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NOT SUITABLE FOR KAZAKHS?
AUTHENTICITY AND NATIONAL IDENTITY IN CONTEMPORARY KAZAKHSTANI MUSIC


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THE DEVELOPMENT OF MA PROGRAMS AT NAZARBAYEV UNIVERSITY:
A LONGITUDINAL STUDY

by
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Abstract

In the two decades since the collapse of the Soviet Union, the musical landscape in Kazakhstan has come to include diverse localized versions of global music. The alternative soundscape of modern Kazakhstan encompasses rhythmic electronic dance sounds, hard rock, romantic and mellow indie, harsh rap, experimental rock, and other genres. Modern musicians now use an electric version of a traditional instrument, the elektro-dombyra, to perform ethnic rock. The language of performance among musicians varies from Kazakh to Russian and English. One recent phenomenon in Kazakhstan is the emergence of ‘Q-pop’, which is largely modeled on K-pop and which is rapidly gaining popularity among the local audience. Many of these performers faced some criticism for their unconventional choices of instruments, genres, and visual images. This thesis addresses the questions of what strategies these musicians themselves use to claim authenticity, and how these strategies intertwine with local discourses of national identity, language, and gender.

In answering the research questions, the project uses qualitative ethnographic research methods, including in-depth interviews with musicians, producers, and cultural activists from Almaty, Astana, and Taraz, participant observation of the concerts, together with a textual and visual analysis of songs. The project will look closely at performances of the traditional qobyz player Almat Saizhan, the ethnic rock group Aldaspan, the indie group Moldanazar, and the Q-pop group Ninety One. It will also briefly discuss choices of indie bands like Molto Loud and city&shivers, rock group Far in Gate, electronic project KinRai, and a rapper Kanamar, focusing on their choices of instruments, language, and genre. The thesis will illustrate how Almat Saizhan and Aldaspan assert legitimacy by performing on ancient and modernized versions of

traditional instruments, by engaging with discourses of national identity, and by recreating local ideas of hegemonic masculinity. It will show how all of my participants legitimize themselves through explaining their language choices and will unravel the language ideologies implicit in these explanations. Finally, the project will outline how Moldanazar and Ninety One declare authenticity by adapting global ideologies of indie and K-pop genres to local ideas of authenticity and autonomy, and by embracing to varying extent ideas of alternative masculinity.

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Introduction

In March 2018, a member of the Q-pop band Ninety One participated in the IV Congress of "Zhas Otan," the youth wing of the ruling party "Nur Otan." Ninety One lead singer Dulat Mukhametkaliyev was one of 16 people to win the election of candidates for members of the Zhas Otan central council back in January 2018. The meeting opened with Ninety One's performance, after which Mukhametkaliyev gave a speech in front of the public, where he addressed the negativity towards their music in the following way:

(People in) several cities, several venues were against our performance. Meaning that singing, presenting a show, being a real modern artist is not suitable for a Kazakh of the 21st century. At that time we faced a stereotype that 21st century and Kazakh mentality, culture are incompatible. I completely disagree with that. Being uncultured is not suitable for a Kazakh, but being modern is.

Mukhametkaliyev thus associated being modern with performing Q-pop and in turn with connecting Kazakh culture to global trends. During the speech he also claimed that Q-pop allows us to fill local show business with quality content in Kazakh language, which is important, in his opinion, as show business is a major part of the local art sphere and the main source of “*Rukhani Zhangiru*” (spiritual modernization). Mukhametkaliyev's speech correlated with the governmental agenda proposed in the program, which also calls for local and global promotion of Kazakh language and culture, as well as for switching to the Latin alphabet. This surreal moment, in which official party representatives in suits gathered together with the unconventional members of a Q-pop band in one event, demonstrates that the government sees local music and local musicians as tools of implementing and promoting their agenda. At the

¹ The speech published on Youtube by user AUROR • NINETY ONE FSG “(рус.саб) Выступление Дулата. IV Съезд Молодежного крыла ‘Жас Отан’” Apr 9, 2018
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=D-SpxvAC1hl>

same time, musicians use this official platform to legitimize themselves as modern Kazakh musicians and to validate their image and sound in the eyes of local audiences.

Much earlier, in 2012 the ethnic rock band Aldaspan presented their modernized *elektro-dombyra* on a national talk show, *Aituga onai* (Easy to say), where an audience member and a professional musician criticized the transformation of the instrument:

*Who gave you the right to change at one moment the form and sound of the sacred and ancient dombyra, that remained the way it was for so many years? What are you trying to achieve with that? You said that the instrument can reach fifty thousand people, but there are special devices for that, Meirambekter² put a microphone to the instrument and played, for example. Secondly, if you want to make a rock sound, there is a band Ulytau that beautifully incorporates our natural dombyra to the rock sound...*³

The front man of Aldaspan, Nurzhan Toishy replied:

I am not trying to spoil the dombyra to make a name for myself with elektro-dombyra, that would be stupid of me. I want to introduce our instrument for the younger generation and for the international community.

The critique of *elektro-dombyra* suggests that the instrument is perceived as inauthentic in contrast to “our” “natural” acoustic *dombyra*. The comment demonstrates that the use of the acoustic *dombyra* helps to legitimize music as authentically Kazakh, as references to bands like Muzart and Ulytau illustrate. In contrast, Aldaspan seems to illustrate disruptive behaviour, even if the intentions of the band reproduce governmental ideas that pushes for promotion of Kazakh culture locally and internationally. However, since 2012 more and more musicians and audiences have accepted the *elektro-dombyra*, the band has become a regular participant of the annual international contemporary ethnic music festival The Spirit of Tengri, and recently they have

² Reference to Meirambek Besbayev a member of the Kazakh band Muzart that performs traditional songs with acoustic *dombyra*.

³ Aldaspantv “Айтуға оңай”, December 2012 <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=atDWYDEoRIw>

been invited to various talk shows and programs about contemporary music in Kazakhstan and the promotion of traditional music.⁴

The role of music in the modernization of Kazakh national identity is similarly evident in the official policies like the program “*Rukhani Zhangiru*”, which aims to modernize Kazakhstan’s identity in the eyes of the citizens and international community in order to facilitate the development of the country. The program consists of tasks outlined in the articles “Course towards the future: modernization of Kazakhstan’s identity” and “Seven Facets of the Great Steppe”, written by the First President of the Republic of Kazakhstan, Nursultan Nazarbayev. The article “Course towards the future: modernization of Kazakhstan’s identity” outlines the importance of “preserving national identity” for modernization, which requires preservation of “national traditions and customs, language, music and literature, in one word, our national spirit”. The article calls for modernization of culture through the implementation of the project “Modern Kazakh Culture in the Global World,” which requires “major translation work and the promotion of our cultural achievements including books, performances, sculptures, pictures, musical compositions and scientific discoveries” among other things.⁵ The second article, “Seven Facets of the Great Steppe,” contains initiatives like the creation of a gallery of great Kazakh thinkers, including musicians, as well as the project “A thousand years of steppe folklore and music”. This project requires the release of the collection of “significant works created for traditional Kazakh musical instruments: *kobyz*, *dombra*, *sybyzgy*, *sazsyrnay* and

⁴ For a program on Kazakh TV see <https://kazakh-tv.kz/ru/programms/viewArchive?id=22292>, for a talk show on Eurasia One see <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=3fM-LZWP15I>, for a talk show on Qazaqstan see <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ruo2ITAMkuQ>

⁵ Nursultan Nazarbayev, *Course towards the future: modernization of Kazakhstan’s identity*, 12 April 2017 http://www.akorda.kz/en/events/akorda_news/press_conferences/course-towards-the-future-modernization-of-kazakhstans-identity

others”, called "Ancient motifs of the Great Steppe". The article further says that “the folklore and melodies of the Great Steppe should acquire a ‘new breath’ in a modern digital format” and in order to promote our culture locally and globally the music should be modernized, for “sounds and melodies can be born not only by means of authentic instruments, but also through modern electronic versions”.⁶ Music thus plays an important role in recent national identity policies and participates in the formation of modern national consciousness. A review of the scholarly literature on Central Asian music below reveals that music played a similarly significant role in nation-building process in the Soviet period as well.

Music in Central Asia

During the Soviet period, scholars focused on introducing the music of Central Asia to the broader Soviet community and to international scholars, describing general characteristics of instruments, notation, and musical practices. For instance, Aleksandr Zataevich, Victor Belaiev, and S. W. Pring focused on exploring the tunes and melodies of Central Asian people and their traditional instruments.⁷ From the 1960s until the 1980s, scholars like George S. Golos, Walter Kaufmann, Johanna Spector, and Pekka Gronow further contributed to the exploration of the instrumentation, notation, Soviet record industry, and musical practices in the region.⁸ Among

⁶ Nursultan Nazarbayev, *Seven Facets of the Great Steppe*, 21 November 2018 http://www.akorda.kz/en/events/akorda_news/press_conferences/article-of-the-president-of-the-republic-of-kazakhstan-nursultan-nazarbayev-seven-facets-of-the-great-steppe

⁷ For works by Aleksandr Zataevich see *1000 songs of Kyrgyz/Kazakh people: tunes and melodies* (Orenburg, 1925); *500 songs and kyuis of Aday, Bukey, Semipalatinsk, and the Ural Kazakhs* (Alma-Ata, 1931). For works by Belaiev, Victor, and S. W. Pring. See “The Longitudinal Open Flutes of Central Asia.” *The Musical Quarterly*, vol. 19, no. 1, 1933, pp. 84–100.

⁸ For articles by Golos, George S. see “Kirghiz Instruments and Instrumental Music.” *Ethnomusicology*, vol. 5, no. 1, 1961, pp. 42–48; articles by Walter Kaufmann see “Musical Notations of the Orient: Notational systems of continental East, South, and Central Asia” *Indiana University Humanities Series*, No. 60. (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1967); For works by Johanna Spector see “Musical Tradition and Innovation” in *Central Asia: A century of Russian rule* ed. Edward Allworth (New York:

the most respected local scholars of that period were Bolat Sarybayev and Akhmet Zhubanov, who wrote extensively about ancient and traditional Kazakh musical instruments.⁹

After the collapse of the Soviet Union, scholars started researching traditional music and canonization,, some of them specifically focused on the role of nation-building policies in the cultural transformations of the region. In the early post-Soviet period, the field of ethnomusicology enjoyed a number of excellent works on music in Central Asia such as *The Hundred Thousand Fools of God* by Theodore Levin, who explored *shashmaqam*, dastans, and music during shamanic practices in separate regions of Uzbekistan as a part of his fieldwork during 1990-1994.¹⁰ In the later post-Soviet period, scholars focused on the role music played in nation-building policies during the Soviet period and after. Specifically, Marina Frolova-Walker investigated the introduction of operas to the Central Asian nations; Frederico Spinetti wrote about music and nationhood in Tajikistan with a focus on *shashmaqam* and *falak* genres; Alexander Djumaev researched the development of Uzbek national musical identity; Jean During explored the separation of previously intertwined linguistic and musical practices of Central Asian people during the Soviet period and the Europeanization of music brought by the Soviet government; Michael Rouland examined the contribution of Aleksandr Zataevich to the music of Kazakhstan; while Danette Ifert Johnson and Megan Rancier explored national identity issues through music videos of contemporary Kazakhstan's performers.¹¹ Rachel Harris focuses on

Columbia University Press, 1967); for works by Pekka Gronow see "Ethnic Music and Soviet Record Industry." *Ethnomusicology*, vol. 19, no. 1, 1975, pp. 91–99

⁹ For works by Akhmet Zhubanov see *Ән-күй сапары* (Алматы, 1976); for works by Bolat Sarybayev see *Казахские музыкальные инструменты* (Алма-Ата: Жалын, 1978), *Қазақтың музыкалық аспаптары* (Алматы, 1981).

¹⁰ Theodore Levin, *The Hundred Thousand Fools of God: Musical Travels in Central Asia* (Queens, New York), Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1996.

¹¹ For articles by Marina Frolova-Walker see "National in Form, Socialist in Content': Musical Nation-Building in the Soviet Republics." *Journal of the American Musicological Society*, vol. 51, no. 2,

music of Uyghur people and wrote about the role of music in popular Islam by exploring festivals near tombs of Islamic saints in Xinjiang region and Chinese Communist Party's regulations; she extensively analyzed The Uyghur Twelve Muqam and how it became integral to the Uyghur national music.¹² Rachel Harris also explored Uyghur music in the context of modern time, outlining how digital flows of cultural products shape Uyghur nations identity, carry collective memory, and illustrate political situation; as well as how global musical forms influence Uyghur pop music.¹³ Scholars like Razia Sultanova contributed to the discussion of music and spirituality in context of Islam and Shamanism.¹⁴ Kazakh traditional musical practices were analyzed by scholars like Jennifer C. Post, who researched *dombyra* performance in Kazakh diaspora of Western Mongolia; Saida Daukeyeva analyzed how Kazakh nomadic ideas about gender roles influenced traditional *dombyra* practices; and Eva-Marie Dubuisson explored Kazakh traditional improvisational phenomenon "*aitys*" and its role as a form of socio-political

(1998) pp. 331–371; by Federico Spinetti see "Open Borders. Tradition and Tajik Popular Music: Questions of Aesthetics, Identity and Political Economy." *Ethnomusicology Forum*, vol. 14, no. 2, 2005, pp. 185–211; for Alexander Djumaev "Musical Heritage and National Identity in Uzbekistan." *Ethnomusicology Forum*, vol. 14, no. 2, 2005, pp. 165–18; for Jean During see "Power, Authority and Music in the Cultures of Inner Asia." *Ethnomusicology Forum*, vol. 14, no. 2, 2005, pp. 143–164; for Michael Rouland see "Creating a Cultural Nation: Aleksandr Zataevich in Kazakhstan." *Comparative Studies of South Asia, Africa and the Middle East*, vol. 25 no. 3, 2005, pp. 533–553; For Danette Ifert Johnson article see "Music Videos and National Identity in Post-Soviet Kazakhstan" *Qualitative Research Reports in Communication*, 7:1 (2006) pp. 9–14; For Megan Rancier see "Resurrecting the Nomads: Historical Nostalgia and Modern Nationalism in Contemporary Kazakh Popular Music Videos." *Popular Music & Society* 32(3) (2009) pp.387–406.

¹² For article on popular Islam see Rachel Harris and Rahilä Dawut. "Mazar Festivals of the Uyghurs: Music, Islam and the Chinese State." *British Journal of Ethnomusicology*, vol. 11, no. 1, 2002, pp. 101–118; for the Uyghur Twelve Muqam see Rachel Harris *The Making of a Musical Canon in Chinese Central Asia: The Uyghur Twelve Muqam* (Aldershot: Ashgate, 2008);

¹³For works on digital flows see Rachel Harris "Tracks: Temporal Shifts and Transnational Networks of Sentiment in Uyghur Song." *Ethnomusicology*, vol. 56, no. 3, 2012, pp. 450–475; on global music in Uyghur pop see "Reggae on the silk road: The globalization of uyghur pop" *The China Quarterly*, 183 (2005) pp. 627–643.

¹⁴ Razia, Sultanova. *From Shamanism To Sufism*.(London: Tauris, 2014)

critique.¹⁵ Saida Daukeyeva and Megan Rancier also greatly contributed to the exploration of traditional *qobyz* performance.¹⁶

There are excellent edited books with collections of articles on Central Asian music, music of Turkic nations, and a book about music in independent Kazakhstan that focus on traditional sounds of the region, but also note the growing popularity of pop, hip-hop, and ethnic rock. In 2013 the locally based authors S. Kaskabasov, S. Kiravayev, B. Kundykbayev, G. Zhumaseitova, and S. Kuzembayeva edited and published a book about the music of independent Kazakhstan that explored the current state of traditional musical forms and the appearance of new musical forms like pop, ethnic rock, and Dekko.¹⁷ A book about the musical heritage of Central Asia published in 2016 and edited by Theodore Levin, Saida Daukeyeva, and Elmira Köchümkulova contains articles about performances on traditional musical instruments, oral epic, *aitys*, singing, *maqam* traditions, as well as works about songs performed at various occasions like funerals and weddings.¹⁸ In 2018 Razia Sultanova and Megan Rancier published another valuable book on Turkic musical cultures that explores various themes with the help from different contributors,

¹⁵ For articles by Jennifer C. Post see “I Take My ‘Dombra’ and Sing to Remember My Homeland’: Identity, Landscape and Music in Kazakh Communities of Western Mongolia.” *Ethnomusicology Forum*, vol. 16, no. 1, 2007, pp. 45–69; For works by Saida Daukeyeva see “Gender in Kazakh Dombra Performance”. *Ethnomusicology Forum* 25(3) (2016) pp. 283–305; for an article on “aitys” see E.-M. Dubuisson “Confrontation in and through the Nation in Kazakh Aity Poetry”. *Journal of Linguistic Anthropology*, 20 (2010) pp. 101–115.

¹⁶ For articles by Daukeyeva see “‘Aqqu’ (White Swan): Sound Mimesis and Spirit Evocation in Kazakh Qobyz Performance” In *Pieces of the Musical World: Sounds and Cultures*, ed. Rachel Harris and Rowan Pease, 45–62. (New York and Abingdon: Routledge, 2015); “Kazakhstan. Le kobyz. L’ancienne viole des chamanes / Kazakhstan. The Kobyz. The Ancient Viol of the Shamans, and: Raushan Orazbaeva. Akku. Kazakhstan. Kyl-kobyz (review).” *Asian Music*, vol. 38 no. 1 (2007) pp. 155-161. For articles by Ranciers see “The Musical Instrument as National Archive: A Case Study of the Kazakh Qyl-qobyz” *Ethnomusicology* Vol. 58, No. 3 (Fall 2014), pp. 379-404

¹⁷ С. Қасқабасов, С. Қирабаев, Б. Құндақбаев, Г. Жұмасейітова, С. Күзембаева *Қазақстанның тәуелсіздік жылдарындағы музыка өнері* (Алматы: Жібек жолы, 2013).

¹⁸ Theodore Levin, Saida Daukeyeva, and Elmira Köchümkulova *The Music of Central Asia* (Bloomington and Indianapolis: Indiana University Press, 2016).

including Turkic music in pop culture, Azerbaijani rap, folk songs; pop diffusion, mass music, and modern nation-building in the music of Kazakhstan.¹⁹

According to Gulnar Abdirakhman, Kazakhstan's musicologists became interested in popular music only in the second half of the 1980s and the early 1990s.²⁰ Scholars were mostly interested in Kazakh amateur, traditional, and folk music, amateur songwriting and national traditions in mass music.²¹ Abdirakhman continues that in the 2000s, researchers started focusing on "Western models of local popular music".²² At that period, Kazakhstan's researchers published works on ethnic-rock band Roksonaki and traditional music in contemporary culture of Kazakhstan.²³

This dissertation aims to contribute to the broader discussion of performance on modernized traditional instruments, language choices in Central Asian music, and the localization of global musical forms in the region. This work will engage with local discussion on national identity and focus on the concept of authenticity, which traditional and alternative musicians in Kazakhstan

¹⁹ Razia Sultanova, Megan Rancier *Turkic Soundscapes: From Shamanic Voices to Hip-Hop* (New York and Oxon: Routledge, 2018).

²⁰ Gulnar Abdirakhman "Mass music in Kazakhstan. The phenomenon and its interpretation" in *Turkic Soundscapes: From Shamanic Voices to Hip-Hop* ed. Raziya Sultanova and Megan Rancier (Oxon: Routledge, 2018), 102

²¹ For amateur and folk music see A.Zharasova "Kazakh folklore and the problem of contemporary amateur song" *Folklore in the Modern Artistic Life* (St Petersburg: St Petersburg State Theatre Arts Academy Press, 1987) pp. 102-106 and Gulnar Abdirakhman *Contemporary amateur song-writing in the Kazakh music culture* Candidate's dissertation abstract. Almaty: Almaty COnservatory Kurmangazy, 1999. For traditional music see A.Aituarova *National traditions in mass music of Kazakhstan (as exemplified by the works of N.Tilendiev)*. Candidate's dissertation abstract. Tashkent State Conservatory, Uzbekistan, 1993.

²² Gulnar Abdirakhman "Mass music in Kazakhstan. The phenomenon and its interpretation" in *Turkic Soundscapes: From Shamanic Voices to Hip-Hop* ed. Raziya Sultanova and Megan Rancier (Oxon: Routledge, 2018), 102

²³ For scholarly paper about local group see D. Amirova "Immortal word in a live sound, or somewhat about the group 'Roksonaki'" *Culture and Mass Media: Intercommunication Problems* (Almaty: Credo, 2000), pp. 126-129. For contemporary culture in Kazakhstan see G. Kuzbanova "Functioning of traditional music in contemporary culture in Kazakhstan". *Historical projection and modern interpretation of the substance and form of human activity, creativity and aesthetic issues* (London: LASHE, 2012), pp. 24-26.

articulate through their playing of ancient or modernized version of traditional instrument, through their language choices, and through their recreation of the global ideologies of the genres that they localize. This thesis work will shed light on intriguing phenomena in Kazakhstan's music scene like localized indie rock, K-pop, and the amplified version of traditional dombyra, all of which key discussion of what makes a local musician authentic, what makes a performer of the localized global music authentic, what makes modernized traditional instruments authentic, and what makes a language choice authentic.

This thesis will draw upon diverse studies of music in Central Asia in order to understand why musicians as disparate as artists who play heavy metal music on traditional Kazakh instrument, an indie-rock musician who sings in Kazakh, and a Q-pop band all similarly claim national identity as a kind of cultural capital while simultaneously having to defend their music against charges it is somehow not authentically Kazakh. This tight connection of music with national identity resulted from the long history of using music in nation-building processes, and explains why local musicians feel the need to legitimize their musicianship through demonstration of their authenticity. This thesis work will show that the strategies local musicians use to claim their authenticity and thus the cultural capital and cultural authority of authenticity are different in each case. The first and the second chapters show that contemporary musicians claim authenticity by performing on traditional instruments or in the Kazakh language. The third chapter shows a more complex demonstration of authenticity that largely derives from ideologies of authenticity inherent to the global musical forms that local musicians localized. These conflicts in the case of Kazakhstani music resemble conflicts over authenticity in the music of various genres in different countries as well.

Authenticity and Music

Scholars have intensely discussed the authenticity of authorial voice and of collective folk culture from when the concept emerged as a key value in the 19th century. In the article “Diverging Paths in the Scientific Search for Authenticity”, Regina Bendix described authenticity as “original, genuine, or unaltered,” but also stated that “the ideal of authenticity has over time increasingly intertwined sociopolitical, aesthetic, and moral aspects with market concerns”.²⁴ Bendix explores the ideologies of authenticity in the works of different scholars, including Carl Lachmann, who “favored an individual creativity which was, at best, speaking a more general truth”, in contrast to the brothers Jacob and Wilhelm Grimm, who were devoted to “uncovering and understanding an anonymous or collective authenticity”.²⁵ She concludes by saying that the “concept of authenticity clearly played a central role in the development of scholarly disciplines devoted to German language, literature, history, and folklore”.²⁶

In their book *Voices of Modernity*, Richard Bauman and Charles L. Briggs were intrigued by scholarly discussions on language ideologies, modernity, and authentic voice. Their fifth chapter investigates Johann Gottfried Herder’s language ideologies and views on modernity, outlining his view that the modernization of language should be achieved by “revitalizing its connection with the past and its vernacular attunement to the collective spirit”.²⁷ Herder insisted that “rootedness in time and place is the touchstone of authentic poetic expression and interpretation” and found “authentic German folk voice” “among the peasants and ordinary people of the town”.

²⁴ Regina Bendix “Diverging Paths in the Scientific Search for Authenticity” *Journal of Folklore Research*, Vol. 29, No. 2 (1992), 104

²⁵ Ibid. 123

²⁶ Ibid.

²⁷ Richard Bauman and Charles L. Briggs *Voices of Modernity: Language Ideologies and the Politics of Inequality* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2003), 196

²⁸ Herder thought that intellectuals should “sustain the authentic folk culture” through “educational and literary institutions”.²⁹ He claimed that “it is the task of intellectuals to recover, collect, and preserve the folk culture”, a notion that the brothers Grimm followed and continued, as described in the sixth chapter of the book.

Studies of contemporary music have also focused on the concept of authenticity, specifically Richard A. Peterson outlined multiple ways of understanding authenticity in his book about fabricating the authenticity of country music.³⁰ He writes that authenticity can mean “the act of certifying what can be judged authentic”, with the focus on authenticating authority.³¹ Secondly, it can mean “original, not fake,” referring to the documents; but also “relic, not changed,” meaning old-time.³² The fourth meaning is “authentic reproduction,” which is close to the original but also an inevitably compromised reproduction.³³ The fifth definition “centers on being believable or credible” to the audience, while the final meaning focuses on what is “true, consistent, sincere, real” and at the same time “different from what has come before”.³⁴ Peterson writes that in the case of country music, the last two definitions predominated. In other words, musicians had to have “marks of tradition” to seem credible, but also to be “original enough” to seem real and authentic.³⁵ Given all these definition of authenticity, Peterson outlines that most importantly “authenticity is not inherent in the object or the event that is designated authentic but is a socially agreed-upon construct in which the past is to a degree misremembered,” and that the

²⁸ Ibid. 182

²⁹ Ibid. 184

³⁰ Richard A. Peterson *Creating Country Music: Fabricating Authenticity* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1997), 205

³¹ Ibid. 206

³² Ibid. 207

³³ Ibid. 208

³⁴ Ibid. 208-209

³⁵ Ibid. 209

importance of authenticity and naturalness “changes over time”.³⁶ Peterson claims that musicians had to “legitimize” and “validate” themselves by inventing strategies to seem authentic.³⁷ But he also outlines that there are some characteristics that give a person “the right to speak with authenticity”.³⁸ For example, Peterson writes that Cesar Grana argues in his work about meaning and authenticity that the right of authentic voice “is inscribed in the signifiers of groups membership”. Peterson continues by referring to Stephen Cornell who argued that “claims of ethnic group membership” set up “the right to speak authentically”.³⁹ Yet in the case of musicians in Kazakhstan, ethnic group membership does not always establish this right. For instance, the second part of the first chapter describes an ethnic-rock band, Aldaspan, that modernized traditional *dombyra* by creating amplified *elektro-dombyra*. In spite of the Kazakh ethnicity of the band members, they were criticized for spoiling the traditional instrument. Chapter three discusses other cases, like indie-rock bands Molto Loud and city&shivers, ethnic Kazakh band members do not feel authorised to perform in Kazakh because they lack the fluent knowledge of the language. Consequently, they turn to alternative definitions of authenticity and reproduce ideologies of authenticity of indie music.

Peterson writes that performers “have to authenticate their claim to speak for the country identity” by “knowing all the conventions of making the music and the nuances of voice and gesture that make their work sound ‘country’”. He continues by saying that other signifiers like the outfit, the accent, or a family heritage are also important.⁴⁰ The data of my thesis shows that

³⁶ Ibid. 3, 211

³⁷ Ibid. 214

³⁸ Ibid. 218

³⁹ Ibid.

⁴⁰ Ibid.

these kind of strategies of authentication are also true for musicians in Kazakhstan as well. For example, indie musicians like Moldanazar, Molto Loud, city&shivers dress simply, behave on stage and sing about things that global indie genre conventions suggest. Q-pop bands follow the visual and sonic code of K-pop, while a traditional performer, Almat Saizhan, uses visual and sonic signifiers of authenticity but can also claim authenticity based on his heritage, as his father is an established traditional musician and conductor as well.

Finally, Peterson argues that “the changing meaning of authenticity is not random, but is renegotiated in a continual political struggle in which the goal of each contending interest is to naturalize a particular construction of authenticity”.⁴¹ Thus, arguably, the speech given by Ninety One member Dulat Mukhametkali during the “Zhas Otan” meeting aimed to naturalize the construction of modern Kazakh singer that the Q-pop genre offers. Similarly, the article about *elektro-dombyra* described in the first chapter and published on the national ‘Dombyra Day’ by a national republican newspaper “Liter” may intend to naturalize *elektro-dombyra* as one of the ways traditional instrument could look. Moreover, the article “The Seven Facets of the Great Steppe” that suggests incorporation of modern electronic sounds to traditional Kazakh melodies may also strive to naturalize modern sounding folk songs in order to authenticate modern Kazakh identity.

In his book about recording studio culture in Istanbul, Eliot Bates discusses national identity, artistic production, and authenticity of traditional music rooted in place. Bates writes that in Turkey “music was a key technology for manufacturing a sense of national unity and shared

⁴¹ Ibid. 220

ancestry, and defining the culture of the modern Turkish citizen”.⁴² He refers to the term “media capitalism” coined by Ziad Fahmy, as an outgrowth of Benedict Anderson’s “imagined community” and claims that “recordings, radio, theatre, films, and concerts” in addition to print media were important in Turkish nation-building process.⁴³ Bates argues that Turkish studio musicians used their own strategies to make “authentic” traditional songs, particularly using concepts of “place” and “tradition” based on the discourse that “the most important attribute that makes a song traditional is its rhetorical connection to place”.⁴⁴

Scholars like Simon Frith and Lawrence Grossberg have thoroughly discussed the role of the concept of authenticity in rock music. In his article “Toward an Aesthetics of Popular Music”, Simon Frith argued that the “rock aesthetic depends, crucially, on an argument about authenticity” and that even if in reality rock is a commercial form, it “depends on a myth of youth community” and “creative artist”.⁴⁵ Frith also sees authenticity as one of three judgements that help the audience define good and bad music. Here, authenticity is defined in relation to production, specifically “a perceived quality of sincerity and commitment”.⁴⁶ Lawrence Grossberg also argues that “rock’s special place was enabled by its articulation to an ideology of

⁴² Eliot Bates, *Digital Tradition: Arrangement and Labour in Istanbul’s Recording Studio Culture* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2016), 23

⁴³ Ibid. 33

⁴⁴ Ibid. 29, 74

⁴⁵ Simon Frith “Towards an Aesthetic of Popular Music” in *Taking Popular Music Seriously* (Hampshire: Ashgate Publishing, Ltd, 2007), 260-261

⁴⁶ Simon Frith *Performing Rites: on the Value of Popular Music* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1996), 71

‘authenticity’”.⁴⁷ He continues that this “ideology of authenticity” created a “cyclical movement between high (authentic) and low (coopted) point of rock history determined by fans or critics”.⁴⁸

Thus, drawing from the discussions regarding authenticity outlined above, this work will illustrate how local musicians develop different strategies of claiming authenticity by using markers of tradition like traditional instruments and Kazakh language to seem credible, and at the same time modernize traditional instruments and fuse global sounds with indigenous language to seem original. Some musicians also reproduce global ideologies of their genres to claim authenticity as well as a general connection with the genre.

Methodology and structure

The project is a qualitative ethnographic research that draws upon semi-structured in-depth interviews with musicians, producers, cultural activists from the cities of Almaty, Astana, and Taraz in Kazakhstan. I had hoped to generate a comparative analysis between these three cities, treating Almaty as a cultural center of the country, Taraz as an ancient, traditional, and predominantly Kazakh-speaking city, while Astana is a modern, growing capital with population from various regions of the country. However, the data I gathered was not sufficient enough to draw comparisons between these cities, therefore I decided to focus on the rich music scene concentrated in Almaty, with short but specific insights from musicians based in Astana and Taraz. Research outcomes provided in this work are based on conversations with following musicians and bands: Moldanazar (Galymzhan Moldanazar), Mergen (Akmaral Zykayeva), Aldaspan (Nurzhan Toishy), Almat Saizhan, city&shivers (Arkhat Amangeldin), Molto Loud

⁴⁷ Lawrence Grossberg *We Gotta Get Out of this Place: Popular Conservatism and Postmodern Culture* (London: Routledge, 1992), 205

⁴⁸ Ibid. 207

(Arman Tobagabyl, Temirlan Kydyrgazy, Sabizhan Saikenuly, Evgeniy Rukavichnikov), Far in Gate (Ilyas Kabiyeu), Dmitriy Shegolikhin, KinRai (Zarina Beisembayeva), and Kanamar Djambulsky (Kanat Mahatov). The data is also gathered from conversations with the producer of a Q-pop band Black Dial, Yesbolat Bedelkhan; a creator of a Qazaq Indie project, Ruslan Yakupov; a creator of Astana Rock Club, Andrei Evseev. Finally, I utilize qualitative analysis of songs, music videos, and the performances of musicians.

Kazakhstan's music scene contains music of various genres like pop, hip-hop, r'n'b, *toi* music, etc., but this project focuses on traditional music, ethnic rock, indie rock and Q-pop. The choice of focusing on these specific genres is connected to the kind of musicians I was able to recruit for this research and to the variety of discourses these genres bring into discussion within local society. Apart from that, I chose these genres because of my personal interest in researching it. The research limits itself to specific genres of music; a similar research project with musicians from other genres might show different results. It is also important to acknowledge that some of the participants like Moldanazar, Far in Gate, KinRai, Dmitrii Shegolikhin, and Ruslan Yakupov personally know me not only as a researcher, but also as a musician, which might have influenced the results of this research.

This thesis consists of three chapters and argues that Kazakhstan's musicians develop various strategies that allow them to claim cultural authority and authenticity. The first chapter focuses on two cases of modernization of traditional instruments, *prima-qobyz* and *elektro-dombyra*, and argues that traditional musicians claim authenticity by performing on original ancient instrument like *qyl-qobyz*, while ethnic rock musicians claim authenticity by performing on *elektro-dombyra*. Both traditional and ethnic rock musicians claim national identity by

reproducing ideas of a glorious past with glorious ancestors. The second chapter argues that language ideologies, ideas about national identity and authenticity determine musician's language choices. The third chapter examines localization of global music forms and argues that indie rock and Q-pop bands recreate ideas of authenticity inherent to their genres.

Chapter 1

Traditional Instruments and Authenticity: the *Elektro-dombyra* and the *Prima-qobyz*

Kazakh culture underwent many changes during the Soviet period; after independence, the country strived to rehabilitate indigenous culture, but the sudden exposure to global cultural products complicated achieving this goal. This chapter looks at Kazakh music, national identity, and authenticity through the analysis of two different cases of reconstructing national instruments: the *qobyz* in the Soviet era and the *dombyra* in post-Soviet Kazakhstan. The *qobyz*, like many other traditional instruments of nations in the Soviet Union, was reconstructed as a part of the bigger nation-building agenda of the Soviet government. In contrast, the modernized *elektro-dombyra* was created as a grassroots initiative on the part of a local band whose leader was inspired by metal music to commission the instrument. After independence, musicians started reintroducing the authentic version of the *qobyz* and playing it along with the modernized instrument. Meanwhile, individual music enthusiasts, who had been exposed to global musical forms, created a modernized *elektro-dombyra* and used it to build their reputation with local audiences. Thus, the current music scene of Kazakhstan involves traditional instruments alongside modernized versions reconstructed in various circumstances. In this chapter, I argue that one of the strategies of Almat Saizhan and Aldaspan use to claim the cultural capital of authenticity is to perform on traditional instruments. Almat Saizhan claims authenticity when he performs on the ancient *qyl-qobyz*, and Aldaspan claims authenticity when they perform on *elektro-dombyra*. I also argue that these musicians emphasize national identity through references to a glorious past and glorious ancestors in their compositions.

Nation-building and Modernization

In the 19th century, nationalism was the main political ideology in Europe, and the view that authentic national identity is expressed in folk music (among other things) was widely recognized. This resulted in the growth of research in music, the publication of collections of national music, and in many classical composers' creation of pieces based on folk sounds in an attempt to create 'national' music.⁴⁹ The Soviet government shared this view of music and national identity, as is evident in Stalin's early 1930s nation-building policy agenda including the creation of "national" musical cultures in Central Asia.⁵⁰ Soviet cultural and national policies were based on a Marxist-Leninist view on art and started in the beginning of the 1920s.⁵¹ According to Theodore Levin, these policies, "served four principal ideological aims: combating the legacy of feudalism, embodying atheism, reifying officially sanctioned national identities, and nurturing cultural evolution among peoples".⁵² Thus, the intention was not to simply popularize authentic folk culture, but also to modernize it.

Soviet officials had an evolutionist approach to the music of ethnic groups in the region, trying to bring folk sounds to art music.⁵³ This reflected a broader Soviet ideology that the cultures of non-Russians living in Soviet territory could progress only by assimilation, with the adoption of Russian or, more broadly, European models. For example, officials viewed "monophonic Central

⁴⁹ See Timothy Rice, *Ethnomusicology. A Very Short Introduction* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2014), 14. And Timothy Rice, *May It Fill Your Soul. Experiencing Bulgarian Music* (Chicago: The University Of Chicago Press, 1994), 183

⁵⁰ Marina Frolova-Walker, "'National in Form, Socialist in Content': Musical Nation-Building in the Soviet Republics", *Journal of the American Musicological Society*, Vol. 51, No. 2 (Summer, 1998), 331-337.

⁵¹ Ibid.

⁵² Theodore Levin "Making Marxist-Leninist Music in Uzbekistan" in *Music and Marx: Ideas, Practice, Politics* ed. Regula Burckhardt Qureshi (New York: Routledge, 2014), 190

⁵³ Marina Frolova-Walker, "'National in Form, Socialist in Content': Musical Nation-Building in the Soviet Republics", *Journal of the American Musicological Society*, Vol. 51, No. 2 (Summer, 1998), 343.

Asian music” as historically inevitably developing into “European-style harmonic music”.⁵⁴

Theodore Levin further writes that Soviet officials thought that non-Russian indigenous populations “in the Eurocentric Marxist-Leninist view, lagged behind European Russia’s high level of cultural development”.⁵⁵ Other scholars have noted that canonization has a “historical depth” in the region, which is evident in Uyghur *Twelve Muqam* and Uzbek *shashmaqam*.⁵⁶ But in the case of Soviet Kazakhstan, Rouland writes that the government put forward the tasks of creating a new canon. For example, the Russian music ethnographer Aleksandr Zataevich addressed the task of creating a canon in the Kazakh region and collected a considerable amount of national songs and instrumental pieces from the population, systematizing them to specific categories. However, the collection was created via notation without a recorder, and it is questionable if the Western system of notation fully expressed the vitality of the compositions.⁵⁷

One of the goals behind Soviet policies was to bring modernity to non-Russian Soviet regions and to create a united Soviet nation. Peter K. Marsh writes that in the case of Mongolia, “the ultimate attainment of the Communist Utopia” was the dissolution of Soviet nations into the greater Soviet people.⁵⁸ He continues by saying that the ability of state ensembles to play European classical compositions “with a distinctively national style and sound” signified cultural

⁵⁴ Theodore Levin, *The Hundred Thousand Fools of God: Musical Travels in Central Asia* (Queens, New York). (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1996), 13.

⁵⁵ See Theodore Levin “Making Marxist-Leninist Music in Uzbekistan” in *Music and Marx: Ideas, Practice, Politics* ed. Regula Burckhardt Qureshi (New York: Routledge, 2014), 190 and

⁵⁶ See Rachel Harris *The Making of a Musical Canon in Chinese Central Asia: The Uyghur Twelve Muqam* (Surrey: Ashgate Publishing Limited, 2008), 9-10 and Theodore Levin *The Hundred Thousand Fools of God: Musical Travels in Central Asia (and Queens, New York)* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1996), 47

⁵⁷ Rouland, M. “Creating a Cultural Nation: Aleksandr Zataevich in Kazakhstan.” *Comparative Studies of South Asia, Africa and the Middle East*, vol. 25 no. 3 (2005), 536

⁵⁸ Peter K. Marsh. “The Horse-head Fiddle and the Cosmopolitan Reimagination of Tradition in Mongolia” in *Current Research in Ethnomusicology* ed. Jennifer C. Post (New York: Routledge, 2009), 73

development.⁵⁹ Marsh illustrates how the modernized instrument of the “horse-head fiddle,” which “could play both national and international musical styles,” also became a symbol of cultural advancement.⁶⁰ Modernity and modernization had similarly been goals of the Kazakh intellectuals in the late 19th and 20th century, but the Soviet government not only constructed its own distinct view on modernization but even removed competitors like the Alash leaders in order to continue the implementation of their ideology.⁶¹ Overall, the political views of Soviet officials greatly influenced the musical practices and discourses in the region, and they still affect the music of the newly independent Central Asian countries today.⁶²

The following story of *qobyz* explores the role it used to play for nomads in the Kazakh region, how it was modernized in the Soviet period, and the way it was reintroduced in modern Kazakhstan. The next section in turn unravels the story of the creation of the *elektro-dombyra* and the ideas that Aldaspan reproduce and recreate in their music.

The *Qobyz*

The *Qobyz* is a two-string fiddle played vertically with a bow, with a “double bucket-shaped body, a short, arcuate curved neck”, and hanging metal rings or bells on the head of the instrument. Its two strings are made out of horsehair, and the instrument produces a “deep and overtone-rich timbre”. According to Saida Daukeyeva, the *qobyz* “has a special status and significance among the Kazakhs as a sacred instrument that is deeply rooted in their traditional

⁵⁹ Ibid.74

⁶⁰ Ibid.

⁶¹ Diana T. Kudaibergenova, *Rewriting the Nation in Modern Kazakh Literature: Elites and Narratives* (Maryland: Lexington Books, 2017):3

⁶² Marina Frolova-Walker, “‘National in Form, Socialist in Content’: Musical Nation-Building in the Soviet Republics”, 374.

culture and spirituality.⁶³ Daukeyeva also outlines that the *qobyz* reflects the ancestral spirit of the Kazakhs and Turkic people inhabiting Kazakhstan.⁶⁴ Some scholars further claim that its “vibrating tones have a significant psycho-physiological effect” and that its deep timbre mirrors the spatial ideas of nomads with their multi-level structure of the world. The instrument was widely used by shamans, and is believed to aid them in moving through space and time.⁶⁵

In Kazakh culture, the creation of *qobyz* is strongly linked with the widely-known Turkic figure – Korkut Ata (known also as Dede Korkud among Turkic nations).⁶⁶ Sources suggest that Korkut was a prophetic singer, a saint elder, a healer, a shaman, counselor to the khan.⁶⁷ Korkut Ata also was the protagonist (and supposed narrator) of the Oghuz epic text *Dede Korkut Kitabı*. Korkut was worshipped among many Turkic nations during shamanistic practices, and shamans used to play his compositions and ask him for help.⁶⁸ According to Daukeyeva, in the nineteenth century *qobyz* performance shifted from “ritual to art music,” mainly due to Yqylas Dukenuly’s (1843-1916) compositions that had “wider pitch range”, “advanced playing techniques”, and

⁶³ Saida Daukeyeva “The Kazakh Qobyz: Between Tradition and Modernity” in *The Music of Central Asia* ed. Theodore Levin, Saida Daukeyeva, Elmira Kochumkulova (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2016), 331

⁶⁴ Saida Daukeyeva “Kazakhstan. Le kobyz. L'ancienne viole des chamanes / Kazakhstan. The Kobyz. The Ancient Viol of the Shamans, and: Raushan Orazbaeva. Akku. Kazakhstan. Kyl-kobyz (review).” *Asian Music*, vol. 38 no. 1 (2007): 155

⁶⁵ Roza Amanova, Asiya Mukhambetova, Svetlana Dzhanseitova. “Sacred Functions of Musical Instruments in the Creative Syncretism of Shamanistic Ritual,” *Rupkatha Journal on Interdisciplinary Studies in Humanities*, Vol. 10, No. 2, (2018): 45

⁶⁶ Saida Daukeyeva “The Kazakh Qobyz: Between Tradition and Modernity” in *The Music of Central Asia* ed. Theodore Levin, Saida Daukeyeva, Elmira Kochumkulova (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2016), 331

⁶⁷ Roza Amanova, Asiya Mukhambetova, Svetlana Dzhanseitova. “Sacred Functions of Musical Instruments in the Creative Syncretism of Shamanistic Ritual,” *Rupkatha Journal on Interdisciplinary Studies in Humanities*, Vol. 10, No. 2, (2018): 46

⁶⁸ *Ibid.* 46

“developed musical forms” compared to ancient shamanic sounds.⁶⁹ Soviet officials, however, viewed the shamanic instrument of the *qobyz* as a “vestige of the dark feudal past,” and musical practices related to it were seen as “backward and patriarchal”.⁷⁰ As a result, the *qobyz* was subordinated from the local music scene, and instead its modernized version, the *prima-qobyz*, was introduced.⁷¹ The next section describes the changes the instrument underwent, their meaning, and how the original “ancient” prototype of the instrument, as a sign of authenticity, was reintroduced to the repertoire of traditional music after the collapse of the Soviet Union.

Modernizing the *Qobyz*

Peter K. Marsh writes, referring to Mongolia, that in order to introduce the European-style harmonic music in Soviet republics and execute the Europeanization of the local culture, the Soviet government established national musical institutions, musical ensembles, orchestras, research institutions and employed professionally trained composers and performers.⁷² In 1934 the Soviet government created the first orchestra of national instruments in Kazakhstan, *Perviy natsionalniy orkestr imeni Kurmangazy*⁷³ (The first national instruments orchestra named after Kurmangazy), as a part of this process of institutionalization and nominated a recognized artist, Akhmet Zhubanov, as the conductor and director of the orchestra.⁷⁴ National instruments

⁶⁹ Saida Daukeyeva “The Kazakh Qobyz: Between Tradition and Modernity” in *The Music of Central Asia* ed. Theodore Levin, Saida Daukeyeva, Elmira Kochumkulova (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2016), 336

⁷⁰ Saida Daukeyeva “‘Aqqu’ (White Swan). Sound Mimesis and Spirit Evocation in Kazakh Qobyz Performance” in *Pieces of the Musical World: Sounds and Cultures* ed. Rachel Harris, Rowan Pease (New York: Routledge, 2015), 54

⁷¹ Ibid.

⁷² Peter K. Marsh. “The Horse-head Fiddle and the Cosmopolitan Reimagination of Tradition in Mongolia” in *Current Research in Ethnomusicology* ed. Jennifer C. Post (New York: Routledge, 2009): 14

⁷³ Kurmangazy is a famous Kazakh dombyra player, composer, folk artist that lived in the 19th century.

⁷⁴ Sh. Z. Rauandina “Istoriya sozdaniya kazahskogo muzykalnogo instrumenta ‘kobyz-prima’” last modified January 20, 2010, <https://sites.google.com/site/metodsovet09/konferencia-pps-20-01-10>

required modernization of their structure and shape in order to meet the “technical and aesthetic” requirements of European classical music and orchestral standards.⁷⁵ Apart from adapting traditional instruments for orchestral playing, Saida Daukeyeva outlines the adaptation of the “performance culture to the new social venue of concert halls”.⁷⁶ Based on the model of the Russian orchestra of national instruments, Soviet officials expected the “improved” version of the two-string bowed instrument *qyl-qobyz* (Image 1) to be included in the orchestra. Under the supervision of A. Zhubanov, masters E. Romanenko and K. Kasymov created quintet-based variations of the *qobyz*: *prima-qobyz*, *alt-qobyz*, *bass-qobyz*, and *contrabass-qobyz*. The first prototype of the *prima-qobyz* (Image 6) was similar to the *qyl-qobyz* in its dugout bucket-like shape, but the two original horsehair strings were complemented by a third metal string.⁷⁷

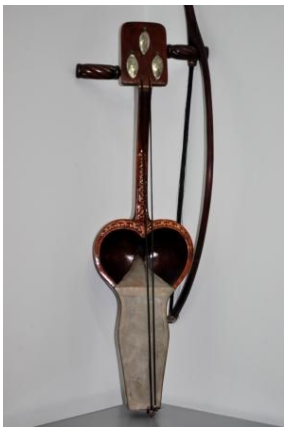





In the late 1950s, the director of the Kurmangazy orchestra, Sh. Kazhgaliyev, initiated the second stage of *qobyz* reconstruction. This time masters K. Kasymov, K. Duboviy, S. Fedotov, A. Lachinov decided to make the instrument with four metal strings and slightly shorten the neck, which considerably influenced the timbre of the instrument. Thus, as other scholars mention, the initial version of the *prima-qobyz* kept its traditional body, but had an “alien” violin tune to it.⁷⁸

⁷⁵ Peter K. Marsh. “The Horse-head Fiddle and the Cosmopolitan Reimagination of Tradition in Mongolia” in *Current Research in Ethnomusicology* ed. Jennifer C. Post (New York: Routledge, 2009): 64

⁷⁶ Saida Daukeyeva “The Kazakh Qobyz: Between Tradition and Modernity” in *The Music of Central Asia* ed. Theodore Levin, Saida Daukeyeva, Elmira Kochumkulova (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2016), 338

⁷⁷ Sh. Z. Rauandina “Istoriya sozdaniya kazahskogo muzykalnogo instrumenta ‘kobyz-prima’” last modified January 20, 2010, <https://sites.google.com/site/metodsovet09/konferencia-pps-20-01-10>

⁷⁸ Ibid.

		
Image 1. Qyl qobyz	Image 2. Prima-qobyz	Image 3. Alt-qobyz
		
Image 4. Bass-qobyz	Image 5. Contrabass-qobyz	Image 6. Initial prima-qobyz

Images retrieved from the website of Pavlodar National University:

http://www.psu.kz/index.php?option=com_content&view=article&id=3821&Itemid=157&lang=kaz

Finally, the honorary teacher D. Tezekbayev along with the musical master A. Pershin transformed the instrument to the level known today, by keeping the strings and the timbre, but changing the shape of the instrument to one that more resembled a violin (Image 2). The unofficial name of the *prima-qobyz* became the “violin-shaped qobyz”, and the position of the musician while playing the instrument and a specific technique of playing it by pressing

fingernails to the strings were the only two characteristics that remained from the original instrument.⁷⁹

Marsh writes that similar changes of instrumental parts - replacing animal skin or leather with wood or metal, horsehair strings with nylon or metal strings, and curved bows with European instrumental bows - were imposed on traditional instruments throughout the Soviet Union.⁸⁰ A similar approach of advancing instruments based on orchestral timbres affected other Kazakh traditional instruments as well (*dombyra*), but the *qobyz* underwent especially significant reconstruction. Saida Daukeyeva outline that this kind of imposition caused severe decrease of ancient practices up to the point of danger of vanishment of performance traditions and repertoire.⁸¹

Reimagining the *Qobyz*

After independence, both the *qyl-qobyz* and the *prima-qobyz* found their places in Kazakhstan's music scene. Some musicians started coming back to the traditional version of the instrument, the *qyl-qobyz*, and purposefully reimagining its role in Kazakh music. One of those musicians is a multi-instrumentalist, composer and a lecturer at the National Academy of Arts "Shabyt", Almat Saizhan. I interviewed him during my fieldwork, and this section will analyze the meaning Almat Saizhan attaches to the instrument and the modernizations it underwent.

⁷⁹ Ibid.

⁸⁰ Peter K. Marsh. "The Horse-head Fiddle and the Cosmopolitan Reimagination of Tradition in Mongolia" in *Current Research in Ethnomusicology* ed. Jennifer C. Post (New York: Routledge, 2009): 64

⁸¹ Saida Daukeyeva, "Kazakhstan. Le kobyz. L'ancienne viole des chamanes / Kazakhstan. The Kobyz. The Ancient Viol of the Shamans, and: Raushan Orazbaeva. Akku. Kazakhstan. Kyl-kobyz (review)." *Asian Music*, vol. 38 no. 1 (2007): 156

After the declaration of independence, many scholars noticed the restoration of the traditional instruments and traditional music. The President of Kazakhstan N.Nazarbayev in his recent article “Seven Facets of the Great Steppe” called for a release of collection of musical compositions for Kazakh traditional instruments like the *qobyz*, *dombra*, *sybyzgy*, *sazsyrynay*, etc.

⁸² The interest for traditional instruments is evident from the international community as well. Saida Daukeeva wrote a review of the first two recording of *qyl-qobyz* published by Western companies in the early 2000s, outlining that the release symbolized “a revival of a ‘backward’ from Soviet officials’ point of view shamanistic instruments like *Qobyz*”.⁸³ Marsh claimed in the article about the modernization of a Mongolian traditional instrument that the reimagination of traditional instruments by institution-based musicians and international community assists the strengthening of the new national identity and national consciousness.⁸⁴ Megan Rancier further outlined the participation of traditional musical practices in the discourse of national identity by examining *qyl-qobyz* as an archive, arguing that it significantly shaped Kazakh national identity.

⁸⁵

The reclaiming of traditional instruments is noticeable in the community of composers as well. For example, during the interview Saizhan mentioned his close friend, a fellow-musician named

⁸² Nursultan Nazarbayev, “Seven Facets of the Great Steppe” (Astana, 2018), http://www.akorda.kz/en/events/akorda_news/press_conferences/article-of-the-president-of-the-republic-of-kazakhstan-nursultan-nazarbayev-seven-facets-of-the-great-steppe

⁸³ Saida Daukeeva, “Kazakhstan. Le kobyz. L'ancienne viole des chamanes / Kazakhstan. The Kobyz. The Ancient Viol of the Shamans, and: Raushan Orazbaeva. Akku. Kazakhstan. Kyl-kobyz (review).” *Asian Music*, vol. 38 no. 1 (2007): 156

⁸⁴ Peter K. Marsh. “The Horse-head Fiddle and the Cosmopolitan Reimagination of Tradition in Mongolia” in *Current Research in Ethnomusicology* ed. Jennifer C. Post (New York: Routledge, 2009): 71

⁸⁵ See Megan Rancier “The Musical Instrument as National Archive: A Case Study of the Kazakh *Qyl-qobyz*” *Ethnomusicology* Vol. 58, No. 3 (2014): 389 and Rancier, Megan. “Ancient roots, modern nation-building. Kazakh spirituality and identity in the music of the Turan ensemble” In *a Turkic Soundscapes: From Shamanic Voices to Hip-Hop* ed. Raziya Sultanova, Megan Rancier (Oxon: Routledge, 2018): 230

Arman Zhaiymov, who wrote a composition specifically for the *qyl-qobyz* and planned to present it in autumn 2018. He claimed, that it was the first concert with a symphonic orchestra consisting of 2 parts, 20 minutes in duration, written specifically for “*our qobyz*”.⁸⁶

In spite of the outlined reintroduction of *qyl-qobyz*, my interviewee expressed support of modernizations the instrument underwent. Almat Saizhan confessed his opinion that “*prima-qobyz* is not a violin, nor is it a *qobyz*, but something in the middle”, and that “we need to finish, improve it”:⁸⁷

*Akhmet Zhubanov showed us the way, but we stopped... I don't think that qyl-qobyz should be forgotten, but I think that both instruments should be used on the same level*⁸⁸

Thus, a traditional instrument has been reclaimed after its oppression and transformation, but some institution-based musicians express support of the modernizations and a willingness to continue the Soviet legacy. This reflects the dubious nature of culture in the post-Soviet state, where traditional musicians use ancient versions of the *qobyz* to communicate authenticity and at the same time support the Soviet policy that facilitated the modernization of *qyl-qobyz* and creation of *prima-qobyz*. Arguably, the ideology of romantic nationalism that allowed the incorporation of traditional instruments into the orchestra in Kazakhstan is still at play in the local scene of traditional music.

⁸⁶ Almat Saizhan, interview, August 25, 2018.

⁸⁷ Ibid.

⁸⁸ Ibid.

Performing National Identity

Apart from restoring traditional instruments, the government of the newly independent state started organizing various events to strengthen national consciousness. One of them was a celebration of 550 years since the creation of Kazakh Khandom in 2015. Although the exact date of the creation of the Kazakh Khandom is still a topic of debate,⁸⁹ the event itself holds more of an ideological character and is a part of a modern nation-building policy that puts forward the message of a glorious past with glorious ancestors.⁹⁰

In 2015, various cultural events and concerts were held all over the country dedicated to this celebration. Many of these celebrations included the performance of a musical piece written by Almat Saizhan called *Khan Kene*, about Kenesary Kasymuly.⁹¹ According to the composer, the composition was written in 2005 but became significantly popular in 2015. *Khan Kene* composition is a part of national identity discourse not only because it was a part of a nation-building event, but also because it is dedicated to a prominent figure of Kazakh history.⁹²

“Khan Kene” is dedicated to Kenesary Kasymuly, the khan of the Middle Zhuz, the leader of an anti-Russian uprising (1837-47) who was tragically killed during the fight with Kyrghyz warriors when he was heading South after his defeat.⁹³ Kenesary Kasymuly was a controversial figure in Soviet Kazakh historiography. In 1924, M.Auezov wrote a play named *Khan-Kene* that was denounced for presenting the khan as a leader of the Kazakh nation and the khanate as

⁸⁹ A.A. Galiyev “Actual Problems of Kazakh History. Review of the Book by K.A. Pishchulina ‘Essays on the History of the Kazakh Khanate’” *Zolotoordynskoe Obozrenie*, Vol 5, Iss 2, (2017): 467

⁹⁰ Anthony D. Smith *National identity* (Reno: University of Nevada Press, 1991): 66

⁹¹ Anna Velichko, “U izvestnogo muzykalnogo proizvedeniya poyavilos’ lico” *Caravan*, June, 3, 2016, <https://www.caravan.kz/gazeta/u-izvestnogo-muzykalnogo-proizvedeniya-poyavilos-lico-88171/>

⁹² Almat Saizhan, interview, August 25, 2018.

⁹³ Musa Chagataev, Belek Soltonev, Shabdan Dzhanataev, *The Šabdan Baatır Codex*, trans. Daniel Prior: (Leiden: Brill, 2013): 148

governmental institution. In the 1930s, the Soviet government depicted Tsarism negatively as “military-feudal imperialism” in order to emphasize the achievement of the proletariat. Soviet historians were allowed to criticize the tsarist period and to publish materials about anti-Tsarist popular revolts of the masses.⁹⁴ In the early 1940s, when a team of Kazakh and Russian historians published a history of Kazakh SSR, their work was initially appreciated but then withdrawn due to its relatively positive depiction of Kenesary Kasymuly and thus its supposed anti-Russian sentiment.⁹⁵ However, in 1969 Ilyas Yessenberlin managed to publish *Kakhar (Wrath)*, a book about Kenesary Khan, which became the third book in his *Koshpendiler (Nomads)* trilogy.⁹⁶ Scholars outline that Soviet policies on nationalities were often conflicting over time, differing from “Stalin’s purges to Brezhnev’s stagnation”.⁹⁷ Yet Kenesary Khan’s revolt was controversial throughout the period and his aristocratic class origin did not fit into the official Kazakh national narrative during the Soviet government. After independence, Kazakh historians started recovering the national history and claimed that 19th-century uprisings were “national-liberation movements”, while Kenesary Khan was proclaimed the leader of a national liberation movement. His statue was put in the center of the capital city Astana, and one of the central streets in the capital is named after him. Almat Saizhan’s composition about the patriotic figure Kenesary Khan therefore underlines his participation as a musician in the discourse of national identity in contemporary Kazakhstan.

⁹⁴ Yilmaz, Harun. *National Identities in the Soviet Historiography: The rise of nations under Stalin*. (New York: Routledge, 2015):

⁹⁵ Gabriel McGuire “Aqyn agha? Abai Zholy as socialist realism and as literary history” *Journal of Eurasian Studies* Vol 9 (2018): 4

⁹⁶ Diana T. Kudaibergenova, *Rewriting the Nation in Modern Kazakh Literature: Elites and Narratives* (Maryland: Lexington Books, 2017):84

⁹⁷ Ibid: 90.

The performance itself further indexes Kazakh nationalism and Soviet cultural appropriation.⁹⁸

The composition was performed by the Orchestra of the National Academic Philharmony of Astana city and Almat Saizhan was himself the conductor of the orchestra during the performance. The instruments the orchestra used resemble the classical orchestra of the Soviet period, except that it had a team of *qyl-qobyz* players among the *prima-qobyz* players and a team of *sherter* players among the *dombyra* players. Apart from that, the orchestra consisted of *dombyra*, *prima-dombyra*, *contrabass-dombyra*, and *bass-dombyra* teams; *prima-qobyz*, *contrabass-qobyz*, *alt-qobyz* teams; flute team; percussion team; oboe team; and accordion team.

The orchestra was dressed in light-blue and dark-blue national dresses of velvet textile with golden ornaments on them, similar to the dresses orchestra members would wear during concerts in Soviet times. The conductor Almat Saizhan was wearing a tuxedo. The instrumentation and costumes of the orchestra reflect its academic nature, deeply rooted in a governmental institution that has a strong Soviet legacy.

The venue stage had a LED-screen behind the orchestra and during the performance it showed an animated video of Kazakh *batyrs* (warriors). The video was synchronized to the tempo of the orchestra, showing peaceful Kazakh village during the calm initial part of the composition, and gradually shifting to the destruction of the village, with *batyrs*⁹⁹ riding to the fight and actually fighting during the high-tempo part of the composition. The visual puts the audience in the

⁹⁸ Almat Saizhan's concert published on April, 2016 on Youtube, "Khan Kene" composition at 1.41-1.51 <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=O3xdPVp9e84>

⁹⁹ Kazakh warriors

imagery of the historically significant Kenesary revolt, reinforcing historical memory and contributing to the patriotic sentiment.

During the interview with Almat Saizhan, he expressed nostalgic sentiment about the state of music in the Soviet period: “In Soviet times, we had strong composers like Gaziza Zhubanova, Kuat Shildebayev (a student of Gaziza Zhubanova), after that, there is a decrease, I don’t know why.” Saizhan also shared his frustration with the way traditional and classical musicians are treated in Kazakhstan, saying that the audience does not appreciate them:

Traditional musicians are poor. They are not appreciated. I get to travel and the way traditional musicians are perceived here completely differs from the way they are perceived in foreign countries. We performed in halls that are 250 years old. We got standing ovations for 5 minutes... Values here are, to put it roughly, “cheap”. They get distracted by cheap pop musicians, to put it simply, “toi musicians”... You may ask any Kazakhstani, they will know Kairat Nurtas. Not everyone knows Aiman Musakhodjayeva, Zhaniya Aubakirova or Aitkali Zhaiymov. Even if they are real masters and recognized musicians.

Here Almat Saizhan refers to Kairat Nurtas, who is a famous *toi* musician in Kazakhstan. It is important to outline that *toi* music, played at social gatherings of feasting celebrations “traditionally organized around important life cycle events such as weddings and anniversaries” (*toi* in Kazakh language), is very popular in the region and it plays a significant role for the local society.¹⁰⁰ Arguably, the significance of *toi* music is not in its sonic characteristics but in its participatory qualities and the values of sociality that it provides. According to Thomas Turino participatory performance prioritizes “social relations” over “producing art”, meaning that “the etiquette and quality of sociality is granted priority over the quality of the sound per se”.¹⁰¹ Rene

¹⁰⁰ René Provis “Shifting social dynamics and economic inequality in the post-Soviet space: Networking and participation in *toi* among the novyi Kyrgyz” *Economic Anthropology* 2 (2015): 371.

¹⁰¹ Thomas Turino *Music as Social Life: The Politics of Participation* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 2008), 25

Provis claims that there is an increase in the number of such celebrations in the Kyrgyz Republic and argues that this increase “has been mistaken for a revitalization of kinship relations, when in fact the *toi* often reflect more pragmatic and strategic considerations vis-à-vis social networking”.¹⁰² Thus, *toi* music with simple beats, convenient for dancing, simple lyrics and melody is wrongfully described as bad music because of its inability to meet the requirements of presentational music, while it accomplishes functions of participatory music. *Toi* music is strongly associated commerce, simplicity, inauthenticity, and because of that Almat Saizhan and many other participants of my research tend to describe themselves in opposition to *toi* musicians.

The “Khan Kene” composition, musical instruments, and visual accompaniment communicate the narrative that modern Kazakhstan achieved the independence and sovereignty that Kenesary Khan hoped to achieve. The concert began with a shamanic dance, but ended with the orchestra performance that has the sentiment of the Soviet past, which communicated the connection between past and the present and a sense of historical continuity. But which part of that past and its music is authentic? I would say that all of it, because they all represent the music we practice at some point or another. This part of the chapter focused on the modernization of the *qobyz* in the Soviet period, while the next part focuses on the modernization of the *dombyra* in post-Soviet Kazakhstan and the peculiarities of both stories.

Modernizing the *Dombyra*

¹⁰² René Provis “Shifting social dynamics and economic inequality in the post-Soviet space: Networking and participation in *toi* among the novyi Kyrgyz” *Economic Anthropology* 2 (2015): 371

This section examines the musical practices of the ethnic rock group Aldaspan, and analyzes the way they participate in the construction of national identity through performing the mixture of the ethnic and rock sounds, using an electric versions of the national instrument, the long-necked two-stringed lute *dombyra*, producing covers of traditional compositions on *dombyra (kuy)* and creating their own music. The section explores the modernization of *dombyra*, the music Aldaspan produces, and the meaning they reproduce through their music.

I suggest that the *dombyra* is the main national identity marker in their music, and that modernized instrument as well as the modernized sound are examples of national music shifting from what Motti Regev called “purist essentialism” to “aesthetic cosmopolitanism”.¹⁰³ My analysis is based on scholarly works, data from an in-depth interview with the creator and leader of the band, Nurzhan Toishy, and the music of Aldaspan. I apply the argument about ethnic rock proposed by Motti Regev in the context of fusion of the ethnic sound with global rock sound, after exploring the story of creation of the *elektro-dombyra*, and analyzing what their music and image of the band signifies. I argue that Aldaspan uses the *elektro-dombyra* to seem credible and to validate themselves as musicians, while incorporating global ideologies of metal music to sound original and therefore authentic.

In his book about the social life of musical instruments, Eliot Bates discusses amplified Turkish saz and the change of playing techniques, but outlines that a popular instrument like the *saz* is not necessarily “symbolic of the nation” or “embodies the nation”.¹⁰⁴ Bates writes that *saz*

¹⁰³ Motti Regev, “Ethno-National Pop-Rock Music: Aesthetic Cosmopolitanism Made from Within”. *Cultural Sociology*, Volume 1(3) (2007): 317.

¹⁰⁴ Eliot Bates “The Social Life of Musical Instruments” *Ethnomusicology*, Vol. 56, No. 3 (2012): 374

became “the key instrument in Turkey” as a result of the national project.¹⁰⁵ Consequently the importance of the instrument grew to the point of acquiring the ability of “mobilizing the public” for cultural events that have a strong connotation of national consciousness.¹⁰⁶ Arguably, the *dombyra* has a similar ability to gather the public and to bring up the sentiment of national pride, evident in the national celebrations in Kazakhstan, where two thousand people of various ages gathered to play on the *dombyra*.¹⁰⁷

During the interview, Nurzhan Toishy told me that he came up with the idea of creating a fusion instrument, the *elektro-dombyra*, in the end of the 1980s when he started listening to and became keen on metal bands like Metallica, Slayer, and Sepultura while going to the *dombyra* classes. He thought that the rhythmic patterns, riffs and chords of the Kazakh *kuys*¹⁰⁸ and metal songs were quite similar, and thought about creating an *elektro-dombyra* that could recreate the sound of the metal music and modernize the sound of the traditional *kuys*.¹⁰⁹

It is important to mention that *elektro-dombyra* is not the only instance of the modernization of the traditional instrument. Martin Strokes explored electrified *saz*, focusing on playing techniques, and illustrated that “*elektrosaz* has resulted in the development of distinct techniques”.¹¹⁰ Interestingly, Aldaspan also demonstrate interesting playing techniques, for

¹⁰⁵ Ibid. 386

¹⁰⁶ Ibid. 378

¹⁰⁷ Дамир Байманов “Президент посетил концерт 2 тыс. домбристов в Астане” Kazinform July 1, 2018. https://www.inform.kz/ru/prezident-posetil-kontsert-2-tys-dombristov-v-astane_a3305797

¹⁰⁸ Traditional Kazakh musical compositions played on dombyra, 2-5 minutes in length.

¹⁰⁹ Nurzhan Toishy, interview, July, 4, 2018

¹¹⁰ Martin Strokes “The Media and Reform: The saz and elektrosaz in Urban Turkish Folk Music” *British Journal of Ethnomusicology*, Vol. 1 (1992): 95

example using guitar picks, which is evident in their music video for the song *Aldaspan*.¹¹¹ The bass *elektro-dombyra* in the video is also noticeably played in a *finger-style*.

In 2009 when Toishy got the financial opportunities, he brought necessary electric details from Moscow and ordered a testing version (Image 7.) of the *elektro-dombyra* from the worker of the Kazakh National Conservatory in Almaty and an instrument maker Kubekov Murat. The tested instrument had a semi-acoustic hollow body, two pickups, and a metal plate with output jack, bridge, pickup selector switch, volume and tone control. Unfortunately, the body of the instrument had many shortcomings that influenced the sound and the frets on the neck were incorrect. However, this tested instrument showed that the specific sound of acoustic *dombyra* wasn't lost completely, and two similar in width strings kept the timbre of *dombyra*, which gave Toishy hope in continuing working on the instrument. After realizing that Kazakhstan lacked qualified electric instrument makers, Toishy ordered the next version of *elektro-dombyra* from the specialized company "Shamray" in Moscow. In 2010 Toishy ordered from the same company solo (Image 8), rhythm (Image 9), and bass (Image 10) versions of the *elektro-dombyra* and received the instruments in 2011. The final versions of the instruments were made from solid wood, had metal strings, and other body parts like two pickups, output jack, bridge, pickup selector switch, volume and tone controls were on the body. The solo electric guitar also had a tremolo arm. Instrument makers from "Shamray" took into account the shortcomings of the tested version and due to their rich experience in making electric instruments, created *the elektro-dombyra* instruments that Aldaspan is still using.¹¹²

¹¹¹ Aldaspan - Aldaspan, December, 2011 at 3.22
https://www.youtube.com/watch?time_continue=156&v=lv3Xb1SeRiU

¹¹² Ibid.



Image 7. The testing version of *elektro-dombyra*



Image 8. The solo *elektro-dombyra*



Image 9. The rhythm *elektro-dombyra*



Image 10. The bass *elektro-dombyra*

Images retrieved from <http://aldaspan.kz/ru/history.html>

During the time the instruments were being prepared, Toishy started recruiting band members to create Aldaspan. In spite of not being a professional *dombyra* player, Toishy paid attention to the qualification of musicians and recruited professional musicians. Before joining the band, solo *elektro-dombyra* player Maksat Khasanov and rhythm *elektro-dombyra* player Bakhytzhan

Zhelderbayev were *dombyra* players in the Kazakh National Conservatory named after Kurmangazy. This demonstrates that professionalism and proper education was very important for the band members. Interestingly, Maksat as a musician with an institutionalized education insisted on recruiting an acoustic *bass dombyra* player as a bass *elektro-dombyra* player, however due to unsuccessful searches, the band recruited the traditional acoustic *dombyra* player Aisarbek Akiyashev to play a bass *elektro-dombyra*.¹¹³

In the beginning of their career, Honored artist of the Republic of Kazakhstan Baigali Serkebayev and an entrepreneur Izbasar Buzayev supported the band by providing them free rehearsing studios. However, overall the creation of the instrument and of the band was an individual initiative of Toishy. This is an example of a grassroots culture initiative modernizing traditional musical practices through the modification of the traditional instrument.¹¹⁴

The choice to perform hard rock and heavy metal music on the modernized *dombyra* was personal for Nurzhan Toishy, the mastermind behind Aldaspan. During our conversation he claimed that no one can be surprised by electric guitars, while *elektro-dombyra* brings uniqueness to their music, makes them stand out among other talented hard rock musicians. Toishy also outlined that the band wishes to demonstrate to the world the capabilities of the instrument. In spite of pointing out the similarities in techniques of metal guitarists and traditional *dombyra* players, the group outlined on their website that overall their style of playing is unknown (*neizvestniy stil' igry*)¹¹⁵ to the international audience.¹¹⁶

¹¹³ Ibid.

¹¹⁴ Ibid.

¹¹⁵ The interview with Nurzhan Toishy was in Kazakh language, but the quote is taken from the official website of the band in that provides information in Kazakh, English, and Russian languages: <http://aldaspan.kz/>

¹¹⁶ Ibid.

The level of professionalism and institution-based knowledge that the band members paid attention to while recruiting musicians outlines the importance of professionalism for the band. Moreover, the Masat Khasanov's attempt to recruit *bass dombyra* player for a *bass elektro-dombyra* player demonstrates the peculiar case of adaptation of adapted musical practices and that musical practices introduced during the Soviet period still influence musical choices contemporary musicians make. Musicians strongly identify their band with their instruments and view elektro-dombyra as their unique trait.

Performing Gender and National Identity

Scholars outline that hard rock and metal music genre contains ideologies of nationalism and exaggerated masculinity.¹¹⁷ The music of Aldaspan is also infused with ideas of nationalism and male dominance. This demonstrates that the band accepts global ideas about what metal bands should be like and what they should sound like.

Scholars outline that there are various forms of masculinity, but this section focuses on hegemonic masculinity. I use the definition proposed by Donaldson that defines hegemonic masculinity as a “culturally idealized form of personal and collective masculinity”, which is connected with male dominance and reinforces certain ideas about manhood.¹¹⁸

Aldaspan indicates in their official website,¹¹⁹ that the main topic of their lyrics is military, male prowess (*voennaya, muzhskaya doblest'*), which is also outlined in the name of the band:

¹¹⁷ Karl Spracklen, Caroline Lucas and Mark Deeks “The Construction of Heavy Metal Identity through Heritage Narratives: A Case Study of Extreme Metal Bands in the North of England” *Popular Music and Society* Vol. 37, No. 1 (2014): 48

¹¹⁸ M. Donaldson “What is Hegemonic Masculinity?” *In Theory and Society* Vol. 22, No. 5 (1993): 643

¹¹⁹ “Aldaspan” accessed January, 10, 2019 <http://aldaspan.kz/>

Aldaspan means a heavy saber for collapsing soldiers in armor. They claim that their music tries to get across “sounds of fights”, stories of “bravery” and “courage”. The sentiment of male power is evident in the fact that Aldaspan regularly performs at *Kazaksha kures* (Kazakh traditional wrestling) competitions held in Almaty, while back in 2014 the band also performed at national MMA fighting competition.

Scholars like Robert Walser claim that distortion aids reinscription of masculine dominance in heavy rock. He argues that “distortion functions as a sign of extreme power and intense expression by overflowing its channels and materializing the exceptional effort that produces it”.

¹²⁰ Therefore, the heavy metal sound that the *elektro-dombyra* produces is also arguably a sign of masculine power.

Scholars outline that many English heavy metal bands reinforce warrior Viking images in their music.¹²¹ Similarly, Aldaspan uses images of various warriors and rulers that inhabited Central Asian region. The band outlines that their main inspiration are ancient Turkic epic texts that “praise heroic deeds”. Their music has the sentiment of connection to glorious ancestors like Genghis Khan,¹²² who is believed to be one of the ancestors of Central Asian nations,¹²³ and heroes of the Turkic epic texts. For example, their first album was called Attila¹²⁴ and included songs like Atilla, Kultegin, and Edige, written for the heroes of epic texts, which strongly builds

¹²⁰ Robert Walser, “The Body in the Music: Epistemology and Musical Semiotics”, *College Music Symposium* Vol. 31 (1991): 123.

¹²¹ Karl Spracklen, Caroline Lucas and Mark Deeks “The Construction of Heavy Metal Identity through Heritage Narratives: A Case Study of Extreme Metal Bands in the North of England”: 51

¹²² The founder and the first Khan of Mongol Empire. For further information read Ratchnevsky, Paul (1991). *Genghis Khan: His Life and Legacy*. Blackwell Publishing. pp. 9–10.

¹²³ Thomas Welsford, *Four Types of Loyalty in Early Modern Central Asia: the Tuqai-Timurid takeover of Greater Ma wara al-nahr* (Leiden: Brill, 2013): 1

¹²⁴ The ruler of the Hunnic Empire who is arguably of a Scythian decent. For further information read Fields, Nic. *Attila the Hun* (Command). Osprey Publishing; UK ed. edition (August 18, 2015). p. 58-60.

up this idea of a glorious past with glorious ancestors, which is evident in the music of Almat Saizhan as well.¹²⁵ Megan Rancier outlines that similar sentiment is widespread in Kazakh popular music production and identifies it with Svetlana Boym's term "*restorative nostalgia*"; this kind of nostalgia "strives to supply an idealized version of the past, which simultaneously inspires pride in one's own national history, and glosses over inconsistencies or untruths that would complicate this polished version of the nation's past".¹²⁶

Thus, Aldaspan shares a global view on the content and sound of a heavy metal band, situating this idea in the context of Kazakhstan. The band incorporates both global and local ideas about the content of their music, their image and style. This integration of globality and locality is evident in their performance as well.

During the analysis of the visual representation of Aldaspan, I noticed that the band reproduces ideologies of a heavy metal band with prevalence of black clothing, black background image, leather jackets, etc. Traditionally, musicians play *dombyra* sitting on a chair, but the band is standing like a regular rock band.

¹²⁵ Anthony D. Smith *National identity* (Reno: University of Nevada Press, 1991): 66

¹²⁶ Megan Rancier "Resurrecting the Nomads: Historical Nostalgia and Modern Nationalism in Contemporary Kazakh Popular Music Videos" *Popular Music and Society*, Vol. 32 No. 3 (2009):388



Image 11. Screenshot of the video on Youtube: Aldaspan - Edige¹²⁷

Interestingly, the solo *elektro-dombyra* on the far left of the screenshot resembles a popular style of finishing for musical instruments. The best known examples of a “sunburst finish” are the Gibson Les Paul and the Fender Stratocaster guitars, with typical area of lighter color in the center that darkens gradually towards the edges.¹²⁸ However, the sunburst finish on this *elektro-dombyra* darkens towards black Kazakh traditional ornamentation.

The band has a wide range of songs they perform: covers of *kuys*, original songs with parts of *kuys* inserted, original songs in Kazakh, Russian, and English. Some songs include the sound of *shangqobyz* (mouth harp) as well. The vocals vary from the death growls usually used by death metal vocalists (performed by Nurzhan Toishy) to low bass vocals (performed by Maksat Khasanov). Musicians incorporate both regular sounds of *elektro-dombyra* resembling acoustic *dombyra* and distorted sound of *elektro-dombyra* resembling electric guitar. The drums are

¹²⁷ Music video of Aldaspan - Edige, accessed February 1, 2019
https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Vu_DZ6uZITs

¹²⁸ Larry Sandberg, *The Acoustic Guitar Guide, Revised and Updated: Everything You Need to Know* (Chicago Review Press): 72

usually fast, rhythmic, and intense with extensive usage of crash cymbals. Overall, the band reproduces rock and heavy metal aesthetics in their performance. Scholarly works suggest that rock aesthetic serves as the uniting element or common ground that connects local ethnic rock with other rock music creating “*aesthetic cosmopolitanism*” with national sentiment.¹²⁹ Therefore, I argue that Aldaspan reproduces hard rock music ideologies to create familiarity with global rock bands, but maintains local instrument, local themes and ornamentation to stand out among those bands and preserve their uniqueness.

“Aesthetic Cosmopolitanism” of Aldaspan

In this section I want to refer to the researcher Motti Regev¹³⁰ who investigated ethno-national pop-rock music in Israel and Argentina. Regev writes that ethno-national pop-rock music reflects a globally similar pattern of “aesthetic cosmopolitanism” that put “ethno-national cultural uniqueness” into global realities. Regev thinks that inevitably “traditional music will be hybridized with pop-rock styles, indigenous instruments will be plugged into amplifiers, and modes of vocal delivery will be adjusted to the use of microphones and amplification...”.¹³¹

Motti Regev writes that initial steps in achieving “aesthetic cosmopolitanism” is “the success of leading rock artists in establishing themselves as inheritors of, rather than rebels against, the folk tradition”.¹³² Aldaspan positions itself as inheritors of traditional music, through the content of their songs, which is reflected in their second album, *Tokne Light*, released in 2012. It consists completely of rock versions of the *kuy* compositions written by famous dombyra players like

¹²⁹ Motti Regev, “Ethno-National Pop-Rock Music: Aesthetic Cosmopolitanism Made from Within”. *Cultural Sociology*, Volume 1(3) (2007): 336.

¹³⁰ *Ibid.*

¹³¹ *Ibid*: 336

¹³² *Ibid*: 331

Kurmangazy Sagyrbayuly, Turkesh Kalkauly, Dauletkerei Shigayuly of the 18th-19th centuries. Their other albums, released after 2012, also include rock versions of other famous traditional composition among their original songs and some original compositions include parts of traditional *kuy*.

In 2012 Toishy arranged the inclusion of Aldaspan songs in the top foreign ethnic rock songs chart of the American music label Roadrunners, which he says worked with rock bands like Linkin Park and System of a Down. The band got to the second place in the daily chart and seventh place in the weekly chart of the label. Toishy outlined this as an important factor that influenced their later recognition and acceptance in Kazakhstan:

We have producers, mass media, but they can't support young talents because they always ask for money. If you pay, they will make you famous, but if you make a name for yourself, they will come to you and invite you. They will even pay if necessary. Therefore, it seems like there is no way for one to grow. Let's not go far away, take Dimash¹³³ for example. People criticized him.¹³⁴ They claimed that he couldn't sing, this or that. Once he surprised the foreigners, now even the president is inviting him.¹³⁵

Interestingly, Toishy thinks it is a Turkic cultural phenomena, referring to Sultan Beybars,¹³⁶ who became famous among Turks only after becoming a ruler in Egypt:¹³⁷

This is in general a natural bad quality of Turkic people that sinked in our blood. We can't support each other. We are not united... This is not a recent thing, it's ancient... Sultan Beibarys for example...¹³⁸

¹³³ Dimash Kudaibergen is a Kazakh singer, songwriter with a wide vocal range, who rose to fame in China after participating in Hunan TV's Singer competition. https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Dimash_Kudaibergen

¹³⁴ <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=2n0dsY7MDjE>

¹³⁵ Nurzhan Toishy, interview, July, 4, 2018

¹³⁶ Beybars was a Sultan of Egypt and Syria in late 13th century, originally from a Turkic Kipchak land: <https://www.britannica.com/biography/Baybars-I>

¹³⁷ Nurzhan Toishy, interview, July, 4, 2018

¹³⁸ Nurzhan Toishy, interview, July, 4, 2018

Therefore, after a relative success of the ethnic rock in the Anglo-American market, they could claim cultural authority and argue for the high quality of their music in the local music scene. This could also communicate that the band is able to compete in the foreign market where American rock standards are dominant.¹³⁹

Controversy Surrounding the *Elektro-dombyra*

Many scholars outline that *dombyra* is “widely considered a symbol of Kazakh identity”¹⁴⁰ and a “common signifier of national identity among all Kazakhs”.¹⁴¹ Therefore the creation of the *elektro-dombyra* brought some controversy from musicians that play traditional acoustic dombyra, mostly from the elderly generation. Nurzhan Toishy mentioned that once he showed *elektro-dombyra* to the parliamentary deputy and traditional singer Bekbolat Tileukhan, but he was not amused by the instrument. Tileukhan said that *elektro-dombyra* appears to be “dead”, “soulless”. Toishy recollected that:

*There were a lot of such opinions (negative). Especially from the older people that make a living of playing acoustic dombyra. One person who works at the conservatory said something like “We need to open a criminal case for spoiling the sacred dombyra”...Well, we entered the show business with electric dombyra. There will be negative and positive opinions. Overall, the population is more enlightened, mostly people support us.*¹⁴²

Similarly to this, the creation of the electric bass stirred negative concerns over its fused nature.

For example, Brian F. Wright writes that jazz musicians thought that the electric bass “sounded

¹³⁹ Ibid: 319

¹⁴⁰ Jennifer C. Post, ‘I Take My “Dombra” and Sing to Remember My Homeland’: Identity, Landscape and Music in Kazakh Communities of Western Mongolia. *Ethnomusicology Forum*. Vol. 16, No. 1, Musical Performance in the Diaspora (Jun., 2007): 47

¹⁴¹ Megan Rancier. “Ancient roots, modern nation-building. Kazakh spirituality and identity in the music of the Turan ensemble” In *a Turkic Soundscapes: From Shamanic Voices to Hip-Hop* ed. Raziya Sultanova, Megan Rancier, (Oxon: Routledge, 2018):220

¹⁴² Nurzhan Toishy, interview, July, 4, 2018

like an ‘amplified plink-plonk’ that lacked a ‘true bass sound’”.¹⁴³ Wright also quotes the electric bass player Monk Montgomery’s interview with Mike Newman, who said: “The electric bass was considered a bastard instrument. Conventional bass players despised it. It was new and a threat to what they knew”.¹⁴⁴

Wright explains the negativity with a “general snobbery toward the instrument”,¹⁴⁵ but in the case of *dombyra*, the instrument has a strong national sentiment to it, making questions of virtuosity and cultural capital in play as well. There is a widespread kazakh saying “*Nagyz qazaq - qazaq emes, nagyz qazaq - dombyra*” (*The true kazakh is not a kazakh, the true kazakh is dombyra*), which reflects an important role the instrument plays in Kazakh musical life. Due to that, there is a much stronger sense of “ownership” of the instrument and the need to protect it.

The discussion of the modernization of *qobyz* in the previous section suggests legitimacy in that case. I think that it is connected to the fact that the modernization was conducted by musicians and instrument makers deeply rooted in institutions of culture production with governmental agenda, who were “authorized” to modify the instrument. In the case of *dombyra*, traditional *dombyra* performers may consider Nurzhan Toishy as an illegitimate figure to modernize the instrument because he is not based in a cultural institution.

With all that being said, Toishy outlined that the general population is supportive of them, and enjoys the music created by the band. I asked Almat Saizhan about his attitude towards Aldaspan, and he showed admiration for their work as well. Thus, Aldaspan is arguably

¹⁴³ Brian F. Wright “A Bastard Instrument”: The Fender Precision Bass, Monk Montgomery, and Jazz in the 1950s. *Jazz Perspectives*, Vol. 8, No. 3 (2014): 293

¹⁴⁴ Ibid: 302

¹⁴⁵ Ibid: 293

contributing to the shift from the “purist” attitude towards cosmopolitan and incorporating the national sound to the global music scene. The band started by amplifying the traditional instrument, establishing themselves as the continuators and modernizers of the traditional sound, and creating their own original compositions.

Officials of the country are accepting this modernized version of *dombyra* and including it in the discourse of what the *dombyra* is. This is evident in the daily republican social-political newspaper *Liter* (Image 12) that published an article about Aldaspan on the *National day of*

dombyra.¹⁴⁶ The article *Kazah-bitlz, ili o chem poet elektrodombra* (*The Kazakh Beatles, or what does elektrodombra sing about*) was published in June, 30, 2018 in the “culture” section. The name of the article suggests, in spite of a very different genres of Aldaspan and The Beatles, that the band reflects ideologies of rock music for the author and participates in the discourse of what *dombyra* can be like. The fact the this article is published due to the celebration of the new holiday - *Dombyra* day, signifies that



¹⁴⁶ Alena Aleksandrova, “Kazah-bitlz, ili o chem poet eletrodombra” *Liter*, June 30, 2018

contemporary music on *dombyra*, and make various covers”. The quote suggests integration of traditional Kazakh instrument with global sounds and the modernization of its image. The interviewer outlines that the “your (the band’s) popularity, means that the popularity of *dombyra* is also rising,” pressing on the fact that the band plays on *dombyra*, even if it is a transformed version of it. Considering a previous notion that *dombyra* is a signifier of Kazakh national identity, the band arguably expands the idea of what Kazakhness is.

In the article Nurzhan Toishy also mentioned that in 2014 he started producing a new band *Sharapat* that performs not only on *elektro-dombyra*, but also on *elektro-zhetigen*. This may signify a growing trend of modernizing traditional instruments in Kazakhstan and it is definitely a theme that can be further researched.

Conclusion

The stories of the *prima-qobyz* and *electro-dombyra* raise the questions of authenticity, tradition, modernization, national identity. According to Marsh, “there is a great fluidity in the processes of creating traditions”.¹⁴⁷ Thus, I assume that the way *prima-qobyz* was integrated into the Kazakh musical tradition in spite of the restoration of the *qyl-qobyz* suggests that the *elektro-dombyra* and other modernized traditional instruments can be integrated into the local musical scene and continue creating new traditions.

The stories illustrate how Soviet, local, and global musical practices influence contemporary Kazakh music scene. These practices also contribute to the meaning of music, instruments, musicianship that Almat Saizhan and Aldaspan reproduce. Almat Saizhan views the Soviet

¹⁴⁷ Peter K. Marsh. “The Horse-head Fiddle and the Cosmopolitan Reimagination of Tradition in Mongolia” in *Current Research in Ethnomusicology* ed. Jennifer C. Post (New York: Routledge, 2009): 13

modernization of the *qyl-qobyz* as something integral to the Kazakh musical tradition that should be continued, but also acknowledges that the ancient *qyl-qobyz* is an authentic Kazakh instrument that should be popularized in the local musical scene. His music and performances have a strong national sentiment and reinforce national consciousness. He is deeply rooted in the governmental cultural production institutions and arguably reproduces current governmental ideas. On the other hand, Aldaspan has musicians that are also institutionally-rooted and reproduce some Soviet ideologies about musical instruments, but they are more affected by global ideologies of hard rock and metal music. The way their music sounds and the way they present themselves suggests that they try to reflect a common ground with global rock musicians but maintain a level of Kazakh authenticity.

These instruments' entanglement with nationalist ideologies makes the question of what language the songs are performed in a significant one. In my next chapter, I will focus on language choices that musicians in Kazakhstan make, expanding my attention from traditional and ethnic rock musicians to indie rock and Q-pop artists. I will also make further analysis of the musical choice that indie rock and Q-pop musicians make, continuing the discussion on authenticity.

Chapter 2

Language Choice and Authenticity: Russian, English, and Kazakh

Modern Kazakhstan has a trilingual environment, which is reflected in the current music scene. Kazakhstan's music mostly consists of Kazakh and Russian language songs, with a relatively small number of English-speaking performers. In the 1990s and early 2000s, popular genres like pop, rap, R'n'B were mostly performed in Kazakh and Russian, while more alternative music like rock, metal, and electronic music was predominantly performed in Russian. This can be explained by Soviet language policies that increased fluency in the Russian language among the population and created the association of the Kazakh language with rural areas and tradition, and of Russian with urban areas and modernity. In the late 2000s, the number of English-speaking musicians slightly increased, but this mostly reflected the emergence of an alternative music scene. At that period, the government started popularizing the English language, which was associated with modernity. However, in the early 2010s Kazakh also became a popular language choice not only among pop performers, but among ethnic-rock, rock, indie-rock, and electronic musicians as well, indicating the shifting status of the indigenous language.

This chapter shows that the language choices musicians who participated in my research make communicate certain language ideologies. Namely, musicians performing in Russian see it as more “convenient”, while musicians performing in English perceive it as more “musical” and as more “representative of them”. Musicians performing in Kazakh demonstrate a shifting language ideology, looking at the language not as “traditional” or “old-fashioned”, but as something “unique” and “authentic”. The chapter outlines that language choices are most commonly

determined by the target audience, by image, by discourses about global music and national identity, but most especially by strategies for stressing authenticity. Musicians choose one language over the other because it is “authentic” for them, and they demonstrate the importance of authentic language choice rather than market-oriented choices.

Researchers like Aziz Burkhanov,¹⁴⁸ William Fierman,¹⁴⁹ Marlene Laruelle,¹⁵⁰ and Juldyz Smagulova¹⁵¹ have focused on analyzing linguistic practices and policies in Kazakhstan and Central Asia. However, there are few works that explore language ideologies and language choices through examination of the language choices of modern musicians in the region. There are also few studies on how English complicates the local linguistic environment. This chapter aims to contribute to the broader discussion of language choices and language environment in Central Asia, as well as to shed light on the complex nature of the contemporary music scene of Kazakhstan.

Language Policies in Kazakhstan

Kazakhstan had a complicated history of language policies during the Soviet Union. In the 1920s and early 1930s, the Russian language was encouraged, but support for local languages was evident as well.¹⁵² In the late 1920s, the Kazakh script was changed from Arabic to Latin, and not long after that the Cyrillic alphabet was adopted, which was considered to be an effort to connect

¹⁴⁸ Aziz Burkhanov, “Kazakhstan’s National Identity-Building Policy: Soviet Legacy, State Efforts, and Societal Reactions” *Cornell International Law Journal*, Vol 50. 2017

¹⁴⁹ William Fierman. “Kazakh Language and Prospects for its Role in Kazakh ‘Groupness’” *Ab Imperio*, 2/2005

¹⁵⁰ Marlene Laruelle “In Search of Kazakhness: The Televisual Landscape and Screening of Nation in Kazakhstan” *Demokratizatsiya: The Journal of Post-Soviet Democratization* 23 (3) (2015): 321-340

¹⁵¹ Juldyz Smagulova, Elise S. Ahn, “Language Change in Central Asia” Vol. 106. *Contributions to the Sociology of Language* (Berlin: Walter De Gruyter, 2016)

¹⁵² L. A. Grenoble, *Language Policy in the Soviet Union* (Kluwer Academic Publisher, 2003): 27

the Kazakh people with Russians.¹⁵³ Soviet officials encouraged people to use indigenous languages in the administrative sphere and in education.¹⁵⁴ However, after the 1930s, the government started a Russification policy that continued for almost half a century.¹⁵⁵ During the Russification period, the Soviet government supported the publication of scholarly works and encyclopedias in the Kazakh language.¹⁵⁶ Nevertheless, Russian became a more prestigious language as it provided educational opportunities and enabled class mobility for its speakers. In contrast, indigenous languages became less-prestigious, unable to provide similar opportunities as Russian.¹⁵⁷

Russification policies resulted in a decrease of Kazakh medium schools and an increase in demand for Russian language from a population that believed Russian was necessary to secure a successful career.¹⁵⁸ According to William Fierman, the Kazakh language was “in the weakest position - and Russian the strongest” at that period.¹⁵⁹ Russian became a prevailing language in urban regions even among ethnic Kazakhs, while the Kazakh language was dominant in rural areas.¹⁶⁰ In the late Soviet period, Kazakhstan was an ethnically and linguistically heterogeneous country. The state became a home for 126 ethnicities that used their ethnic languages, but

¹⁵³ William Fierman. “Kazakh Language and Prospects for its Role in Kazakh ‘Groupness’” *Ab Imperio*, 2/2005: 401.

¹⁵⁴ William Fierman. “Kazakh Language and Prospects for its Role in Kazakh ‘Groupness’” *Ab Imperio*, 2/2005: 401.

¹⁵⁵ Ibid.

¹⁵⁶ Ibid. 402

¹⁵⁷ J. M. Landau & B. Kellner-Heinkele, *Politics of Language in the ex-Soviet Muslim States: Azerbaijan, Uzbekistan, Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Turkmenistan, and Tajikistan* (University of Michigan, 2001): 52

¹⁵⁸ Aziz Burkhanov, “Kazakhstan’s National Identity-Building Policy: Soviet Legacy, State Efforts, and Societal Reactions” *Cornell International Law Journal*, Vol 50. 2017: 5

¹⁵⁹ William Fierman, “Russian Language in Post-Soviet Central Asia: Persistence in Prestige Domains” *Vestnik RUDN, seriya Voprosy obrazovaniya: yaziki i specialnost’* № 5, 2015: 58.

¹⁶⁰ William Fierman. “Kazakh Language and Prospects for its Role in Kazakh ‘Groupness’” *Ab Imperio*, 2/2005: 398

Russian was still predominantly used as a language of inter-ethnic communication.¹⁶¹ Thus, Soviet policies on languages fluctuated throughout the Soviet period, but resulted in the demand for Russian language, and decrease in the usage of Kazakh language. Moreover, Russian was used predominantly in urban areas, while Kazakh remained widespread in rural regions.

After the collapse of the Soviet Union, language policy remained a sensitive topic in the country, and linguistic policies fluctuated as well.¹⁶² Landau outlines that during the initial stage of independence, de-Russification was one of the main language policies in post-Soviet Central Asian region, including Kazakhstan. The policies were aimed at de-Sovietization and at gaining cultural independence from the Russian Federation.¹⁶³ Consequently, the Kazakh language was given the status of the state language, and Russian became the language of inter-ethnic communication. After that, the Russian language was allowed to be used on the same level as the state language and lost its previous status of “inter-ethnic communication”.¹⁶⁴ However, the Language Law adopted in 1997 outlined the “duty” of every citizen to learn Kazakh language.¹⁶⁵ The government of Kazakhstan proposed several programs aimed at expanding the use of Kazakh language, including an obligatory switch of administrative documentation to Kazakh language, but Russian still prevailed in the region.¹⁶⁶

¹⁶¹ Assem Aksholakova, Nurgul Ismailova. “The Language Policy of Kazakhstan and the State Language in Government Service”. *Social and Behavioral Sciences*, Volume 93, 2013: 1580

¹⁶² Aziz Burkhanov, “Kazakhstan’s National Identity-Building Policy: Soviet Legacy, State Efforts, and Societal Reactions” *Cornell International Law Journal*, Vol 50. 2017: 5

¹⁶³ J. M. Landau & B. Kellner-Heinkele, *Politics of Language in the ex-Soviet Muslim States: Azerbaijan, Uzbekistan, Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Turkmenistan, and Tajikistan* (University of Michigan, 2001): 52

¹⁶⁴ Aziz Burkhanov, “Kazakhstan’s National Identity-Building Policy: Soviet Legacy, State Efforts, and Societal Reactions” *Cornell International Law Journal*, Vol 50. 2017:6

¹⁶⁵ Ibid.

¹⁶⁶ Ibid.

The government tried to support the languages of all ethnic groups living in Kazakhstan by ensuring their perseverance in the governmental project “The functioning and development of languages of Kazakhstan for 2011-2020”. However, since other ethnicities constitute only 13,2% of the population, the main languages of communication in the country were Kazakh and Russian.¹⁶⁷ William Fierman writes that “migration within Kazakhstan, especially Kazakhs’ movement from rural to urban areas,” increased the usage of Kazakh in urban areas.¹⁶⁸

More recently, the government started working on spreading and teaching the English language, proclaiming the project “The trinity of languages: Kazakh, Russian, English”. In a number of laws on education and language, English became a compulsory language for study, and the government started the transformation of the education system by proposing polylingual education.¹⁶⁹ Moreover, the government initiated the process of switching Kazakh language to the Latin alphabet, which is expected to be finalized by the year 2025. The First President of Kazakhstan, N. Nazarbayev, in his article “Course towards the future: modernization of Kazakhstan’s identity”, writes that switching to the Latin alphabet is supposed to help the country to incorporate to the “fast-growing technologically advanced globalizing world”.¹⁷⁰ The name of the article and the content of proposed policies demonstrate that Latin script is indexical

¹⁶⁷ Ibid. 5

¹⁶⁸ William Fierman. “Kazakh Language and Prospects for its Role in Kazakh ‘Groupness’” *Ab Imperio*, 2/2005: 418

¹⁶⁹ Laws on education and language include “On Education”, “On languages in the Republic of Kazakhstan”, “State program of functioning and language development for 2011-2020”, “State Program for Development of Education of the Republic of Kazakhstan for 2011-2020”; for scholarship on English among Kazakh youth see: Damira Akynova, Sholpan Zharkynbekova, Atirkul Agmanova, Aliya Aimoldina, Lyazzat Dalbergenova. “Language Choice among the Youth of Kazakhstan: English as a Self-Representation of Prestige” *Procedia - Social and Behavioral Sciences* Vol. 143, 2014: pp. 228 – 232.

¹⁷⁰ Nursultan Nazarbayev, *Course towards the future: modernization of Kazakhstan’s identity*, 2017.

of modernity for the government officials. In March 2019, the government accepted the law that obligated cinema theaters to only screen movies with subtitles or offscreen translation in Kazakh language.¹⁷¹ This signifies that recent language policies arguably focus on de-Sovietization, de-Russification, and promotion of the Kazakh language not only in official workplace areas, but also in entertainment settings.

Language Ideologies in Kazakhstan

According to Fierman, in the late 1980s “quite possibly over 90 percent” of the Kazakhstan’s city population spoke Russian fluently and probably only 10-15 percent spoke Kazakh.¹⁷² Urban Kazakhs perceived the language and culture of Moscow as closer to themselves, which created a gap between them and their rural “co-ethnics”.¹⁷³ Apart from that, the data from the 1990s show that the Kazakh language significantly dominated in rural education and public life.¹⁷⁴ This linguistic duality created certain language ideologies in the country. As a result, Russian language was associated with urbanity and modernity, while Kazakh was associated with rural identity and traditionalism.

Scholarly works outline that later on macro-level language policies positively influenced the spread of Kazakh language, as the younger generation became more interested in learning Kazakh and urban parents more willing to send their children to Kazakh schools, believing knowing the language provided more career opportunities and therefore economic stability. However, Smagulova, Ahn, and Akanova say that the policies did not influence the language

¹⁷¹ Закон Республики Казахстан от 3 января 2019 года № 212-VI «О кинематографии», статья 9.

¹⁷² William Fierman “Language and Education in Post-Soviet Kazakhstan: Kazakh-Medium Instruction in Urban Schools” *The Russian Review*, Vol. 65, No. 1 (Jan., 2006), 101

¹⁷³ Ibid. 102

¹⁷⁴ Ibid. 107-108

usage of everyday life, and the Russian language is still a more popular language choice, especially in cities.¹⁷⁵ Akanova further says that “purist attitudes” and a certain shaming for not knowing Kazakh or not speaking it properly are one reason why many ethnic Kazakhs struggle to learn the Kazakh language and to use it in everyday communication.¹⁷⁶ Burkhanov claims that while the older generation that grew up in Soviet times gives preference to Russian, the youth prefers Kazakh.¹⁷⁷ He concludes that the wider usage of Kazakh language in cities is not a result of the government policies, but a result of “migration factors” and “influx of ethnic Kazakhs from rural areas to cities”.¹⁷⁸ Therefore, we can say that today the language ideologies are slowly shifting, the status of the Kazakh language is increasing but the Russian languages is still a more frequent language choice for everyday communication.

Scholars have further found that English language symbolizes development and economic success for speakers in Kazakhstan. A paper on language choice among youth outlines that Kazakhstan’s youth use English to construct their identity as prestigious.¹⁷⁹ English is considered to be a prestigious language because of its association with developed countries and wider career opportunities, but local governmental language trinity policy has also contributed to the uplifting of the status of English language.

¹⁷⁵ Elise S. Ahn, Juldyz Smagulova. “Language Change in Central Asia” Vol. 106. *Contributions to the Sociology of Language* (Berlin: Walter De Gruyter, 2016):

¹⁷⁶ Gulnur Akanova, “Language Ideologies of Kazakhstani Youth: the Value of Kazakh in the Context of a Changing Linguistic Marketplace” (master’s thesis, Nazarbayev University, 2017), 49

¹⁷⁷ Ibid. 11.

¹⁷⁸ Aziz Burkhanov, “Kazakhstan’s National Identity-Building Policy: Soviet Legacy, State Efforts, and Societal Reactions” *Cornell International Law Journal*, Vol 50. 2017: 8-9

¹⁷⁹ Damira Akynova, Sholpan Zharkynbekova, Atirkul Agmanova, Aliya Aimoldina, Lyazzat Dalbergenova. “Language Choice among the Youth of Kazakhstan: English as a Self-Representation of Prestige” *Procedia - Social and Behavioral Sciences* Vol. 143, 2014: pp. 228 – 232.

Overall, various language policies pushed forward by different governments throughout the latest history of Kazakhstan shaped our society as a trilingual one. Russian, Kazakh, and English languages are indexical of separate socio-cultural norms and have the potential to locate the speaker on disparate social grounds. The following discussion asks, what language ideologies does the language choice of musicians reproduce, how is modern music in Kazakh language shifting language ideologies, and what kind of meaning does a musician's language choice communicate?

Russian as a Language Choice

This section will illustrate the role of the Russian language in Kazakhstan's music scene, ideologies surrounding the language in the region, and the meaning it has for the performers. I will show how the consequences of the Soviet Russification policies, language ideologies, and target audience influenced the language choices of musicians, drawing upon interviews with them. I will also outline that the regional origin of the musician adds another dimension to language choice and that local musicians and cultural activists actively respond to the language environment of the country as they develop certain theories of music and language choice. I will further argue that musicians claim authenticity and truthfulness by choosing Russian, the language they comfortably speak, instead of choosing a language that the nationalist discourse may require of them.

One of my research participants was the rapper Kanamar, based in a Southern-Kazakhstan city Taraz, who performs in Russian. When I asked Kanamar about his language choice, he claimed that even if he graduated from a Kazakh school, it's easier for him to rap and to express himself

in Russian. He also acknowledges that his language choice was partially determined by his target audience, and that rapping in Russian allows him to make his music understandable for a wider audience. He went on to claim that speaking in your “mother tongue” does not make you necessarily a patriot, but that making good actions for the benefit of the whole society and the country is really what is important.¹⁸⁰

The way he defends his language choice might be explained by the pressure that he feels to speak Kazakh as an ethnic Kazakh. Akanova writes that governmental initiatives encourage parents to send their children to Kazakh schools and to learn the language, but that this does not affect their everyday communication practices.¹⁸¹ The fact that he mentions that he does not feel comfortable rapping in Kazakh even if he graduated from a Kazakh school may demonstrate that the Russian language is still a major language of communication in a regional but still urban area like Taraz. However, Taraz is also perceived to be a comparatively Kazakh city, so there might be another reason for his language choice. If performing in Kazakh in urban areas like Almaty signifies national identity, performing in Kazakh in a regional city like Taraz might signify a rural identity. Therefore, his language choice might signify his desire to communicate an urban identity. This demonstrates a peculiar case when regional dimension is added to the language choices that musicians make.

Apart from that, Kanamar points out that the audience is important for him as a performer, therefore in order to reach a wider audience he chose to perform in a language that is more widespread. Another thing worth mentioning is that Taraz was one of the most criminal cities in

¹⁸⁰ Kanamar, interview, June 30, 2018.

¹⁸¹ Gulnur Akanova, “Language Ideologies of Kazakhstani Youth: the Value of Kazakh in the Context of a Changing Linguistic Marketplace” (master’s thesis, Nazarbayev University, 2017), 38

Kazakhstan in the 1990s. The city still has a negative criminal reputation, which also shaped the music of the rapper, as is evident in songs like *Criminal*, *Bablo* (a slang meaning money), and *Married to the Game*. Arguably, the fact that he claims to have experienced criminal practices signifies the importance of reproducing his authentic identity, compared to other *posers* (not authentic rappers). Brent Luvaas writes that the “glamour and gloss of contemporary commercial culture” is associated with “African American musical styles, including rap...” and Kanamar recreates this genre ideology in his songs *Pachka* (a slang meaning money), *Gucci*, *Rolex*, *All night*.¹⁸² During research on youth identity in Southern Kyrgyzstan and the influence of cultural globalization, Stefan B. Kirmse writes that young men in Osh demonstrate “consumerist aspirations” and express their desire to acquire “fashionable status symbols”.¹⁸³ Kanamar’s songs also articulate consumerist sentiment and a fascination with money and with expensive brands like Gucci and Rolex. Despite the fact that some listed songs have English names, they are performed in Russian, with the English lines of the title usually repeated in the *hook* part of the songs. Overall, his language choice is determined by his fluency and by the targeted audience, but it also demonstrates a regional dimension and word choices associated with his genre.

Unlike Kanamar, Kinrai started her career singing in English with a stage name, Zzara, but then decided to start singing in Russian and changed her stage name to Kinrai. Kinrai’s real name is Zarina Beisembayeva and she is originally from Karaganda, an industrial city in central Kazakhstan. Both her projects present electronic music with soft, mellow vocals and back vocals. However, the sound of Zzara is more experimental as compared to Kinrai, with subtle dissonant

¹⁸² Brent Luvaas “Exemplary Centers and Musical Elsewheres: On Authenticity and Autonomy in Indonesian Indie Music” *Asian Music*, Volume 44, Number 2, (2013): 96

¹⁸³ Stefan B. Kirmse, “In the Marketplace for Styles and Identities: Globalization and Youth Culture in Southern Kyrgyzstan.” *Central Asian Survey* 29 (4) (2010), 391.

harmonies and sharp instrumental bridges and outros in some songs. In contrast, Kinrai is slightly more traditional with the synthesizer sounds she uses.

During the interview, Kinrai stated that when she started working on her second album, she wrote lyrics in Russian, but with time she realized that the musical material was no longer suitable for the Zzara project, and decided to change the image completely to Kinrai. She acknowledges that the difficulties she faced when writing in English, a language she is not fluent in, contributed to switching the language of performance. She mentioned that there were times when people corrected her lyrics, or she had to consult with people who spoke English fluently to correct her lyrics. She had a misconception that it would be easier to write about abstract things in English, but once she realized that English actually restricted her ability to express herself, she switched to Russian as it gave her more artistic freedom.¹⁸⁴ Thus, in case of Kinrai, initially, the language choice was determined by the language ideology, but then fluency became more important for her.

During my fieldwork in Almaty, Ruslan Yakupov, the creator of the project Qazaq Indie, outlined the fact that many active members of the cultural sphere of Kazakhstan are working and sharing ideas on the development of Kazakh creative culture and he advised me to speak to Dmitriy Shegolikhin. Dmitriy is a cultural activist and musician, who also works at a marketing company. Currently, he performs in two bands, Eklektika and Rasputniki. He also participated in a number of projects with the live band iFly in which they made rock and electronic covers of traditional Kazakh songs. During his work for those projects, he wrote notations for the orchestra

¹⁸⁴ Zarina Beisembayeva, interview, July, 5, 2018.

members to play traditional songs and other instrumental parts for iFly.¹⁸⁵ Dmitriy is Russian and says that he performs in the Russian language because he doesn't know Kazakh language and because he is not fluent enough in the English language to write lyrics in that language. However, he shared his opinion about the status of the Kazakh language and his thoughts on how it can be popularized:

*There is a big problem with the stylishness of the state language. Rodnyansky¹⁸⁶ is a person who brought Levafan to Oscar and he made the Ukrainian language very trendy (**modnym**). A person (Rodnyanskiy) read the language on a non-verbal level. If a person looks and behaves like **kolkhoznik**¹⁸⁷ it doesn't matter what he says, no one will listen. That's why they found fashionable, cool people and taught them the Ukrainian language. They forced (**forsili**) very hard. They made the Ukrainian language stylish and needed. The same situation with Kazakh... Maybe I will be able to do the same thing that Rodnyansky did... I think I will be able to understand if I find a person who will speak to me only in Kazakh. This intention to understand each other, this will help us speak Kazakh. Style, culture, and beauty.¹⁸⁸*

Rodnyanskiy, that Dmitriy referred to, created a TV channel 1+1 in 1995 on the basis of the governmental television company and was the first to introduce new media genres and formats like political talk shows, political debates, comedy talk shows, Hollywood movies, American TV-series in the Ukrainian television. As a result, the channel became the leader of the national television broadcast. Rodnyansky hired sympathetic, pleasant, and Ukrainian-speaking hosts for his TV programs, and Dmitriy argues that in this way he contributed to the development and popularization of the Ukrainian language. He proposes that the Kazakh language should be

¹⁸⁵ A cover of a Kazakh song *Manmanger* written by traditional *akyn* of the 19th century Aqan Seri, featuring Gabit Nesipbayev on organ, iFLY, and a choir of №79 school-gymnasium
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=bxlq8Cd63Jc>

¹⁸⁶ Alexander Rodnyanskiy is a Ukrainian and Russian film director, producer and tv channel executive.
https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Alexander_Rodnyansky

¹⁸⁷ Kolkhoznik is a collective farmer during the Soviet times. In urban Russian and in this context it means a backward person.

¹⁸⁸ Dmitriy Shegolikhin, interview, July, 6, 2018.

presented through pleasant, modern, fashionable speakers, high-quality content, and that consequently, people will want to speak Kazakh.

Josep Cru, in his scholarly work on indigenous languages in Mexico, states that there is a misconception that indigenous languages “cannot express modernity” and that they are associated with “socio-economic and cultural backwardness”.¹⁸⁹ Dmitriy’s comments demonstrate a similar ideology that he thinks exists in Kazakhstan about the Kazakh language. Similarly to Cru, Dmitriy thinks that incorporating indigenous language to pop culture and to trendy and fashionable things can shift the existing ideology to a more positive one, inspiring people to learn the language.

To sum up, participants of the research in this section demonstrate the importance of fluency in the language choice, implying that this kind of choice has connotations of authenticity and truthfulness. Kinrai had language ideologies about the easiness of writing lyrics in English that proved to be untrue and she switched the language, while Kanamar outlined that for him language choice does not express national identity or patriotism. For Kinrai and Kanamar, the targeted audience of the performers is also important, and by singing in Russian, they want to increase the number of their audience. Dmitriy displayed concern about the ideology of Kazakh language and the willingness to contribute to the popularization of Kazakh; the final section of this chapter also addresses similar intentions among performers in Kazakh language and cultural activists.

English as a Language Choice

¹⁸⁹ Josep Cru. “Bilingual rapping in Yucatán, Mexico: strategic choices for Maya language legitimation and revitalization”, *International Journal of Bilingual Education and Bilingualism*, 20:5, 2017: 484

English was introduced to our linguistic environment relatively recently, but there is already a considerable amount of musicians in Kazakhstan who sing their songs in English. Similar to the case of Zarina Beisembayeva's Zzara project, conversations with musicians discussed in this section reveal that English language ideologies play a significant role in the language choice. This section reveals that exposure to global music in English and language ideologies influenced their language choices. It shows that musician's language choice reasoning communicates the social pressure to perform in Kazakh that they experience. Their reasoning also demonstrates their involvement with global musical practices and the entanglement with local national identity discourse.

In Almaty I got acquainted with a local indie band, Molto Loud, who started their career as a product of the label SoundLab Studio. The band was picked during a selection process that was organized as a competition among musicians, where 70 bands took part and 11 made it to the finals. The band goes around the country with their gigs and are currently recording an album. The main language choice of Molto Loud is English, but they also have a few songs in Russian. I spent some time with them and their producer and drummer Evgeni Rukavichnikov, talking about their music and what they had to say about their language choice:

*We write in English because, like Temir said, we grew up listening to Western music. Another reason is that English language is **more melodic**, it kind of sounds **simpler**.*

*Me and Arman met in a linguistic gymnasium, where we studied English from the childhood... It turned out that way. I think that if I could write beautifully in Kazakh, **I would have written in Kazakh**.*

*In short, we write in English, because we like English language, because we grew up listening to English music. Well, on music in English. And the whole world can understand English.*¹⁹⁰

Every band member shared their thoughts about the language choice, and the response shows that listening to Western music in English constructed their language ideology that perceives English as naturally more melodic and simpler. Their language choice is mostly based on aesthetic grounds, which contributed to the personal sympathy for the language and made it seem more suitable for songwriting. The guys became friends because they were studying in a linguistic school, which contributed to their fluency in the language and meant they do not have difficulties with writing texts correctly. They also mention the target audience, and that English texts give them an opportunity to be heard all around the world and to gain popularity outside of the country. According to information on the official website of the label SoundLab, which works with the band, Molto Loud has performed on multiple venues not only in Kazakhstan, but also in the Waves Vienna showcase festival (Austria) and the Jager Music Week showcase festival (Russia). Their debut album “Different”, released in July 2017 on iTunes, was on top of the chart throughout the month and gained positive reviews from audiences in foreign countries.

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Cece Cutler writes that the prestige connected to English, its status as an international language and a hope to reach a bigger audience has made it a frequent choice for many European musicians since the 1960s. Even in France, where French is protected by the French Academia, musicians often sing in English.¹⁹² In contrast to that, Molto Loud members indicate that if they

¹⁹⁰ Molto Loud, interview, July, 1, 2018.

¹⁹¹ Soundlab on Molto Loud <http://soundlab.kz/en/rl/moltoloud-en.html>

¹⁹² Cece Cutler. “Chanter en yaourt”: Pop Music and Language Choice in France”. *Popular Music and Society*. Vol. 24(3), 2012: 118

knew Kazakh as well as they know English, they might have written texts in Kazakh. Akanova outlines that society pressures ethnic Kazakhs to know Kazakh, and Molto Loud's comment can be interpreted as a position of defence. Akanova's work also indicates that Kazakh speech has social value only if it is spoken "grammatically correct, unmixed with extensive vocabulary" and speakers that do not possess that level of knowledge choose to speak other languages in order to avoid purist attitudes.¹⁹³

Another participant of my research was a frontman of the Almaty band city&shivers, Arkhat Amangeldin. He studied music in England and released the first album of the city&shivers as his capstone project, but when he came back and started working in a marketing company, he decided to continue making music. He commented on his language choice, outlining the significance of fluency and language ideology:

*Music in Kazakh is not accessible to me yet, because I do not want to write texts on the level that I know the language. I would like to (write) something deeper, metaphorical, but the knowledge of the language does not allow me to do so yet. What about Russian, I think that this language is hardly useful for music... I think that there is a parallel between the melody of the language...and it's more comfortable for me to perform in English.*¹⁹⁴

Arkhat puts emphasis on the deep lyrics and claims that because he doesn't know Kazakh on the level that would allow him to write beautifully, he refused to write lyrics in Kazakh. Interestingly, when he explains why he doesn't perform in Russian, the characteristics of the language are limiting for him, while in the case of Kazakh, the lack of knowledge is the limitation. He displayed a certain ideology regarding Russian, that this language is not melodic,

¹⁹³ Gulnur Akanova, "Language Ideologies of Kazakhstani Youth: the Value of Kazakh in the Context of a Changing Linguistic Marketplace" (master's thesis, Nazarbayev University, 2017), 57

¹⁹⁴ Arkhat Amangeldin, interview, July, 6, 2018.

that it is harsh, and contains words that are too long. Similarly to Molto Loud, he outlined that English is melodic and that it is convenient for him to sing in English. This statement implies a language ideology of English as more appropriate for songwriting; and Kazakh language ideology, suggesting that writing songs in Kazakh requires poetic fluency. Cece Cutler's paper suggests that the band's language choice reflects their involvement with global indie music culture. However, the band's reasoning demonstrates their engagement with national identity discourse.

Both Molto Loud and city&shivers indicate that it's easier for them to perform in English, and songs in English sound better. Cutler outlines that it is a common language ideology among European pop and rock musicians, which she connects to the "long tradition of English language pop and rock music that serves as a point of reference for generations of non-English speaking musicians and fans".¹⁹⁵ Moreover, she claims that there are no scholarly works that indicate suitability of certain languages with certain music, therefore these kinds of comments are based purely on social factors and ideology. Cutler also outlines that language choice can represent a desire to identify with certain musical traditions and musical practices, or reference particular musical roots.¹⁹⁶ In other words, Molto Loud and city&shivers' language choice arguably symbolizes their attempt to be associated with the English and American musicians they enjoyed listening to and with the Western indie musical tradition they reproduce through their own music. Moreover, the way they explain their language choice reveals ideologies surrounding English and Kazakh languages in Kazakhstan's musical scene.

¹⁹⁵ Cece Cutler. "Chanter en yaourt": Pop Music and Language Choice in France". *Popular Music and Society*. Vol. 24(3), 2012: 129.

¹⁹⁶ Ibid.

Kazakh as a Language Choice

If English is associated with modernity, Kazakh is associated with tradition, which creates an opposition between modernity and tradition; between English and Kazakh. But making songs where modern sounds are intertwined with Kazakh words enables the association of Kazakh language with modernity and disrupts that idea that something Kazakh is necessarily something old-fashioned. This also demonstrates the agency of musicians, their ability to reconstruct the language ideology as opposed to simply recreating it. This newly created association of Kazakh with modernity is one of the tools making Kazakh songs popular among the younger generation. This section will examine the role of Kazakh language in the local music scene and how modern musicians participate in shifting language ideologies surrounding indigenous language and help promote Kazakh language among youth. It will also illustrate that Kazakh can be a deliberate language choice for some musicians.

Akanova talks about the fact that the use of Kazakh language by public figures raises the social value of the language, and mentions Galymzhan Moldanazar as a prominent figure in contemporary Kazakhstan, one who positively contributed to the belief that Kazakh songs can be modern, creative and of high quality.¹⁹⁷ During my conversation at a home concert (*kvartirnik*) in Almaty, I was also told that this changing ideology refers to Kazakh language as well. An activist in the field of contemporary music in Kazakhstan, creator of the social network public QAZAQ INDIE that recently started organizing regular musical sessions, Ruslan Yakupov, outlined that Moldanazar and other indie singers in Kazakh language inspire him to learn Kazakh

¹⁹⁷ Gulnur Akanova, "Language Ideologies of Kazakhstani Youth: the Value of Kazakh in the Context of a Changing Linguistic Marketplace" (master's thesis, Nazarbayev University, 2017): 55.

language and that their music encouraged him to contribute to the development of indie music in Kazakhstan and thus influence the modernization of the language.¹⁹⁸

This mixture of a modern sound with Kazakh lyrics is something very characteristic to the music of Moldanazar. His modern synthpop, indie-rock songs sound unexpectedly harmoniously with Kazakh words. During my interview with Galymzhan Moldanazar, he shared his thoughts about the positive change in language ideology of the Kazakh language:

*In the last four years (Kazakh music) has been developing very rapidly. Not long ago Kazakh youth rarely listened to Kazakh songs. Nowadays, young people listen to songs in Kazakh language a lot, they accept it, love it. They have a different view today. This is because of the young musicians, youngsters like them. There are singers in Kazakh language in different directions, I think all of it is right.*¹⁹⁹

Moldanazar grew up speaking primarily Kazakh in a village in Kyzylorda region. He wrote music in Kazakh because he did not feel comfortable writing music in Russian or English, languages he wasn't fluent in. In this case, the Kazakh language was not a matter of choice, but his rural identity arguably became cultural capital for him, communicating his authenticity and maybe even entitlement to represent the language.

When analyzing bilingual rapping in Mexico, Josep Cru concluded that social networks and popular culture contributed to the popularization of the minoritized Maya language. According to him, incorporating Maya language to new technologies (internet) and popular trends (hip-hop) revived the language among the younger generation.²⁰⁰ A similar pattern is arguably noticeable in

¹⁹⁸ Discussion during participant observation, July 2018

¹⁹⁹ Galymzhan Moldanazar, Interview, July, 2, 2018.

²⁰⁰ Josep Cru. "Bilingual rapping in Yucatán, Mexico: strategic choices for Maya language legitimation and revitalization", *International Journal of Bilingual Education and Bilingualism*, 20:5, 2017: 492

Kazakhstan as well. For example, social networks played a significant role in popularizing Moldanazar, something I will talk about in more detail in the third chapter.²⁰¹ Current musicians in Kazakhstan use their social network pages and collaborate with local social media micro celebrities to promote their music online. Contemporary musicians produce music in trendy genres (synth-pop, indie, rock, k-pop) and release their music through online media services like iTunes, Spotify, Youtube.

One of the common topics that were evident in my interviews with musicians was a question of finances and marketing. Moldanazar acknowledges that singing in English and Russian is financially beneficial because English and Russian speaking audience are much bigger, while local musicians have to perform at various celebrations to make a living. However, he justifies his language choice by saying that “*singing in Kazakh, in our language, in the **mother language** is right*”. Thus, he suggests that he is putting nationalist obligations on top of financial needs. However, at the same time, for Moldanazar Kazakh language has the connotation of a smaller audience and fewer opportunities.

In this case, Moldanazar is reproducing the notion that the “mother tongue” is the authentic, morally significant and real language of a speaker.²⁰² Chaise LaDousa writes that there are various possibilities of what “mother tongue” can mean: it can be defined as a “language that was learned first, a language that is known best, and/or a language that is used most”, but he concludes that it is more correct to say that “‘mother tongue’ is a result of the mythical

²⁰¹ Radif Kashapov, “Novoe imya: Galymzhan Moldanazar. Smozhet li Kazakhstanskiy Pevec, Kotorogo Prozvali “Hipsterzhanov”, Poyavitsya na Mezhdunarodnom Rynke?” (last modified November, 6, 2013) https://www.colta.ru/articles/music_modern/1050-novoe-imya-galymzhan-moldanazar

²⁰² Chaise. LaDousa, “On Mother and Other Tongues: Sociolinguistics, Schools, and Language Ideologies in Northern India”. *Language Sciences* (32 (6), 2010): 602

consciousness of a people that has a strong ideological influence”.²⁰³ This ideological influence is evident in the comment of Moldanazar that outlines a spiritual value in singing Kazakh songs. LaDousa also quotes Pattanayak’s (1981) critique that “‘mother tongue’ rests on the emotional attachment one feels to a language that is often underpinned by the notion of ‘mother land’, one’s nation or would-be nation”.²⁰⁴ Native language can be perceived variously, for some it can be a language of fluency, for others a language of one’s ancestors.²⁰⁵ During the Soviet Union, heritage language was seen as native language.²⁰⁶

Examples of Moldanazar and Far in Gate are more consistent, however the language environment in Kazakh musical scene is more complex than that. For instance, during an interview I conducted during participant observation in the house concert (*kvartirnik*) organized by Ruslan Yakupov from Qazaq Indie, the lead singer of the band We Have to Now, Asya Tuleshova, mentioned that her language choice was driven by patriotic feelings and that even if she wasn’t fluent in Kazakh, she would have her texts corrected by other people. She claimed that it was very important for her to perform specifically in Kazakh, but in this case a sentiment of moral obligation influenced her choice. However, after this meeting, her band released a song in English in September, which shows their openness to other languages and perhaps some inconsistency in the comments of musicians.

In her master thesis work, Akanova outlines that one of the obstacles that stand in the way of learning Kazakh is a “purist attitude” of the national-patriotic part of society. However,

²⁰³ Ibid.

²⁰⁴ Ibid.

²⁰⁵ L.A.Grenoble, *Language Policy in the Soviet Union*. (Vol. 3) Kluwer Academic Publisher. 2003: 28.

²⁰⁶ B. Dave, P. Sinnott. Demographic and Language Politics in the 1999 Kazakhstan Census. The National Council for Eurasian and East European Research, 2002: 7

Kazakh-speaking musicians do not share those views and support their fellow-musicians. For example, Moldanazar said: *“I know a lot of musicians that I respect, they sing in English or Russian, but not because of the money, but because they do not know Kazakh, they think in English or Russian. They write their own lyrics, so the songs are in English or Russian”*. Therefore, the authenticity of the artist and the absence of a mercantile agenda is of higher importance for local indie musicians. Thus, the independent music scene is not divided according to linguistic attributes, but according to artistic goals, missions, and views on music. They bond over and create a sense of groupness and “us” over suggested authenticity. But with that comes an oppositional group, “them”. Most of the musicians I interviewed make a clear division between “us” themselves and “them” *toi* (celebration) musicians, whose primary source of income is performing at celebrations. I talked about ideologies of *toi* music in the previous chapter, saying that it is commonly thought to be of low quality, with simple lyrics. Along with Almat Saizhan and Aldaspan, performers of localized global genres that participated in this research express a belief that *toi* musicians have financial agenda, while they themselves aspire to make high-quality music for the art itself, implying that in contrast to *toi* musicians, they are more truthful, more authentic. Although bands like Molto Loud outline that they have the opportunity to make a living out of their musicianship, musicians like city&shivers claim that one cannot feed the family by being a professional indie musician in Kazakhstan. The common argument that my participants express is that while they write music they love, *toi* musicians write music the audience loves, simply pleasing the audience. Thus, my participants see themselves in polar opposition to *toi* musicians, claiming authenticity and autonomy by expressing the lack of financial interest.

If Moldanazar performed in Kazakh because he could not perform in other languages, musicians in the bands like Far in Gate and Aldaspan had options and chose to perform in Kazakh to make their music unique. In spite of having an English name, Far in Gate chose to perform in Kazakh and is one of the few rock band that work with a label (SoundLab) based in Almaty. The lead guitarist and the creator of the band Far In Gate, Ilyas Kabiyeu, states that Kazakh language is a key thing in their music, and as he outlines the importance of the language to get across their thoughts to the audience, he also says that language is something that makes their music unique and connects them with their listeners:

*In fact, Kazakh language is somethings that makes our music more unique than it is. Let's take Moldanazar for example. His lyrics are very beautiful, and even if his music is simple in some way, but the lyrics make the whole atmosphere in the song. The language plays a huge role in this, and this is not some kind of a business model. This is something that comes from within us.*²⁰⁷

However, Ilyas carefully mentions that this is not a business model, and this is not something done for some kind of social or financial benefit. The importance of the artistic reasoning and spiritual goal to build a bridge with the audience is described by Ilyas in contrast to a “business model”. Therefore, singing in Kazakh because some kind of a business model has strong negative connotation for Ilyas, just as it does for Moldanazar.

Another complex example from the perspective of language choice is Aldaspan, the ethnic-rock band discussed in detail in the first chapter. They perform songs mostly in Kazakh, but have songs in English and Russian as well. They acknowledge that those compositions are not as successful as the Kazakh ones. Interestingly, their musical choices, specifically a heavy rock that

²⁰⁷ Ilyas Kabiyeu, interview, July, 4, 2018.

has connotations of nationalism and masculinity, would seem to call for Kazakh language as an instant language choice. Yet, they initially directed their music for an international audience, and this pushed them to choose English as a language of performance. Later in their career they experimented and wrote some songs in Russian.²⁰⁸ However, they realized that singing in Kazakh is in sync with the image of *elektro-dombyra* and perpetuates nationalist sentiment that metal music possesses. Therefore, Aldaspan have changed their language choices, implying that musical style that draws on Kazakh traditions with the instrument, sound, image, and themes call for a performance in Kazakh language.

According to Toishy, the demand for Kazakh language in a band like theirs can be explained by the fact that rock songs in English and Russian are pretty common, while ethnic rock with *elektro-dombyra* in Kazakh language is something no one heard before, and this increases interest in their group. Therefore, there is a sense of practicality in choosing Kazakh as a language of performance, because language distinguishes this artistic product from others. Even if English and Russian seem to be languages that provide more benefits for performers of the global music forms, making the cultural products more accessible for an international audience, members of Aldaspan and Far in Gate see Kazakh language as a tool to make their music unique. Nurzhan also explains his language choice as a means to create a more cohesive musical atmosphere that correlates with the fact that they perform ethnic-rock. Megan Rancier writes that “artists can draw upon deeply meaningful sonic emblems such as the voice of an instrument, a particular folk tune, or evocative lyrics to create messages about national identity”, and arguably the *elektro-dombyra*, sounds of Kazakh *kui* (compositions on dombyra) and Kazakh lyrics

²⁰⁸ Nurzhan Toishy, interview, July, 4, 2018.

symbolize national identity in the music of Aldaspan.²⁰⁹ According to the musicians, Kazakh language makes their music seem original, which demonstrates that indigenous language can be associated with authenticity and uniqueness. Arguably, this makes the language not only a nationalist, but a rational and strategic choice for musicians like Aldaspan.

I have discussed the singers of indie, rock and ethnic-rock, and I want to conclude the section with an exploration of the language choice of the Qazaq pop, or Q-pop, band Black Dial. For the purpose of organizing this work, I will describe the history of Q-pop in the third chapter and continue the discussion on language choice there.

The people behind establishing Q-pop in Kazakhstan are the Bedelkhan brothers, who were born in Mongolia and repatriated to Kazakhstan at the age of eight. The brothers grew up speaking Kazakh, and because of that it remained their main language choice in their Q-pop projects. According to scholarly work, throughout the 1990s the Kazakh diaspora in Mongolia were believed to “have preserved the Kazakh language in a purer form (fewer loan words and grammatical corruptions) than any other Kazakh community in the world”.²¹⁰ In the introduction part of this chapter I illustrated the language environment in Kazakhstan. In that context, it is evident that Kazakhstan is a trilingual society and Russian language, brought to Central Asia during the Soviet period, plays a significant role in the socio-cultural sphere of the country. Due to that, Kazakh people repatriated from Mongolia, China, Turkey, etc. who speak primarily Kazakh, face regular challenges in daily life and struggle to integrate because they lack Russian

²⁰⁹ Resurrecting the Nomads: Historical Nostalgia and Modern Nationalism in Contemporary Kazakh Popular Music Videos.” *Popular Music & Society* 32(3), 388

²¹⁰ Alexander C. Diener “Kazakhstan’s Kin State Diaspora: Settlement Planning and the Oralman Dilemma” *Europe-Asia Studies* Vol. 57, No. 2, March 2005: 335

language skills.²¹¹ Some Kazakh nationalists expressed thoughts that repatriated Kazakhs would significantly contribute to the cultural rebirth of Kazakhstan.²¹² The ideology that Kazakh diaspora in Mongolia preserved authentic Kazakh language and ideas of cultural rebirth contribute to the discussion of what is authentically Kazakh, implying that Kazakh spoken locally is somehow “authentic”.

For this research I interviewed one of the creators of Q-pop, the producer of the band Black Dial, Yesbolat Bedelkhan. According to him, the role of Kazakh language in their music is huge, but their goal was never to perform in Kazakh in order to promote the language. They chose to perform in it because it was comfortable for them. However, due to the traditional ideology surrounding indigenous languages and the unexpected integration of the modern musical form with indigenous language, the band started being credited with contributing to the popularization of the language:

*And (I think) this is something to be proud of, if this contributed to the solution of such problem. But I think that the problem with language is very complicated, it cannot be solved only through music.*²¹³

Many other musicians that I interviewed agree that creating music in the K-pop genre in Kazakhstan, which has a huge K-pop fandom, is a very good business model, even if some of the participants confessed that they personally do not like Q-pop. Other musicians shared their opinion that since this project is a business model, and it aims to get financial income, there is less artistic value to it and they hesitate to call it an artistic project.. This demonstrates that most musicians I interviewed show solidarity to the self-made musicians that write and perform their

²¹¹ Ibid. 340

²¹² Ibid. 334

²¹³ Yesbolat Bedelkhan, July 4, 2018.

own music, rather than to the produced musical projects. Independent musicians see value in independence, artistic freedom and in their opinion, Q-pop, much like *toi* music, does not stand for this.

Finally, another interesting governmental agenda that Q-pop and indie musicians seem to support is transitioning to the Latin alphabet. The transition was first proposed in 2012 when Nursultan Nazarbayev addressed the nation with the program “Kazakhstan – 2050” and it was further pushed by the program “Rukhani zhangyru”. Nazarbayev outlined in his article “Course towards the future: modernization of Kazakhstan’s identity” that transition “is a change driven by the specific requirements of the modern technological environment, of communications and science and education in the 21st century”.²¹⁴ Kazakh speaking Q-pop and indie performers occasionally or consistently make publications on their official social media pages in the new Kazakh Latin alphabet. For example, on International Women’s Day, the Q-pop band Ninety One made a post “Búgingi arýlar kúnine oraı daıyndagan tosyn syıymyzdy gabył alyńyz! Meıramdaryńyzben 🌸” (Accept a surprise we prepared for today’s Women’s Day! Happy holiday 🌸).²¹⁵ After a drummer left the band, Far In Gate posted their photo with a caption “ómirde bári óz ornymen, óz ýaqtyymen” (everything in life happens in right place, right time).²¹⁶ In the introduction I provided a quote of Dulat Mukhametkaliev, a member of Ninety One, during his speech at the “Zhas Otan” meeting. At the same event he also addressed the transition: “If we want to bring the Kazakh language to the world level, we need to adapt it and Latin alphabet is suitable for

²¹⁴ N.Nazarbayev *Course towards the future: modernization of Kazakhstan’s identity*, April 2017.
http://www.akorda.kz/en/events/akorda_news/press_conferences/course-towards-the-future-modernization-of-kazakhstans-identity

²¹⁵ NinetyOne, March 8, 2019

https://www.instagram.com/p/BuvWh0OhQF5/?utm_source=ig_web_copy_link

²¹⁶ Far In Gate, February 6, 2019

https://www.instagram.com/p/Bti4MrMA7eF/?utm_source=ig_web_copy_link

that, we completely agree with it. That is why the name of the band is in Latin alphabet and we always release lyrics in Latin alphabet, due to that our foreign listeners are learning the language thinking that it is beautiful and even send us video messages in Kazakh.”²¹⁷ While many official state broadcasting companies and state organizations are already switching to the Latin alphabet, there is no official requirement for musicians to switch to the Latin alphabet in their social media pages. However, their willingness to make such posts and their comments imply their support of this language policy and their acceptance of the official discourse that transitioning to the Latin alphabet will modernize the Kazakh language.

Conclusion

In this chapter I examined language choices of contemporary musicians in Kazakhstan and analyzed the way they identify themselves through the reasoning of the language choices they make. According to the data acquired from the interviews, musicians outline several reasons for choosing a particular language of performance. Fluency in the language is evident as one of the factors, however there is also the example of a band, We Have to Now, that chose to sing in Kazakh out of patriotic feelings in spite of their acknowledged limited skills in the language. Therefore, a desire to communicate a certain identity is another reason for a language choice. The role of language ideologies is noticeable in the reasoning, specifically English is described as “more musical”, “simpler” language, while singing in Kazakh has the connotation of modernizing and popularizing a “mother tongue”. The targeted audience is also outlined by musicians, where reaching to Russian-speaking audience and globally widespread

²¹⁷ The speech published on Youtube by user AUROR • NINETY ONE FSG “(рус.саб) Выступление Дулата. IV Съезд Молодежного крыла ‘Жас Отан’” Apr 9, 2018
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=D-SpxvAC1hl>

English-speaking audience is evident. Performers in Kazakh demonstrate a divisive sentiment between positive and negative reasoning of language choice, where singing in specific language for financial benefit is described as negative, while choosing a language out of limited language skills is positive and eliminates “purist” attitude. Apart from that, participants of this research who chose Kazakh as a language of performance demonstrate some degree of agency and willingness to be associated with modernizing Kazakh language and creating a uniquely localized global musical form; the ones who chose Russian indicate the connection with artistic freedom; performers in English want to identify with the musical tradition they recreate and popular English performers they look up to. According to the data, the language choices in the local music scene reveal an incredibly complex, multifaceted, and multilayered language environment.

Chapter 3

Localized Global Genres and Authenticity: Indie and K-pop

The first chapter outlined how traditional instruments serve as markers of national identity and how reimagining the ancient version of the *qobyz* has strong connotations of authenticity, while amplifying the *dombyra* was for some associated with creating inauthentic music. The second chapter focused on musician's language choices and how the choice of Kazakh language is connected to purist ideas about the language, while Russian and English recreate language ideologies of modernity. The chapter also examined how global musical genres in Kazakh language contribute to shifting language ideologies. The final chapter will further continue the discussion on authenticity, focusing on musical forms in Kazakhstan, on the localization of global genres, and on the ways in which this brings into play questions of gender and the performance of masculine and feminine identities.

Socio-cultural changes influenced the usage of traditional instruments, whether it is governmentally supported modernization of the *qobyz* or the individual initiative to transform the *dombyra*. These changes also shaped the language environment, creating a trilingual society, allowing for the various instrumental and linguistic choices that musicians use to communicate certain social identities. The choice of genre and the musical choices that the genre determines also communicate the identities of musicians, their understanding of authenticity, and their social stance. It seems that in the Soviet and post-Soviet period, the nationalization of music would always take place at one level or another. Introducing traditional instruments to the orchestras nationalized classical music, adapting folk songs to electric sounds nationalized rock'n'roll,

while creating indie music in Kazakh nationalized indie. This process of the nationalization of the global forms of music raised questions of authenticity and produced multiple different and to some extent clashing authenticities in our society. If traditional musicians perceive reimagining the ancient qobyz as claiming authenticity, indie musicians look at live performance and non-commercial musicianship as being authentic. If ethnic-rockers connect public acceptance to authenticity, Q-pop bands see authenticity in free self-expression. This common aspiration to be authentic is something that unites all these musicians and influences their musical practices.

Thomas Turino writes that *dicent indices* are “identity signs that are actually affected by the social position, experiences, and ingrained habits that they signify,” and that they have the connotation of authenticity. Turino claims that recorded music and musical performance have the ability to make “dense combinations of icons and indices” that embody current social identities and determine possible ones.²¹⁸ This work looks at interviews with musicians but also at dicent indices of identity and icons that musicians in Kazakhstan create to identify what kind of current social identities they represent and what kind of possible models they provide. In Kazakhstan, musicians use various identity signs retrieved from global discourses of their genre, from local discourses of national identity, traditional, and modern identity, which arguably results in complex and interesting multiple authenticities.

Jazz and Rock in Soviet Kazakhstan

In contrast to the assumption that global music came to Kazakhstan only after the collapse of the Soviet Union, the localization of global musical forms in the region can be traced back to the

²¹⁸ Ibid. 108

beginning of the Soviet period. Due to the lack of information on pop music, I will focus on jazz and Rock'n'Roll in the country. This discussion uncovers that musicians of the Soviet period had concerns similar to current musicians regarding the authenticity of their music, and came up with similar solutions in their incorporation of local sounds, themes, and language.

In the 1930s nation-building period, the Soviet officials built first opera houses and conservatories in Central Asia, which introduced classical European musical forms to the general population.²¹⁹ Gulnar Abdirakhman writes that in the 1920s and 1930s Kazakhstan's popular music consisted mostly of folk songs, but a newly established European-derived "professional composer's school" contributed to the emergence of "a new style of Kazakh mass song" that fused national intonations with the "European logic of tonal organization".²²⁰ Abdirakhman continues that after the 1940s "Kazakh Soviet mass songs" characterized as "marching-and-patriotic" and "waltz-and-lyrics" became widely popular.²²¹ Urban ethnic Kazakhs mostly looked to Moscow for popular products for cultural consumption, and the appearance of a jazz and Rock'n'Roll scene in Kazakhstan was arguably influenced by their unofficial popularity across the Soviet Union.

According to scholarly works, the official perception of jazz was ambivalent and either tightened or loosened depending on political situations and international relations. However, unofficially it steadily grew in popularity, first among elite intellectuals and then in urban areas. According to an extensive research in jazz in the Soviet Union by S. Frederick Starr, jazz first entered the

²¹⁹ Marina Frolova-Walker, "'National in Form, Socialist in Content': Musical Nation-Building in the Soviet Republics", 335

²²⁰ Gulnar Abdirakhman "Mass music in Kazakhstan. The phenomenon and its interpretation" in *Turkic Soundscapes: From Shamanic Voices to Hip-Hop* ed. Raziya Sultanova and Megan Rancier (Oxon: Routledge, 2018), 103

²²¹ Ibid.

Union in 1920s during Lenin's New Economic Policy.²²² Heli Reimann writes that compared to the strict cultural regulations in the 1930, the postwar era was relatively liberal.²²³ Scholars like Richard Stites²²⁴ and Julianne Furst²²⁵ write that jazz was informally popular among Soviet officials in the late 1940s. According to Reimann, jazz symbolized a temporary friendship between American, British, and the Soviet oppositional political systems after the victory over Nazi Germany.²²⁶ But in 1946 Andrei Zhdanov was appointed by Joseph Stalin to regulate foreign cultural influence and to "Sovietise jazz".²²⁷ In the post-Stalin Thaw period, jazz in the Soviet Union recovered due to loosened control, even though a youth subculture "*stiliagi*" (*stylish*) that expressed fondness for Western culture through clothing, cultural activities, taste in cultural products, etc. has been around for several years already.²²⁸ In the 1960s, Soviet officials were allowed to "sponsor the spread of jazz as an alternative to the new forms of cultural consumption".²²⁹ In the late 1960s, Soviet youth became interested in Anglo-American rock music and started unofficially organizing little concerts of local amateur bands, inspired by the popularity of the Beatles.²³⁰ Thus, Soviet officials demonstrated a contradicting and complex

²²² S. Frederick Red and Hot: *The Fate of Jazz in the Soviet Union, 1917-1980* New York: Oxford University Press, 1983: 53

²²³ Heli Reimann "Late-Stalinist ideological campaigns and the rupture of jazz: 'jazz-talk' in the Soviet Estonian cultural newspaper *Sirp ja Vasar*" *Popular Music* Volume 33/3 (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2014), pp. 509–529, 512

²²⁴ Richard Stites "Frontline Entertainment" in *Culture and Entertainment in Wartime Russia*. (Bloomington: Indiana University Press) 1995: 134

²²⁵ Julianne Furst *Stalin's Last Generation: Soviet Post-War Youth and the Emergence of Mature Socialism* (Oxford: Oxford University Press) 2010: 212

²²⁶ Heli Reimann "Late-Stalinist ideological campaigns and the rupture of jazz: 'jazz-talk' in the Soviet Estonian cultural newspaper *Sirp ja Vasar*" *Popular Music* Volume 33/3 (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2014), 512-513

²²⁷ Ibid. 514-515

²²⁸ S. Frederick Red and Hot: *The Fate of Jazz in the Soviet Union, 1917-1980* New York: Oxford University Press, 1983: 237

²²⁹ Sergei Zhuk *Rock and Roll in the Rocket City: The West, Identity, and Ideology in Soviet Dnipropetrovsk* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press) 2010: 70

²³⁰ Alexei Yurchak, *Everything was Forever Until it was No More: The Last Soviet Generation* (Princeton: Princeton University Press) 2006: 217

policy towards “western” cultural products, one that affected the growing cynicism towards the government officials from the population, but didn’t affect the unofficial growth of jazz, blues, and rock scene in the Soviet Union.²³¹

Due to the lack of scholarly works about jazz in Soviet Kazakhstan, I describe it based on information from a documentary movie about the jazz, blues, and rock scene in Almaty from 1959 until the 2010s, released in 2018 by an Interstate TV and Radio Company “MIR”. The documentary revealed many musicians that created unique local versions of global music in the Soviet period and after, all with a strong sense of regional identity.²³² Arguably, this music scene became a foundation for the contemporary new wave of Kazakh music that I focus on in this work. According to the documentary, one of the first jazz bands in Almaty was Boomerang, created by the jazz-drummer Tahir Ibragimov, which included various musicians during its existence, including an established bass player Farhat Ibragimov and a famous musician, Baigali Serkebayev, who is now a member and a producer of A-Studio, a band popular in Russia. The band performed at the first jazz festival in Ferghana (Uzbekistan) in 1976 (according to other source in 1977)²³³ organized by the Soviet officials and they were regular guests at various jazz festivals in Tashkent, Dnepropetrovsk, Moscow, Tbilisi, Novosibirsk, Samarkand, and Dushanbe. According to the documentary, the Almaty Association of Musical Ensembles censored local musicians and controlled the ideological content of their music, which meant that

²³¹ Sergei Zhuk *Rock and Roll in the Rocket City: The West, Identity, and Ideology in Soviet Dnepropetrovsk* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press) 2010: 209

²³² Interstate TV and Radio Company “MIR”, author, director, and producer Arsen Bayanov “Alma-Ata: gorod-djaz, gorod-bluz, gorod-rok-n-rol”, February 11, 2018
https://www.youtube.com/watch?time_continue=2&v=NyChzVDcL6U

²³³ http://www.jazz.uz/history_jazz/58

radical variations from the music in Moscow were not allowed, limiting the freedom of artistic expression.²³⁴

Boomerang's three albums, *Bumerang* (*Boomerang*, 1983), *Ornament* (*Ornament*, 1984), and *Mirazhi* (*Mirages*, 1986), were more than any other group released, which implies that even if jazz was relatively popular in the region, it wasn't in the mainstream and there were few established musicians. The band experimented with their sound, performing compositions in the classic jazz, free jazz, and jazz-rock styles and even creating their own style that they called *oriental'niy djaz* (*oriental jazz*). This style is characterized with oriental connotations inserted in the music through instruments like tabla percussion, sitar, a melody resembling the sound of *dombyra*, and sonic themes like Arabic, Indian, Turkish melodies. Orientalism is also noticeable in the album covers of the band, which depict deserts, mausoleum buildings, and palm trees; the names of some compositions also refer to some exotic places like India. For example, their first album *Bumerang* (*Boomerang*) has a third track "Madras" with a distinct Arabic sound of guitar in the intro, percussions, and a two and a half minute long tabla (Indian percussion instrument) solo.²³⁵ The first track of the album "*Semirechye*" (*Seven rivers*) begins with a 30 second intro resembling the *dombyra* sound.²³⁶ The name of the track in Kazakh might refer to the region in the Southern Kazakhstan, Zhetisu (in Russian Semirechye, in English Seven waters), and the intro part of the song may refer to the Zhetisu *dombyra* playing school categorized by Akhmet

²³⁴ Interstate TV and Radio Company "MIR", author, director, and producer Arsen Bayanov "Alma-Ata: gorod-djaz, gorod-bluz, gorod-rok-n-rol", February 11, 2018

²³⁵ Funked Up East, published on Jun 21, 2014. For track "Madras" see minute 11
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=sRs4Gnb1Pkk>

²³⁶ Funked Up East, published on Jun 21, 2014. For track "Seven Rivers" see the beginning of the video
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=sRs4Gnb1Pkk>

Zhubanov.²³⁷ The first album cover depicts a boomerang and a couple of tumbleweeds on a desert with a blue sky, a little black Kazakh ornament on the upper left side, and the band logo on the upper right side of the cover. The second album, *Ornament*, has songs like “*Minaret*” (*Minaret*), “*India*” (*India*), “*Tureckiye zarisovki*” (*Turkish Sketches*) on its B side that have Arabic, Indian, and Turkish sonic markers.²³⁸ This album cover also has a desert, a blue sky, and a golden boomerang with a mirage of a mausoleum similar to the Taj Mahal. The third album, *Mirage*, has a song “*Mirazh*” (*Mirage*) with Indian sitar instrument, tabla percussion solo, and some Indian melodies.²³⁹ The album cover is a white-blue depiction of a minaret and some palm trees.

The most popular Kazakh pop-rock band of the Soviet period in the 1970s was Dos-Mukasan, which began in 1967, released their first album of the same name in 1973, and participated in numerous festivals and competitions during their existence. According to their official website, band members were inspired by the popularity of The Beatles, The Rolling Stones, and Deep Purple and secretly listened to the radio Golos Ameriki (Voice of America), learning new playing techniques from the radio broadcasting.²⁴⁰ The band also claims that they “balanced on a blade: any moment they could have been accused of nationalism or popularizing bourgeois culture”. As for their repertoire, the band performed covers of popular Soviet music (*estrada*), as well as adaptations of Kazakh folk songs and their original compositions. Among Dos-Mukasan’s popular compositions are pop songs like “*Toi zhyry*” (*Marriage song*), “*16 kyz*”

²³⁷ К. Сахарбаева “Қазақ күйшілік мектептерінің қалыптасуы (Құрманғазы атындағы ҚҰК мысалында)” *Saryn art and science journal* 2 (15) 2017, 6

²³⁸ Bigórnia Musical Published on Aug 15, 2015. For the B side of the album see minute 18.50 <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=oWazt-Lta54>

²³⁹ Bigórnia Musical, Published on Sep 17, 2014 For song *Mirage* see minute 23.39 <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=oJXv51AyPgA>

²⁴⁰ Official website of Dos-Mukasan, accessed April 1, 2019 http://dos-mukasan.kz/?page_id=23

(16 girls), “*Kaidasyn*” (*Where are you*), but the band also had experimental recordings, like the song *Betpak Dala*, released in 1976.²⁴¹ The information on their official website has a nationalist sentiment, claiming that the band was “ahead of their time” in adapting folk songs for amplified instruments and that during the Soviet time they “helped the Kazakh youth accept themselves as representatives and descendants of a people (*narod*) with rich musical legacy”.²⁴² Not all of the band members created careers in music, two of them also built careers in academia. Interestingly, Dos-Mukasan still occasionally performs at republican-level celebrations and their music has become iconic of Soviet Kazakh music in contemporary Kazakhstan.

In the 1980s, Almaty saw the emergence of many strong local musicians, who greatly contributed to the local music scene, many of whom (Taskyn Okapov, Roza Rymbayeva, Bulat Syzdykov, Batyrkhan Shukenov, Baigali Serkebayev) started their career in a famous pop band, Aray. Later on, the band became known as Almaty, and eventually A-Studio, which is still active and very popular in Kazakhstan and Russia. Ex-members of Aray like Roza Rymbayeva, Bulat Syzdykov, Batyrkhan Shukenov, and Baigali Serkebayev are very popular established musicians in Kazakhstan and neighbouring countries even today. When Aray became A-Studio, Baigali Serkebayev continued to work on the project, targeting more the audience in Russia, while Roza Rymbayeva and Batyrkhan Shukenov created solo careers. Later on, Bulat Syzdykov created a duet project, Musicola, with Karina Abdulina. In the late 1980s, city officials established an official rock club in Almaty, which was directed by Alexander Kirichenko. The club regularly organized concerts in the concert hall of the publishing house Baspager. Eventually, other

²⁴¹<https://ru.wikipedia.org/wiki/%D0%94%D0%BE%D1%81-%D0%9C%D1%83%D0%BA%D0%B0%D1%81%D0%B0%D0%BD>

²⁴² Ibid.

expressive music forms began to take place in Almaty, including a heavy metal band Bratya Tarnovskiye (Tarnovskiy brothers), created in 1986 by Vladimir and Oleg Tarnovskiy.²⁴³

The majority of the musicians I mentioned that became famous in the 1980s switched to more popular music forms and maintained their place in the local music scene. During my summer fieldwork in Almaty, I briefly met with members of the band Granchester, who started playing music when they were students in the 1990s and still occasionally perform in Almaty. Dmitriy Shegolikhin, who introduced me to the band, challenged them to tell me some of the craziest stories from their concerts. The band members told me how the audience members would get crazy during their concerts and behave inappropriately. Granchester members also told me how they would run away from what they called *gopniki*, referring to young men stereotypically from suburban families with low income and bad education, because *gopniki* would usually beat up members of “deviant” subcultures. During my summer fieldwork in Astana, I also met with an unofficial “father” of Astana’s rock music scene, Andrei Evseev, a creator of the Astana rock club. He told me about the hardships of the 1990s in Astana, before it became the capital: “I lived in the private sector (*chastniy sektor*), in the private sector alcohol, drugs, people passed away very (*uhodili*) very fast”. In the 2000s Aleksandr opened a small music store, eventually created a rock club, opened a music studio, and started organizing music festivals. “At first we organized a huge festival, but it was hard. In 2003 I organized a big festival with my own hands. Later we started organizing smaller rock club festivals, it was easier” - says Aleksandr. Due to his health issues, Aleksandr gave the Astana rock club to his protege, but remains a creator of the club and sponsors some events. In the 2000s, Kazakhstan’s music scene welcomed many other

²⁴³ Ibid.

interesting projects like ethnic-rock band Ulytau, a Kazakh rock band Asem, experimental pop project Naya, a rock band Anomalia, etc.

Indie Rock

After some pause in the local music scene, a new name broke into the alternative music scene of Kazakhstan. Galymzhan Moldanazar became famous in 2013 when he uploaded his debut song “*Akpen birge*” (*With Light*) on Youtube in 2013.²⁴⁴ Surprisingly, he gained popularity in Russian social networks before being acknowledged by audiences or fellow musicians in Kazakhstan. His popularity among Russian social network users drew the attention of the Russian online media, which published articles about him with an orientalist sentiment, outlining their surprise that Kazakhstani musicians could produce trendy, high-quality songs. The independent media website *Colta* for culture and society published an article about a newcomer, as they said, with an “exotic” name, claiming that his songs in Kazakh sound “*zagadochnee i dushevnee*” (more mysterious and soulful) and that he sings in such a way that translation is not required. The author of the article concluded that this kind of music has the potential of becoming an international phenomenon.²⁴⁵ Another article by the Russian internet media project *Daily Afisha* for culture and entertainment called his music video “*ekzotichnyi*” (exotic) and his songs “*neozhidanno i podozritelno kruto*” (unexpectedly and suspiciously cool).²⁴⁶ Arguably, the intersection of Kazakh language with what *Colta* described as “chillwave” music is what

²⁴⁴ <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=jpy0Hjai7m4>

²⁴⁵ Радиф Кашапов “Новое имя: Галымжан Молданазар. Сможет ли казахстанский певец, которого прозвали «хипстерджаном», появиться на международном рынке?” *Colta*, 6 ноября 2013 года https://www.colta.ru/articles/music_modern/1050-novoe-imya-galymzhan-moldanazar

²⁴⁶ Булат Латыпов “«Я боюсь одного — славы и денег»: Галымжан Молданазар и казахский чиллвейв” *Афиша Волна*, 14 октября 2013 года <https://daily.afisha.ru/archive/volna/heroes/ya-boyus-odnogo-slavy-i-deneg-galymzhan-moldanazar-i-kazhskiy-chillveyv/>

interested the audience; this kind of sonic and linguistic crossing was analyzed in the second chapter.

Before his unexpected breakthrough, Moldanazar had been writing songs for other artists, including the Kazakh pop band Orda and pop-rock bands Asem, Urker, etc., while also working on his own music. However, the popularity of “*Akpen birge*” made a name for him, and he started collaborating with international artists like the American string quartet Break of Reality and the Ukrainian singer Ivan Dorn, and performing at local as well as American venues.²⁴⁷ He formed his own band, released an album, and established a regular performance schedule in Kazakhstan’s cities. This is a unique case for Kazakhstan based artists, as my interviewees admit, where more usually the only source of profit for a musician in Kazakhstan is not performing at concerts but at celebrations (*toi*). Today he is arguably one of the most successful indie musician in Kazakhstan. After Moldanazar’s breakthrough, the local alternative music scene grew richer, with other musicians with various performing styles: the soft acoustic Qonyratbay Fam; the classic indie electric guitar sounding Molto Loud, city&shivers; the hip-hop-ish Darkhan Juzz; the mostly electronic Celestial Whales and M’Dee; and the hard rock-ish Far in Gate, etc. Artists like Far in Gate, Molto Loud, and city&shivers reference Moldanazar as the first indie musician to become popular in Kazakhstan and as an inspiration for aspiring musicians like them to pursue their own dreams of becoming professional artists.

²⁴⁷ For information on collaboration with Ivan Dorn see

<https://www.buro247.kz/culture/music/dorn-moldanazar-noviy-trek.html>

For information on collaboration with Break of Reality see

<https://astanatimes.com/2015/08/galymzhan-moldanazar-break-of-reality-offer-cross-cultural-musical-collaboration/>

For information on concerts in the USA see

<https://www.nur.kz/1719501-gruppa-moldanazar-edet-pokorat-ssa.html>

The popularity of Moldanazar also shed light on a trending nostalgia for the 1990s and 1980s, which can be considered as an attempt of the youth to reimagine that period. The music video for the first song, “*Akpen birge*,” has many 1990s throwbacks like a cassette audio player in the beginning, oversize leather jackets, old style cologne, village culture clubs, etc.²⁴⁸ A recent music video for “*Senin zhanynda*” has a distinct 1980s vibe, evident in sparkly bright-colored clothing, voluminous hairdos, audience in Soviet apartments *khrushchyovki*, old Soviet furniture, Lenin busts, wired telephones, and communist party members; even a small detail like girls with ponytails to the side is a throwback to the late Soviet period.²⁴⁹ In the music video storyline, Moldanazar band jokingly performs as a band called Modern Tolkyn (Modern Wave), presenting an image similar to the band Modern Talking. In her vivid exploration of nostalgia, Svetlana Boym writes that even if nostalgia seems like a “longing for a place,” it is actually “a longing for a different time”.²⁵⁰ This nostalgia for late Soviet and early post-Soviet period is an example of this kind of longing, one also evident in other recent cultural activities in Kazakhstan, like the reimagining of the Soviet tradition of wall carpets by using them as decor at night clubs or instead of posters at events.

During my summer fieldwork, I met with Galymzhan Moldanazar in Almaty in a local café, “Kino,” situated on an area called by the locals *Arbat*. Arbat lies on the intersection of Panfilov and Zhibek Zholy streets and is a very popular destination among the local youth. It’s common to see street musicians and dancers performing on the Arbat, alongside artists and craftsmen selling their works. Recently, the area started filling up with various creative cafes or fast foods

²⁴⁸ Галымжан Молданазар Published on Oct 27, 2013 <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=jpy0Hjai7m4>

²⁴⁹ Gakku TV Published on Dec 8, 2017 <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=v00BONAxtyo>

²⁵⁰ Svetlana Boym *The Future of Nostalgia*. (New York: Basic Books, 2001), xv.

opened by local social media micro celebrities, who can themselves be frequently noticed there. “Kino” was right in the middle of this creative area of Almaty.

Although Moldanazar is known in Kazakhstan as an indie musician, his music is often described as synth-pop with a strong 1980s vibe. In order to unravel his strong association with indie music, I want to provide a brief origin history of indie rock. According to David Hesmondhalgh, the term “indie”, the abbreviation of the word “independent, was adopted in the 1980s and referred to the claimed relevance and authenticity of the genre to the youth and to its independence from large music corporations.²⁵¹ Initially a British phenomenon, indie music became popular in the 1990s and was associated with loud guitar sounds, smart and emotional lyrics, and deliberate minimization of the image of musical prowess and charisma, arguably to differentiate themselves from rock scene.²⁵² Matthew Bannister has similarly described indie rock as a “post-punk subgenre of independent or alternative rock,” with mainly white males playing a melodic electric guitars sounds with bass and drums.²⁵³ Scholars outline that indie musician’s autonomy from commercial culture today is more mythical than actual and describe a more complex nature of indie labels, which in reality can be “more exploitative of their musicians than major corporations.”²⁵⁴ A similar ideology of autonomy from commercial culture is associated with Moldanazar and this signals that he is an indie musician.

²⁵¹ David Hesmondhalgh “Indie: The Institutional Politics and Aesthetics of a Popular Music Genre.” *Cultural Studies* 13(1), 1999: 35

²⁵² Ibid. 35, 38

²⁵³ Mathew Bannister “‘Loaded’: Indie Guitar Rock, Canonism, White Masculinities.” *Popular Music* 25(1), 2006: 77

²⁵⁴ David Hesmondhalgh “Indie: The Institutional Politics and Aesthetics of a Popular Music Genre.” *Cultural Studies* 13(1), 1999: 35

During the interview, I noticed that *authenticity* and *autonomy* were one of the common themes that kept coming up. According to Brent Luvaas, the concepts of authenticity and autonomy are fundamental for indie musicians all around the world. Since autonomy from commercial culture is not such a defining factor of indie music, simplicity in stage behaviour, clothing, melodic guitar sounds, smart lyrics, and live performance came to be associated with indie music. When Luvaas examines Indonesian indie musicians, he outlines that they have their own culturally and socially specific way of demonstrating authenticity and autonomy.²⁵⁵ In the case of Kazakhstan, the collected data show that the authenticity and autonomy that indie musicians in Kazakhstan demonstrate is still connected to the myth of commercial autonomy, but also to the simplicity of their image, sound, and live performance. However, there are also connotations of autonomy specific to the region, like having the freedom to choose concert venues, and being able to refuse to perform at family celebrations of certain authority figures.

Local and Global Ideas of Autonomy and Authenticity

Luvaas writes that indie music typically demonstrates resistance to the “glamour and gloss of contemporary commercial culture”, which was inherent, according to the article, to African American rap, R&B, soul music.²⁵⁶ If African American music indexes glamour and gloss, according to the article, in Kazakh society, pop music played at celebrations (*toi music*) similarly indexes glamour and gloss. As I mentioned in previous chapters, my participants often described themselves as in strong opposition to *toi music*, which constructs their image as autonomous from commercial culture, glamour, gloss, and more generally as “independent from the capitalist

²⁵⁵ Brent Luvaas “Exemplary Centers and Musical Elsewheres: On Authenticity and Autonomy in Indonesian Indie Music” *Asian Music*, Volume 44, Number 2, 2013: 95

²⁵⁶ *Ibid.* 96

system”.²⁵⁷ The simplicity of indie bands is displayed in their image as well. For example, Moldanazar and his band are often dressed in simple black clothing like t-shirts and pants during concerts (*Image 13*). Groups like city&shivers and Molto Loud also dress in simple t-shirts,

checked shirts, and jeans. Moldanazar himself mentioned in one interview that he feels like he is separate from the general Kazakh music scene, autonomous, not fitting in it.

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If the autonomy and authenticity of production practices of the indie musicians in the West are ambiguous, Kazakhstan’s indie musicians have regionally specific ways of demonstrating autonomy and authenticity. The music market in the country is so small that no major corporations are interested in it, giving indie musicians commercial autonomy. While local production studios and members of showbusiness are much more interested



Image 13. Moldanazar concert poster
Retrieved from:
<https://www.inalmaty.kz/afisha/full/65739>

in the *toi* music inherent to a *toi* business that provides more financial opportunities, indie musicians of Kazakhstan mostly follow DIY (do it yourself) ethic, recording and producing their music in rented recording studios or in their own studios. However, local musicians face other socio-cultural practices that give them space to demonstrate autonomy in a way unique for

²⁵⁷ Michael Azerrad *Our Band Could Be Your Life: Scenes from the American Indie Underground 1981– 1991*. (New York: Back Bay Books) 2001: 9

²⁵⁸ Зарина Ахматова, Светлана Ромашкина, Власть
<https://vlast.kz/persona/19359-galymzan-moldanazar-muzykant-a-ne-hozu-na-toi-potomu-cto-ne-hocu-por-tit-ludam-prazdnik.html>

post-Soviet countries. Namely, the role of informal practices that obligate musicians to perform at family celebrations (*toi*) like birthdays and weddings of authority figures in order to gain their support and establish practical personal relationships with them. The frontman of the band city&shivers, Arkhat Amangeldin, said that during his conversation with Galymzhan Moldanazar they talked about a situation that happened to Moldanazar. He was ordered to perform at a celebration of an authority figure, but refused to do so, considering it below his dignity. Arkhat looked at it as a risk for Moldanazar's career. A refusal to engage in informal practices and personal relations with authority figures is thus another way that indie musicians claim their autonomy.

The concept of authenticity is also interconnected with autonomy in the context of resistance to commercial culture. Luvaas writes that generally indie musicians claim autonomy because of the ideology that indie musicians are “unwilling to cave in to the demands of corporations or compromise ‘who they really are’—that is, their ‘authenticity’—for the sake of a quick buck”.²⁵⁹ He also argues that Indonesian musicians demonstrate authenticity by linking their music to classic indie sounds.²⁶⁰ Indie musicians in Kazakhstan demonstrate a more complex understanding of authenticity, one that involves production and performance practices. That is, local indie musicians disparage *toi* musicians because they claim that they satisfy the need of the audience for money and therefore are not authentic, while they themselves write music for the art itself, and therefore are authentic. Apart from production practices, local indie musicians demonstrate authenticity in their performance practices as well. Moldanazar outlines that

²⁵⁹ Brent Luvaas “Exemplary Centers and Musical Elsewheres: On Authenticity and Autonomy in Indonesian Indie Music” *Asian Music*, Volume 44, Number 2, 2013: 96

²⁶⁰ *Ibid.* 98

performing live is very important for him as a musician, especially in Kazakhstan, where the music scene is dominated by lip-syncing performances, suggesting that performing live with live instruments has the connotation of honesty and authenticity for local indie musicians:

An artist shouldn't should perform with a phonogram because people feel it at a concert with a phonogram (lyp-sync). (People) can't feel something inside the song, an artist, inside the heart of a composer because it is electronically written piece. I think many things should be forbidden if we really need changes, improvements... When it (lip-syncing) will be forbidden, artists will start to work.
²⁶¹

At the same time, the Kazakh music scene in general demonstrates multiple authenticities, in a way that if performing live is authentic for Moldanazar, performing on traditional instruments is authentic for traditional musicians. In the interview with Vlast, Moldanazar mentioned an elderly man lecturing him for not performing on *dombyra*: *"They get after me saying 'Why don't you play on dombyra'. I told one elderly man (agashka) 'look, we met each other on a street, you drove here on a Mercedes, why not on a horse?'"*²⁶²

Thus, local indie musicians reproduce the ideologies of autonomy and authenticity of the global indie music scene, but also interpret what these two concepts mean in the context of the local music scene. The meaning ranges from questions of musical practice (live performance, melodic guitar sound, interesting lyrics) to questions of image (simple clothing, simple stage behaviour), and questions of commercial practice and independence from informal pressure.

²⁶¹ Galymzhan Moldanazar, interview on July 2018,

²⁶² Зарина Ахматова, Светлана Ромашкина, Власть

<https://vlast.kz/persona/19359-galymzan-moldanazar-muzykant-a-ne-hozu-na-toi-potomu-cto-ne-hocu-porit-ludam-prazdnik.html>

Matthew Bannister writes that indie music scene was accused of sexism because of its male-dominated nature.²⁶³ Scholars were interested in the scene as a homosocial space where they could analyze masculinity.²⁶⁴ Thus, male-dominated nature of Kazakhstan's music scene can be a reason for analyzing masculinity and gender issues.

Challenging Hegemonic Ideas of Masculinity and Femininity

Scholars have outlined that the indie rock scene is male-dominated, which is true for Kazakhstan as well, except for a few examples like Qonyratbay Fam and Far in Gate. Taylor Martin Houston has argued the North America's indie music scene is a homosocial space, where men instead of constructing and measuring manhood, challenged hegemonic masculinity and embraced alternative masculinities.²⁶⁵ Kazakhstan's indie music scene also has instances of demonstrating alternative masculinity in the music videos of local indie musicians, which arguably challenges hegemonic masculinity in Kazakhstan's society.

Scholars outline that there are various forms of masculinity, but according to Connell and Messerschmidt, hegemonic masculinity is "the currently most honored way of being a man, which requires all other men to position themselves in relation to it; and... ideologically legitimates the global subordination of women to men".²⁶⁶ Given the narrow understanding of hegemonic masculinity, Houston claims that individuals construct alternative masculinities by

²⁶³ Mathew Bannister "'Loaded': Indie Guitar Rock, Canonism, White Masculinities." *Popular Music* 25(1), 2006: 77, 88

²⁶⁴ Taylor Martin Houston "The Homosocial Construction of Alternative Masculinities: Men in Indie Rock Bands" *The Journal of Men's Studies*, vol. 20, no. 2, (2012)

²⁶⁵ Taylor Martin Houston "The Homosocial Construction of Alternative Masculinities: Men in Indie Rock Bands" *The Journal of Men's Studies*, vol. 20, no. 2, (2012): 159.

²⁶⁶ R.W. Connell & J.W. Messerschmidt "Hegemonic masculinity: Rethinking the concept" *Gender & Society*, 19, (2005): 832.

incorporating characteristics typically associated with femininity like “expressing emotions such as caring, joy, sadness, anxiety, and fear; being openly affectionate with peers; maintaining stylized/fashion forward dress codes that accentuate the body; engaging in beautification practices like styling one’s hair and adorning the body with accessories; and performing activities that sexualize the body and draw the gaze of onlookers” to their masculinity.²⁶⁷

Houston acknowledges that historically since the development of the notion of “romanticism” in the 18th century, female characteristics demonstrated by male artists were accepted by the society as “necessary for the production of art”, and argues that indie rock musicians construct alternative masculinity through recreating connotations of romanticism in their image and performance.²⁶⁸



Image 14. Screenshot of the music video
Moldanazar - Senin zhanynda

Scholars have considerably contributed to gender studies in the Central Asian region by outlining the importance of masculinity for the national representation, but my study

shows that the concept of masculinity is quite ambiguous in Kazakhstan’s music scene. Diana

Kudaibergenova have discussed the “symbolic ‘masculinization’ of national representation” in Kazakhstan and other Central Asian post-Soviet countries, outlining that these nations are

²⁶⁷ Taylor Martin Houston “The Homosocial Construction of Alternative Masculinities: Men in Indie Rock Bands” *The Journal of Men’s Studies*, vol. 20, no. 2, (2012): 159.

²⁶⁸ Ibid.

frequently represented by “ancient, strong, and mainly male figures or symbols”.²⁶⁹ Edward Snajdr has explored the subject of domestic violence in Kazakhstan, saying that the question of domestic violence has an ethnic connotation in the local discourse and that local police links “Kazakh ethnicity with domestic violence as a way to perform their authority as authentic cultural subjects.”²⁷⁰ However, local indie musicians demonstrate vague relationship towards masculinity through their images and song lyrics. Namely, in December 2017, Moldanazar released a music video for his song “*Senin zhanynda*” (Close to you), sonically and visually stylized in a 1980s vibe, which featured him and members of his band wearing sparkly clothes, excessive accessories, light makeup, lip gloss, and volumized hairdo.²⁷¹ The lyrics of the song express emotions of love, joy, and excitement:

Tulaydy menin zhuregim
Senin zhanynda, senin zhanynda
Taudan da biyk sezindim
Senin zhanynda, senin zhanynda

My heart is beating fast
When I am close to you, close to you
I feel higher than the mountain
When I am close to you, close to you

Another less obvious lyrical example can be noticed in the song “*Alystama*” (Don’t move away), a very soft, mellow, sad song accompanied by the piano.²⁷² The song is about two people becoming estranged and their feeling for each other slowly fading, and it has lines about crying:

Sezim suyp suktanar
Zhaska tolar zhas zhanar

The feelings will get cold
The eyes will fill with tears

²⁶⁹ Diana T. Kudaibergenova |Between the state and the artist: representations of femininity and masculinity in the formation of ideas of the nation in Central Asia” *Nationalities Papers* 2015: 4

²⁷⁰ Edward Snajdr “Ethnicizing the Subject: Domestic Violence and the Politics of Primordialism in Kazakhstan” *The Journal of the Royal Anthropological Institute*, Vol. 13, No. 3 (Sep., 2007), 609

²⁷¹ Moldanazar, *Сенің жаныңда*, December 8, 2017: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=v00BONAxtyo>

²⁷² Moldanazar, *Алыстама*, April 14, 2016: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=6FinZpyh5uk>

The images of musicians in the music video and the content of the songs arguably challenges conventions of hegemonic masculinity and reproduces discourses of alternative masculinity. Thus, some of my research participants produce alternative representations of masculinity in their music.

I also want to mention examples in music videos and lyrics of indie bands that construct alternative femininity. The first example of that is a music video for the song of city&shivers “*More*” released on April 12, 2018.²⁷³ The music video portrays three young women as not interested in romantic relationships through showing them leaving men who are trying to hit on them, and by the end of the video all three of them are taken to a fight club where they brutally fight each other and fancy dressed spectators are betting money on them. In the end of the video they are shown in bruises and blood laughing with each other and hugging. The lyrics in the bridge of the song suggest the distance of women from romantic feelings, and on the contrary the proneness of men to romantic feelings:

*She said
Don't fall in, don't fall in,
Don't fall in love with me boy*

The coldness, brutality, and rage demonstrated by the women in the video are the opposite of the hegemonic constructs of femininity in Kazakhstan, and these kind of music videos arguably construct an alternative femininity in the local music scene.

²⁷³ Gakku Youtube Channel, city&shivers “*More*”, April 12, 2018: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=eLrQ4bsZ7qo>

Another band that participates in constructing alternative femininity is Far in Gate, their example is especially notable because of the female vocalist and a former female drummer in the band. Unfortunately, I had the opportunity to interview only the lead guitar player and creator of the band, Ilyas Kabiyeu, but I want to provide a very short interpretation based on the music and the music videos of the band. The overall sonic style of the band is harder and harsher than the previously discussed bands in this chapter. Sonically, the band recreates the sound of bands like Paramore, with more classic rock sound than indie, darker and harsher female vocals, distorted electric guitar and bass sounds with strong drum part. The vocalist of the band, Zhanel Zhusupova, does not try to portray traditional female characteristics, but natural to the rock band frontman image, recreates a rebel identity with bright red locks of hair and hair whipping-jumping behaviour on stage. She arguably rejects traditional female image of a soft, shy, traditional Kazakh woman, and constructs an alternative modern femininity.

Thus, indie musicians in Kazakh music scene engage in practices of constructing alternative masculinity and alternative femininity, but they are not consistent in their views towards alternative masculinity and their recreation of it, as it was clear from Moldanazar's comment during the interview, when he said that he doesn't like the image of Q-pop bands, implying their alternative masculinity. However, the discussion of alternative masculinity construction in Kazakhstan's music scene is not complete without the analysis of Q-pop.

Korean Wave in Kazakhstan

Q-pop was introduced to the audience in 2015 by members of the Kazakh band ORDA, the producers and brothers Yerbolat and Yesbolat Bedelkhan. It originates from Korean popular

music or K-pop, which is characterized by danceable rhythms, catchy melodies, and a mixture of Western music genres like rap, R&B, hip-hop, reggae, electro performed by teenage singers and groups.²⁷⁴ The first Q-pop project, presented in 2015 by Yerbolat Bedelkhan, was called Ninety One as an homage to the year Kazakhstan gained independence, 1991. At that time Kazakhstan already had a considerable amount of K-pop fan base, and the producers targeted that audience. In spite of the cultural differences of Korea and Kazakhstan, Q-pop performers arguably recreated a K-pop star's distinctive appearance, dance moves, fashion style, and music video style. Initially there was a controversy over the looks and fashion choices of Ninety One, a band who became popular very fast. If initially music videos of Kazakhstan's performers could reach only a million views on Youtube, Ninety One's music videos could reach 6 million views. The fan base grew day by day, and gradually other Q-pop bands started appearing as well. Today there are almost twenty other Q-pop bands, and in 2018 JUZ Entertainment, the production company of Yerbolat Bedelkhan, organized a Q-pop music festival Q-fest in Almaty where 16 performers took part²⁷⁵. Ninety One and a guest artist from the Kyrgyz Republic were headliners of the festival, suggesting that K-pop and Q-pop may be popular in Kyrgyz Republic as well. In order to understand the popularity of the genre in Kazakhstan, we need to explore the rise of K-pop and when it was brought to Central Asia.

The popularity of pop music produced in South Korea (from now on "Korea") began when the country experienced democratization and economic prosperity in the early 1990s. The younger generation that grew up consuming American pop culture started demanding globalized local

²⁷⁴ Dal Yong Jin, Woongjae Ryoo. "Critical Interpretation of Hybrid K-Pop: The Global-Local Paradigm of English Mixing in Lyrics" *Popular Music and Society*, Vol. 37, No. 2, 2014: 113

²⁷⁵ The news post about Q-fest published on the website of the JUZ Entertainment created by Yerbolat Bedelkhan. <http://juzent.com/#/article/news/1538042582996>

cultural music.²⁷⁶ Michael Fuhr outlines the creator of the first Korean hip-hop band Seo Taiji and their music as trailblazers for Korean pop stars. Seo Taiji became iconic for fusing hip-hop, rap, reggae, heavy metal, alternative rock, grunge styles and appropriating music, dance, fashion styles for the youth.²⁷⁷ At first, entertainment agencies that created cultural products targeted the local consumers, but after the decrease of the domestic market the agencies became export-oriented. K-pop music inherited “fast and rap-based dance pop” from Seo Taiji’s music and started spreading to the Asian audience, starting with China.²⁷⁸ Fuhr explains the rapid popularity of Korean pop culture as due to the high quality of the products and low price, which influenced the spread of Korean pop culture through China to Hong-Kong, Taiwan, Singapore, Vietnam, Indonesia, Japan, and later on in North America and Europe. It is important to outline that the Korean wave consisted of various products, including TV dramas, movies, songs, make-up, etc, though this discussion will focus only on music.²⁷⁹

Scholarly works on K-pop lack information about its popularity in Central Asian region and post-Soviet countries, and do not focus on how Korean Wave is taking over those regions. There is a soon-to-be-published scholarly research conducted by an Assistant Professor from Nazarbayev University, Ho Youn Koh on K-pop and young Korean diaspora in Kazakhstan, initiated by the lack of scholarly research on local Korean diaspora.²⁸⁰ Hopefully, the shift in the

²⁷⁶ Michael Fuhr *Globalization and Popular Music in South Korea: Sounding Out K-pop* (Oxon: Routledge) 2017: 52

²⁷⁷ Ibid. 53

²⁷⁸ Ibid. 55

²⁷⁹ Ibid. 130-131

²⁸⁰ Ho Youn Koh “K-Pop in the Blood?: (Re)shaping of Korean Identity among the Young Korean Diaspora in Kazakhstan”

scholarly discourse of popular music from Western to Eastern regions due to the Korean Wave will also shed light on popular music in Central Asia.

K-pop culture in Kazakhstan and local K-pop fandom is supported by the social media and Korean government. From my personal observation, I can say that Korean Wave came to Kazakhstan in the early 2000s with the huge popularity of TV dramas like *Autumn in My Heart*, *Winter Sonata*, and *Full House*. Later on, K-pop bands like *Big Bang*, *SHINee*, and *SS501* became popular, and gradually K-pop culture gained a considerable fan base in the country. Shifting from consuming Korean drama to K-pop, in other words “Hallyu 2.0”, occurred in other regions, like Southeast Asia, Middle East through social media.²⁸¹ The Korean Embassy and Culture Center in Kazakhstan actively support K-pop culture by organizing concerts, festivals, Korean movie nights, and free language teaching classes for local people.²⁸² Nissim Otmazgin and Irina Lyan write that social media play a huge role in institutionalizing K-pop fandom in Israel and Palestine and shapes the community.²⁸³ In Kazakhstan, social media also play a huge role in shaping the local fan community by providing access to music videos, various information about the groups and the industry, but it is also a good organizational tool that creates a sense of community. In Kazakhstan the K-pop fan community spreads beyond social media as well. There are K-pop dance cover groups that perform the dance routines of famous K-pop groups, organize concerts, K-pop parties, perform at festivals, and regularly train. For example, on March 30, 2019 NU K-Pop Cover Dance Club of Nazarbayev University in the

²⁸¹ Nissim Otmazgin, Irina Lyan “Hallyu across the Desert: K-pop Fandom in Israel and Palestine” *Cross-Currents: East Asian History and Culture Review*, Volume 3, Number 1, (2014), 38

²⁸² The information is taken from the official website of the Korean Center in Kazakhstan <http://kaz.korean-culture.org/kk/494/board/205/list>

²⁸³ Nissim Otmazgin, Irina Lyan “Hallyu across the Desert: K-pop Fandom in Israel and Palestine” *Cross-Currents: East Asian History and Culture Review*, Volume 3, Number 1, (2014), 41

capital of Kazakhstan held a concert “Fate: Throughout the Time” with the help of the local Korean Center.²⁸⁴ With the appearance of Q-pop, some fan communities embraced both K-pop and Q-pop, sharing information about music groups from both genres.²⁸⁵ But some K-pop fans demonstrate specific preferences between these two musical choices. For example, the president of the university K-pop cover dance club told me during our personal communication:

*Q-pop appeared relatively recently. Its many characteristics derive from K-pop. I think that Q-pop is only now outlining its unique feature (izyuminka). I don't want to seem rude, but for me Q-pop seemed like an imitation of K-pop in Kazakh language.*²⁸⁶

Localizing K-pop: Q-pop

Q-pop is an interesting musical phenomenon in Kazakhstan that contributes to the discourse of authenticity, gender identity, and national identity. Some audience members perceive localizing K-pop and representing K-pop singers' look as inauthentic, while singers themselves claim authenticity for incorporating a global trend to local realities and as a result promoting Kazakh culture and language. The bands also calls for authenticity, creativity, self-expression, and loyalty to dreams, creating a complex understanding of authenticity.

Q-pop is largely based on Korean pop music, however it has some specific regional differences. According to Ingyu Oh, K-pop is an example of *glocalization*, “high quality localization of one hegemonic culture that is meant to be re-exported to other countries due to a small domestic market”, while *localization* “refers to modifying global cultural contents to the demands of local

²⁸⁴ “В Назарбаев университете прошел к-pop cover dance концерт с корейским культурным центром 2019” April 1, 2019 <http://kaz.korean-culture.org/kk/494/board/205/read/96292>

²⁸⁵ For information on such communities see Instagram accounts @qpop._k-pop @qpopkpop @kazak_korean_dance, etc.

²⁸⁶ Personal communication with a K-pop fan, April 6, 2019.

consumers”.²⁸⁷ Thus, as the following section will show, Q-pop communicates the demand for high-quality songs and music videos in Kazakh language and for a modern Kazakh social identity, discourse that supports freedom of expression and following your dreams. The band also reconstructs the discourse of masculinity in the country by demonstrating alternative masculinity through their stage image and music videos.

During my interview with Yesbolat Bedelkhan, the producer of the Q-pop band Black Dial and one of the Bedelkhan brothers who created Q-pop, commented on why they decided to create Kazakh K-pop in the first place:

*Korean music, Korean show business is a worldwide leader. Why shouldn't we learn from them? K-pop system is developing and proved itself... Western singers were always the best. Korea beat them just in ten years. Why? Why shouldn't we analyze and learn the system that allowed them to achieve that?*²⁸⁸

In February 2018, a member of Ninety One, Dulat Mukhametkaliev, became one of the 16 elected members of the central committee of Zhas Otan, a youth wing of the ruling party Nur Otan, from 363 candidates.²⁸⁹ On March 28 2018, Dulat gave a speech on the fourth meeting of Zhas Otan, that was mentioned in the introduction part.²⁹⁰ During the speech, Dulat also expressed the “best practice” rhetoric of Yesbolat Bedelkhan:

K-pop subculture became a huge business which brings 5 billion USD to the country through tourism. Because the development of K-pop subculture is

²⁸⁷ Ingyu Oh “From Localization to Glocalization: Contriving Korean Pop Culture to Meet Glocal Demands” *Kritika Kultura* 29 (2017), 160

²⁸⁸ Yesbolat Bedelkhan, interview, July 4, 2018.

²⁸⁹ Tengrinews, “Солист Ninety One победил на выборах в ‘Жас Отан’” February 28, 2018 <https://tengrinews.kz/music/Colist-Ninety-One-pobedil-na-vyiborah-v-jas-otane-338100/>

²⁹⁰ Максим Споткай IV Съезд молодежного крыла “Жас Отан”: перезагрузка 30 марта 2018 https://liter.kz/ru/articles/show/44460-iv_sezd_molodezhnogo_kryla_zhas_otan_perezagruzka

*interconnected with governmental support. I can see the same thing happening with Q-pop. I think there is a good potential here.*²⁹¹

Yesbolat Bedelkhan's and Dulat Mukhametkali's comments reflect a clear and a conscious "best-practice" kind of business thinking from the producer's point of view. Laura Adams and Assel Rustemova suggest that this kind of business thinking is widespread in Kazakhstan, outlining the local government "emphasises an orientation to the future, to development, to global managerial ideas of 'best practices', and to aesthetics not based on an ethno-national idea".²⁹² Thus, the comments suggest that mimicking K-pop is a strategic choice aiming to learn from a "successful business" and benefit financially.

Fuhr writes that a small music market and growing piracy made entertainment agencies focus on music export and on the idol system.²⁹³ The market in Kazakhstan is even smaller, but there are already eight entertainment and recording companies, including *JUZ Entertainment*, *YB Entertainment*, *Trend Entertainment*, *Eighty Eight Entertainment*, *MM Entertainment*, *SW ENTERTAINMENT*, *DEM Entertainment*, and *DARA Entertainment*. Even if it is hard to say that Q-pop has a similar focus on musical export, it certainly jointly pays attention to the local consumers, and foreign consumers by posting songs and music videos in Latin alphabet with English subtitles and produces the reality show *Q-pop idols*. The first reality show, *Q-pop idols*, which started in March 2018 and recruited young women from all over Kazakhstan and

²⁹¹ AUROR • NINETY ONE FSG, Published on Apr 9, 2018
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=D-SpxvAC1hl>

²⁹² Larua L. Adams, Assel Rustemova "Mass Spectacle and Styles of Governmentality in Kazakhstan and Uzbekistan" *Europe-Asia Studies*, Vol. 61, No. 7, Politics of the Spectacular: Symbolism and Power in Central Asia (Sep., 2009), 1270

²⁹³ Michael Fuhr *Globalization and Popular Music in South Korea: Sounding Out K-pop* (Oxon: Routledge) 2017: 67

reportedly even from Russia and China, debuted the girls band *Juzim* in October 2018. The band premiered their first music video and continues working on their music.²⁹⁴

According to scholarly work, in practice K-pop bands do not have strict stylistics limits, having diverse songs like ballads and pop songs with soul, disco, rap, rock, techno, and reggae styles. K-pop songs adopted standard pop song formulas defined by catchy melodies, high-tempo beats, vibrant sounds, and three-five minutes length.²⁹⁵ Arguably, K-pop songs are Americanized with



Image 15. Ninety One concert poster
Retrieved from:
<https://zakazbiletov.kz/en/events/1-almaty/3-kontserty/12322-ninety-one-v-almaty>

distinct dance rhythms, rap vocals, and English language, which was a conscious business strategy.²⁹⁶ Sonically, dynamic shifts, abrupt switches, and changes of flow are characteristic of K-pop music.²⁹⁷ Apart from that, every K-pop song has a rap part, and a rapper member in the band.²⁹⁸ These musical choices are evident in Q-pop as well.

Fuhr outlines that K-pop is a very visual phenomenon and so is Q-pop.²⁹⁹ Since its appearance, Q-pop bands were defined by their high-quality music

videos, eclectic visual style, dance choreographies, and millions of views on Youtube. Similar to

²⁹⁴ Juzim Music videos <https://www.ntk.kz/ru/q-pop/juzim/mv>

²⁹⁵ Timothy Warner *Pop Music: Technology and Creativity: Trevor Horn and the Digital Revolution*. (Aldershot/Burlington: Ashgate) 2003: 8

²⁹⁶ Michael Fuhr *Globalization and Popular Music in South Korea: Sounding Out K-pop* (Oxon: Routledge) 2017: 81

²⁹⁷ Ibid. 92

²⁹⁸ Ibid. 98

²⁹⁹ Ibid. 108.

K-pop, Q-pop bands are often put in performance spaces with multicolored background, abstract spaces, stylized settings, etc. Recent trends outline that ways of music consumption are expanding to the video and audio streaming websites, movie theatres. The high popularity of Youtube reaction videos assisted in exposing Q-pop bands to international K-pop fan base, which is evident in the high amount of such videos on Youtube. The band is available on iTunes, Spotify, and on August 24, 2017, the band even released a movie about themselves called “Ninety One”.³⁰⁰ Local movie theatres also show live concert of various international bands, including K-pop bands.³⁰¹

Q-pop songs target younger generation and tend to speak about fragile parts of the youth identity discourse, unveiling the youth problems of the region. Fahr mentions that Seo Taiji and Boys released a song *Come Back Home* when there was an increase of runaway teenagers facing pressure for academic achievement. Q-pop songs tend to cover topics of creativity, freedom of expression, individuality, following your dreams, and not worrying about other people’s opinion. For example, Ninety One’s song “*Mooz*” (Ice), which was a soundtrack for a movie about the band, is called *Ice* in reference to the “coldness” of people who criticized them. The song calls on the audience to fight for their dreams:

*Sonymen, bilemin arkimnin tandayi bar,
Al mende arman bar,
Solai de, bilemin senin de tandayin bar,
Sende arman bar.
Senbegen taptaidy, sen kulaganda taiyp,
Bolmaidy olai!
Bilmeimin kim kandai,*

*So, I know everyone has a choice,
Well, I have a dream,
Say so, I know you have a choice,
You have a dream.
Those who don’t believe will run over you,
run away when you fall,
You shouldn’t do that!*

³⁰⁰ Kinopoisk - Ninety One <https://www.kinopoisk.ru/film/1048046/>

³⁰¹ BTS: Love Yourself Tour in Seoul premiere announcement on the website of the movie theaters company in Kazakhstan <http://www.kinopark.kz/ru/movie/bts-love-yourself>

Birak senuge arдайым mendik zhurek daiyn! *I don't know the way everyone is,
But my heart is always ready to believe!*³⁰²

Another song “*Ah!Yah!Mah!*” (Ayama - Don't pity) encourages people to think outside of the box:

<i>Aş esikti, keldim eskertpey!</i>	<i>Open the door, I came without warning!</i>
<i>Jandıramın, dereu bilay ket deymın!</i>	<i>I will burn you, get out of my way!</i>
<i>Endi dayın bol, endi dayın bol!</i>	<i>Be ready now, be ready now!</i>
<i>Bayau men uaqıttan ozamın</i>	<i>Slowly I am ahead of time</i>
<i>Endi dayın bol! Endi dayın bol!</i>	<i>Be ready now, be ready now!</i>
<i>Taptaurındarıñdı büzamın</i>	<i>I will destroy your stereotypes</i>
<i>Şekaradan assın miiñ!</i>	<i>Let your brain cross the border!</i> ³⁰³

Thus, the themes of the songs may reflect the frustration of the younger generation with social pressure to be practical instead of dreamy, to abide outdated traditions, and to limit oneself. The song almost calls for a social movement or riot, reflected in the choir-like “Uao-o-o-o” background vocals on these lines.

Another characteristic of Q-pop, similar to K-pop, is the usage of English words or lines in the songs. For example, both of the previously mentioned songs “*Mooz*” and “*Ah!Yah!Mah!*” have English lines in them. In the song “*Mooz*” the outro has the following English lines:

*When you feel alone,
You can breath with the world
Just keep our rhythm,
One love, one rhythm.*

While the song “*Ah!Yah!Mah!*” Has the following English lines after the first chorus, and an English word inserted in the Kazakh text:

³⁰² Ninety One - Mooz, August 21, 2017: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=dgU0Q9e-g0I>

³⁰³ Ninety One - Ah!Yah!Mah! December 31, 2017: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=TXndIL4XPE4>

*If you can do it
If you can do it
DO IT!
AH! YAH! MAH!*

*Mendik **skill** - beybereket ūyqastardıñ üdemeli qozğalı, My skill is unstoppable movement of natural rhymes*

Thus, Q-pop borrowed many characteristics of the K-pop genre, but certainly regionalizes the music by singing in Kazakh, bringing up topics crucial for the local youth, and using different production practices, making them suitable for the region.

Reproducing Alternative Masculinity

Finally, the appearance of Q-pop genre in Kazakhstan was controversial due to the alternative masculine image that the band constructed. In the first year of the band's existence, there was a huge fan base as well as an organized hater base, mostly consisting of local young men who demanded the cancellation of concerts in cities like Karaganda, Shymkent, Zhezkazgan, Kyzylorda, and Aktobe. The main reasoning of the hater base was that the band "contradicts our traditions" (*dasturge karsy keletin*), or that "their clothing and behavior is not suitable for Kazakh men" (*kiym-kiisi, zhuris-turysy bizdin Kazak zhigitterine tan emes*), etc.³⁰⁴

Referring back to the discourse of hegemonic masculinity, alternative masculinity, and femininity discussed in the section about Indie Rock, arguably, fashionable clothing, make-up, hairdo, and other feminine traits embodied by Q-pop singers are challenging the narrow

³⁰⁴ Azattyq TV - Азаттық - Азаттық Концерт Ninety one сорвали и в Кызылорде, October 21, 2016
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Qs3M9RQP0Sw>

definition of hegemonic masculinity, causing outrage from the homosocial communities of young men. Moreover, the global sound together with a trendy image indexing “modernity” is perceived in opposition to “tradition”, causing extra outrage from the traditional part of the population.

During my discussion with Yesbolat Bedelkhan, he outlined the following characteristics of a Q-pop singer:

*Who are Q-pop representatives? Very talented, open-minded, beautiful people. Young. They have to fit this description. Thus, their art is very important and their image is also important... They have to be beautiful, different. It has its own meaning. Why people don't accept it? Because they are not ready to understand it. But there are many other young people who understand it and who are ready for it...*³⁰⁵

Bedelkhan focuses on the concept of beauty when talking about band members, reproducing a similar discourse of the K-pop scene that focuses on the concept of “beautiful boys” and “beautiful girls”.³⁰⁶ According to Oh, K-pop male celebrities demonstrate a gender-fluid image “in order to compete with local and global celebrities and to cater to female fans all over the world” and as a result they “promote images of androgynous males”.³⁰⁷ However, according to the comment of Bedelkhan, for local Q-pop bands the androgynous look is more about being different from others.

The theme of alternative masculinity was brought forward in the movie about the band that was released on August 24, 2017. The band members were followed by aggressive haters and the movie culminated when a serious fight occurred between the band members and the haters. Thus,

³⁰⁵ Yesbolat Bedelkhan, July 4, 2018.

³⁰⁶ Ingyu Oh “From Localization to Glocalization: Contriving Korean Pop Culture to Meet Glocal Demands” *Kritika Kultura* 29 (2017), 164

³⁰⁷ Ibid. 163

the production company used the negativity towards them to create a storyline in the movie and to position themselves as protesters, artists, and freethinkers. The movie also communicates that the members themselves had a desire to create a band and perform, that their stylistic choices are not completely imposed by the producers, but authentic to the performers. The fact that Q-pop originated from K-pop creates a tight connection between these two genres. Therefore, the storyline in the movie about the band members themselves striving to become artists tries to discredit the association with the Korean conveyor idol star system where stereotypically singers themselves lack agency and corporations make choices for musicians, concentrating on profit first and foremost.

I mentioned before that musical choice of K-pop producers was largely determined by the business model, and Q-pop is viewed by my interviewees as a business model as well. This notion has the connotation of inauthentic music that puts the goal of making money before making art. According to the musicians I interviewed, the same ideology surrounds Q-pop bands. For example, the frontman of city&shivers, Arkhat Amangeldin told me:

*The members of Ninety One themselves, I think they are poor fellows. How old are they? Maybe 20? What are they going to have after five years, when they will get older, fatter, when the wave of K-pop popularity will go away? And it will definitely go away. Their producer won't need them anymore, he will probably create another new project.*³⁰⁸

The band itself tries to discredit this kind of discourse by outlining in the description of music videos on Youtube that members of the band are also songwriters and therefore have a degree of

³⁰⁸ Arkhat Amangeldin, interview, July, 6, 2018.

agency. Whether Ninety One actually have agency or not in their performance, the band and producers are arguably aware of this discourse and try to change it.

Conclusion

Thus, Q-pop arguably constructs alternative masculinity, challenges hegemonic masculinity and cultural norms, providing new models for possible social identities. However, this new model of social identity seems inauthentic for some members of the audience, resulting in an open debate about authentic national identity. The most famous Q-pop band, Ninety One, promotes ideas of following your dreams, breaking norms, and of being open-minded in their songs, music videos, and movies, thus recreating another understanding of being authentic. The genre quickly acquired a huge fan base through its association with K-pop, but this similarity created some negativity as well. For example, some K-pop fans perceive Q-pop as simply a copy of K-pop, while other musicians associate it with a business model, not true art, adding another layer of the authenticity question to the discussion of this music form.

This chapter shows how Indie Rock and Q-pop musicians claim authenticity by localizing the global musical form, but at the same time reproduce global ideologies of their genres. The analysis shows what kind of possible models of social identities musicians provide through their music and how they interact with traditional identities. Musicians arguably create modern Kazakh identities by localizing global musical forms, fusing Kazakh language with modern music, and creating high-quality cultural products.

Conclusion

When I started writing this research, I was intrigued by the backlash that many contemporary bands like Aldaspan, Ninety One, Moldanazar faced at the beginning of their career. The common critique of the bands sounded like “This music/instrument/image is not suitable for Kazakhs”, which created an instant question in my mind “What makes the music ‘suitable for Kazakhs’?” As I was doing my fieldwork and writing this thesis, with help from my advisors I started realizing that the answer to this question was connected to the concept of authenticity and national identity. The complex history of cultural policies during the Soviet period, exposure to the global cultural products and other factors affected the negative attitude towards localized global music forms from the traditional, “purist” part of our society. However, contemporary musicians started using the discourse of modern national identity and recent governmental policies like “*Rukhani Zhangiru*” to legitimize and validate their cultural authority, while governmental officials started using contemporary musicians to promote their own agenda among the youth.

This thesis argues that the “new wave” of local musicians developed various strategies of claiming authenticity by incorporating traditional instruments, local sounds, indigenous language, and adding reference to glorious ancestors as well as references to a common history. The work also argues that musicians claim authenticity through expressing ideologies of indie genre and K-pop genre connected to authenticity and autonomy. The first chapter of the thesis analyzed modernization of *qyl-qobyz* and *dombyra*, and argued that Almat Saizhan claims authenticity by reimagining and recreating ancient *qobyz*, while Aldaspan claims authenticity by using *elektro-dombyra*, adapting traditional compositions to the rock sound, and writing original

compositions about historical figures that inhabited Eurasian steppe. The second chapter outlines that the language choices that current musicians make reflect the language environment and language ideologies existing in the country. The language choices are also affected by the nationalist discourses, for example Moldanazar, Far in Gate, and Aldaspan sing in Kazakh to claim national identity and originality, while Molto Loud and city&shivers explain their choice of English with claiming connection to the global indie scene, and feeling unauthorized to perform in Kazakh due to their limiting knowledge of the language. Musicians who perform in Russian claim truthfulness by choosing the language they comfortably speak. In spite of the different language choices, musicians disregard “purist” language attitudes and value authenticity of the language choice that is not determined by financial agenda. Musicians that perform in Kazakh language also contribute to the shifting ideology of the Kazakh language. The third chapter focuses on the localization of global music forms in Kazakhstan and argues that Moldanazar, Molto Loud and city&shivers reproduce ideologies of authenticity and autonomy fundamental to the ideology of the global indie music scene, while Q-pop bands recreate ideologies of the K-pop genre. Moldanazar references common historical memory by reimagining the Soviet past in his music videos and songs, while Q-pop band Ninety One references current problems of the youth and calls for creativity, freedom of expression, and loyalty to your dreams.

The thesis does not provide a concrete answer to the question I asked myself in the beginning, as is usual with complex cultural phenomena, but certainly unravels an intricate music scene of the country and opens up many other questions that require further research and analysis.

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