not the question of whether Kazakhstan is a ‘colonized’ nation in fact, but how the author perceives it.

He highlights the negative effects of modernization, industrialization and urbanization on nature, thus critiquing the Soviet discourse of nature as a backdrop to technological progress. Moreover, he tries to break the epistemological and ontological transformation of understanding nature in Kazakh society, which, surely, does not only place the rationality in the center of human and nature relationship. Man, for him, is a part of nature. A purely rational man is not a full man. He is a half-man. Man has also an animal side which is a natural existence for him as he is a part of nature. Thus, Bökei seems to construct a different discourse on nature and man relationship which he understands in national terms.

²³⁶ *Ibid.*, 144.

Conclusion

On 14th May 1992 during one of his last interviews Oralkhan Bōkei was asked this question: Do you think the collapse of the Soviet Union to be a mere coincidence or inevitable outcome when there was one step left from changing from ‘mature socialism’ into communism? He says: To my mind, it is yet early to say that the Soviet empire collapsed totally. There are still many out there who want the system to persist. The Socialism we experienced was like a house without strong basis. It is an undeniable fact that the house without strong basis would fall ultimately.²³⁷

What is interesting in his answer is that first of all, he clearly identifies the Soviet Union as an empire and secondly the persistence of the same kind of system even when Kazakhstan got its independence. I think he felt doubtful about the new system because of the similarity of agenda behind the Soviet power and newly emerged political elite. His doubt might have been influenced by the fact that he did not see this new elite formation to be completely new, but the consolidation of power to those who were once the allies of the Soviet system which he felt uneasy during the Soviet regime.

This master’s thesis has examined Oralkhan Bōkei’s works from a postcolonial perspective. The main aim of the study was to explore the applicability of postcolonial theories and concepts developed mainly in Western academia in the context of Soviet Kazakh literature. It argued that some postcolonial concepts such as hybridity, subalterneity and postcolonial environmentalism, orientalism can be useful in explaining the experience of Central Asia’s experience under the Soviet Union as colonial. Its one of the assumptions is that literature plays a significant role in the process of ‘writing back’ and generating anti-colonial resistance. It also argued that Oralkhan Bōkei’s works offer a window to analyze that

²³⁷ Bauyrzhan Ghūbaidullin’s interview with Oralkhan Bōkei appeared in 110th number of the newspaper “*Almaty aqshamy*” on 14th May, 1992.

experience. The major argument of the thesis was that Bôkei's works suggest an existence of anti-colonial as well as postcolonial discourses in post-Stalin Kazakh Soviet literature. This work did not intend to explore whether or how far the Soviet Union was an empire, rather it examined Oralkhan Bôkei's perception of the Soviet Union as an empire. Undeniably I agree with the argument that the Soviet Union was an empire unlike other empires. However, as this work justifies there can be many different perceptions of empire along with many models of it. This work was an attempt to analyse individual author's perception of the Soviet Union and its modernizing policies as a colonial power.

In the author's perception what kind of colonial power the Soviet Union was? As Partha Chatterjee argues famously in his book *The Nation and its fragments: colonial and postcolonial histories* that in India colonialism was primarily connected with public realm.²³⁸ The inner domain of Indian society preserved its sovereign territory and refused to allow the colonial power to intervene in that domain. As Dave points out that Soviet Union was a hybrid entity, combining elements of a centralized empire and a high modernist state, which did not only change the public milieu but also private. For Bôkei, the most painful experience is that the loss of the private and inner domain of Kazakh society. Soviet power did not only destroy the livelihood of Kazakh society, but it also corrupted the core of Kazakh values and traditions. Family relationships and kinship ties which binds Kazakh people were destroyed. Tradition and culture which existed for generations was swept away. People left villages leaving behind the native place. People did not remember who they were once and who they are now any more. Soviet power generated individuals which did not know their roots and routes.

²³⁸ Chatterjee, P. (1993). *The nation and its fragments: Colonial and postcolonial histories* (Vol. 11). Princeton: Princeton University Press.

Thus, lost generation of Kazakh people were created by Soviet regime. As I argue in my first chapter, for the author, the Soviet man is a hybrid man. The author portrays hybridity of any form- cultural, linguistic, racial- dangerous to preserve the purity of ethnic Kazakh society. If Chingiz Aitmatov calls this lost generation as ‘*mankurt*’, for Bökei they are ‘*dubără*’. The author uses the word ‘*dubără*’ to denote a de-ethnicization, the loss of group solidarity symbolized by *aul*, the demise of rich oral tradition of the nomads, the erasure of geneology and memory which were central to nomadic identity. The center of this ‘*dubără* – making machine’ is the city. Urban places threaten the existence of Kazakh values which is circled around the village life. In its turn village life is also threatened by the plans of making *sovkhozs* and small social towns.

According to Bökei, the source of that lost Kazakh essence lies in the past. Only returning to the past one can acquire the Kazakh soul. For him, past is an elightener of his darkened soul. In order to revive that past, he creates stories which flow between the past and the present. Like for village prose writers, memory plays an important role. This memory is a memory of the collective, as well as of an individual.

He chooses to speak *of* ‘his’ people and *for* ‘his’ people who are ordinary young and old people of Altai. His characters are his fellow villagers who are the victims of Soviet modernizing and industrializing projects which are Russian-centered. Thus, Bökei criticizes not only the Soviet machine which is Russian, but Kazakhs who side with the rules set by Russian. He voices the unheard voice of the ‘subaltern’ – Kazakh villagers- who are left aside by the state. In Bökei’s works, Soviet regime changed the way people interact with nature. Nature is not a background to the technologically advanced modern society, it is a living entity which has its own world. His writings reflect his deep concern about the ecological situation of his region.

Through portraying subaltern people of Altai, Bókei offers alternative history of colonization in Kazakhstan which is being neglected by the state nationalism under Kunayev. He seems to criticize the internationalist agenda of Kazakh elite. Thus his texts do not only engage with the criticism of the Soviet power as a whole and its Russifying agenda, but is also an active reaction and response to what is happening within the Kazakh SSR.

With becoming an independent state which Dave calls Kazakhstan as an ‘accidental state’, Kazakhstan has asserted its postcoloniality. However, as Dave and Adams note Central Asian states adopted the same national framework of Soviet Union. The contemporary nation building projects in Kazakhstan employ the same categories of Soviet national culture. The postcoloniality of Kazakhstan still remains to be an ambiguous topic which needs more discussions and debates.

I think I like the idea how novel this work is in very different ways. First of all, it engages in the general debate about the applicability of postcolonial theories in the context of Central Asia and the outcome of this work does suggest that the ‘selective borrowing’ of some postcolonial concepts and theories is a fine toolkit to have for any scholar of Central Asia. Secondly, having done so, it links the bridge between postcolonial studies and Eurasian studies thus opening the window for more interdisciplinary approach in scholarly enquiry. Thirdly, I find it emotionally fulfilling experience that this work might bring something new into the study of Kazakh literature. I think it is also a two-way process. Along with introducing new approaches into the study of literary texts into Kazakh literature, this work gives an understanding of Kazakh literature to English-language readers. Last, but not least, this work also highly adopts comparative framework from Indian, African and Soviet Russian literature, which also makes this work interesting in bringing together colonial experience of different cultures, people, and societies.

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