

**Between Faith and Strategy: Islam in the Nationalist Discourses of Akhmet Baitursynov and Alikhan Bokeikhanov**

The early twentieth century is remembered as a period of first nation building campaigns for the Kazakh people. The period was not peaceful as there were constant struggles over preserving rights and identity through what later political autonomy could be achieved. As Russian colonial expansion intensified its hold over Central Asia, Kazakh intellectuals acquired a new task to protect and gather the ordinary people in order to protect their nation's cultural and spiritual heritage. They became main actors in shaping the new realities under the modern state requirements of the time. In this context, the main question was a proper negotiation between religious identity and emerging discourse of nationalism. However, such interplay of old but not written and centralized traditions in Kazakh nationalist thought has often been overshadowed by narratives of secular modernity imposed by Colonial Russia. This paper examines how Islam, far from being a relic of the past, served as both a moral foundation and a strategic tool in the nationalist projects of leading Kazakh thinkers Akhmet Baitursynov and Alikhan Bokeikhanov.

However, for intelligentsia of the time, the group of scholars or elite group among the locals who through literature thought to negotiate their rights under the EMpire, Islam was not merely a spiritual system. The religion played an essential cultural role that could unify the Kazakh people against colonial assimilation and provide legitimacy to claims for self-determination. Among them some prominent figures stand out being the leaders of the movement such as Akhmet Baitursynov and Aleikhan Bokeikhanov. Through newspapers such as *Qazaq*, they promoted primarily Islamic teachings and mother language, values and history of the kazakhs to shape the shared national consciousness. Their efforts aligned with broader global movements, where

colonization triggered such responsive nationalistic campaigns in places like India or Turkey, where similar attempts of instrumentalizing the religious and cultural symbols to articulate new statehood values happened.

Therefore, this study examines the ways in which Baitursynov and Bokeikhanov strategically navigated between faith and secular strategy in defining Kazakh nationalism. The research involves a qualitative analysis of early issues of *Qazaq* newspaper particularly in 1913 and in the first half of 1914. Therefore this paper attempted to trace in these publications the use of religious identity, and how it was later mobilized to enforce national unity. Additionally, the relation of the topic of religion used to address the political, educational, and cultural challenges posed by Russian colonial rule would be examined. In order to frame their work within broader theoretical frameworks the paper involves Benedict Anderson's concept of "imagined communities," postcolonial theories, and Anthony Smith's notion of ethno-symbolism. The research attempted to identify the complex dynamics and contradictions within the usage of religious identity to create a sense of belonging. Thus the thorough analysis of ways in which Islam was both preserved or reinterpreted in order to serve the purpose of awakening the national consciousness was made.

This study involves a qualitative historical methodology, focusing on textual analysis of the primary source *Qazaq* newspaper publications, particularly articles with nationalist ideas that heavily involve religion and its political treatises regarding land. The research follows a thematic approach to investigate the use of religious narratives in building nationalist discourse among ordinary people - the readers of the newspaper. These articles also would be helpful in locating the role of Islamic identity in fostering national cohesion. Main aim in this approach is to trace the evolution of ideas in the newspaper's response to socio-political challenges. Primary sources

include a collection of Qazaq newspapers from the first two years - 1913 and 1914, which also consists of publications from Kazakh intellectuals. Secondary sources provide context on Kazakh nationalism, Russian colonial policies, and the role of Islam in Central Asia.

Benedict Anderson's concept of "imagined communities" helps evaluate properly the role of print culture primarily in shaping national identities. Groups of any small country are unlikely to get to know, or possibly encounter most of their fellow residents, they only would have the representation of the existing community in their head according to what they have heard or read, which is why it is "imagined." When a sizable portion of a community believes they constitute an entity or acts as though they do, then that nation is real.<sup>1</sup> Therefore, the claims that would be made in this paper also include the agency behind printing and spreading such nationalistic newspapers. Additionally, cross sectional analysis was made to find the correlation between post-colonial theories and the sociology of religion to better understand the dynamics of religious identity within the process of nationalism.

The phenomenon of nation-building in the early 20th century was not unique to Kazakhstan; similar processes occurred in other colonial or semi-colonial regions such as Ireland, India, and Turkey. For instance, in Turkey, during the late Ottoman and early Republican years an effort to reconcile Islam with Turkish national identity took place, particularly under Mustafa Kemal Atatürk's reforms.<sup>2</sup> In India, nationalist leaders like Gandhi and Nehru navigated religious and cultural identity to fabricate an independent nation's views.<sup>3</sup> Similarly, in Ireland, the Gaelic Revival played a crucial role in enforcing the national consciousness campaigns against British colonization policies.<sup>4</sup> These cases illustrate how religious background and historical narratives

---

<sup>1</sup>Cf. Seton-Watson, *Nations and States*, p. 5

<sup>2</sup>Kadioğlu, "The paradox of Turkish nationalism and the construction of official identity," p. 180

<sup>3</sup>Varshney, "Contested meanings: India's national identity, Hindu nationalism, and the politics of anxiety."p. 233

<sup>4</sup>Castle, "Irish Revivalism: Critical Trends and New Directions."p. 292

were used as tools to distinguish the 'us' from 'them,' a central aspect of national identity formation. In fact, the most universally accepted attribute in contemporary political discourse is nation-ness.<sup>5</sup> Therefore, it is a more complex and multi-dimensional process. Anderson argues that it was the result of a complex 'crossing' of distinct historical forces; however, shortly after they had been developed, they became 'modular,' meaning that they could be transplanted to a wide range of social environments with differing degrees of self-consciousness, where they would integrate and be merged with an equally wide range of political and ideological constellations.

The reason to bring up into research these seemingly simple observations is because, in eighteenth century Western Europe, the rise of nationalism was accompanied by the decline of religious thought. New uncertainties were also brought forward by the Enlightenment's reliance on secularism and reason. The misery that religion had attempted to comprehend persisted even as religious belief declined. Without salvation, people needed a new method to give their lives purpose and consistency in and without the promise of heaven, fate appeared more arbitrary. A secular change resulted from this necessity, turning chance into purpose and fate into continuity. As we will see, few ideas served this purpose better than nationalism. Usually there is a distinction even between seemingly related states being labelled old or historic and modern, however usually they consist of continuous and have existed from the beginning of time.<sup>6</sup>

---

<sup>5</sup>Anderson, *Imagined communities: Reflections on the origin and spread of nationalism*, p. 3

<sup>6</sup>Anderson, *Imagined communities*, p. 11

The main idea of Anderson's proposal is that nationalism should not be interpreted solely in terms of purposefully hosted political convictions. It was both a product of and a reaction against the vast cultural systems that came before it. The ruling space and the religious community are the two interconnected social structures for the function of this discussion. Each of these contexts for interpretation were taken for granted in their prime, just like nationality is now. Therefore, it is crucial to examine what made these societal institutions seem so obvious while also highlighting some crucial components in their breakdown.<sup>7</sup>

Furthermore, separating one's identity from an oppressive system is consistent with the theoretical framework of "Orientalism," by Edward Said. He emphasizes that if there is a forced identification of a particular nation, colonized individuals in order to oppose tries harder to maintain their own historical and cultural validity.<sup>8</sup> Baitursynov and other Kazakh intelligentsia got involved in this approach by presenting their campaign as a cultural and religious renewal rather than just a political conflict. Their discourse could be framed within the theory of Anthony Smith about "ethno-symbolism." Smith argues there that historical myths and symbolism are essential in nation building as it creates profound ground for connection points.<sup>9</sup> Baitursynov and the Alash movement as a whole made use of these historic characteristics in their active efforts to modernize and minimize the 'cultural' loss. This study places Kazakh nationalism in the larger global conversation on identity creation and opposition to imperial rule by integrating different approaches to theory. Additionally, we can see the beginnings of a territorialization of faiths in the unintentional use of "our" (which turns into "their") and the characterization of the Christian faith as "truest" as opposed to "true," which anticipates the rhetoric utilized by various local

---

<sup>7</sup>Anderson, *Imagined communities*, p. 11

<sup>8</sup> Said, "Orientalism." In *Social theory re-wired*, p. 214

<sup>9</sup>Smith, *Ethno-symbolism and nationalism: A cultural approach*.

groups (in a competitive, comparative field, "our" nation is "the best").<sup>10</sup> Instead of being boundary-oriented and straight, the basic ideas about "social groups" were linear and hierarchical.<sup>11</sup>

In order to understand the existing social groups it is better to understand how they appeared in the land. The Kazakh Khanate (Khanate means kingdom) was a separate state established in the 15th century with a distinct Kazakh identity that combined its political and tribal confederations. Islam was introduced to the Kazakh steppes mostly through trade and cultural exchange and not by conquest as many believe. From the beginning in the 8th century with the Arab expansion into Central Asia. During the reign of Golden Horde khans (kings or sultans) within the period between 13th and 15th centuries. Later on, Islam became a dominant force in the region, however, the adoption of religion was gradual. Particularly stands out Uzbek Khan, who ruled in 1313-1341. He played a crucial role in the Islamization of the steppe nomads by promoting the faith in top down process by establishing Islamic institutions.<sup>12</sup> Over centuries, the Kazakhs experienced some geopolitical crises from neighboring powers such as the Jungar tribes, which forced them eventually to be integrated into the Russian Empire. Understanding this trajectory requires examining the origins of the Kazakh Khanate and the role of Islam in fundamentally being practiced for more than centuries within the area, and the motivations behind their alliance with Russia.

Despite the increasing role of Islam, Kazakh society retained elements of its pre-Islamic belief systems, including Tengeriism and shamanistic practices. This syncretic approach allowed Islam to blend with traditional Kazakh customs, creating a unique religious and cultural identity. Even

---

<sup>10</sup>Anderson, *Imagined communities*, p. 15

<sup>11</sup>Anderson, *Imagined communities*, p. 15

<sup>12</sup>Biran, "The Chaghadaids and Islam: The Conversion of Tarmashirin Khan (1331-34)" p. 748

though steppe people started interacting and acquiring Islamic lifestyle in the eighteenth century, only starting from the second half of the nineteenth century and in the beginning of twentieth century full incorporation of Islamic identity took place<sup>13</sup>. Yet almost until 1917, the story of Kazakh intermediaries within the Russian Empire is the story of a series of attempts to creatively define a compromise between Kazakh economic interests and cultural identity and Russian imperialism.<sup>14</sup> The motivations for joining the Russian Empire initially included three main aspects. Security concerns as Kazakhs faced continuous raids from the Jungars and sought Russian military protection. There have also been political pressures because Russian colonial administrators for prolonged time used both diplomacy and coercion to extend their influence over Kazakh leaders. Trade and economic benefits probably were the least motivating reason, however integration into the Russian economic network provided access to goods and infrastructure with the cost of underpaid labor of locals.<sup>15</sup> Russian imperial expansion into Central Asia in the 19th century led to profound transformations in Kazakh society. Colonial policies aimed at suppressing local customs and promoting Russian culture led to resistance among Kazakh intellectuals. The introduction of Russian educational reforms and legal structures challenged traditional Islamic institutions, leading figures like Baitursynov to advocate for a synthesis of religious and nationalist values as a means of cultural survival.<sup>16</sup> Kazakh mediators moved from neutrality to direct criticism of Russian colonial policy during the revolution of 1905.<sup>17</sup> Earlier hopes for economic prosperity, cultural development, and political inclusion were dashed as land resettlement devastated Kazakh communities, and their exclusion

---

<sup>13</sup>Frank, 'Islamic Transformation on the Kazakh Steppe, 1742–1917: Toward an Islamic History of Kazakhstan under Russian Rule', p. 285

<sup>14</sup>Campbell, "Knowledge and Power on the Kazakh Steppe, 1845-1917" p. 302

<sup>15</sup>Zholdybalin, "Turkic Roots Of The Kazakh National Idea: Historiographical Analysis." p. 96

<sup>16</sup>Arynov, Zhumakhan, And Smagulova. "150th Anniversary Of The Birth Of The Leader Of The Nation Akhmet Baitursynov." p. 917

<sup>17</sup>Campbell, "Knowledge and Power on the Kazakh Steppe, 1845-1917" p. 443

from parliamentary representation reinforced the steppe's colonial status. Economically, the region was exploited for land to serve Russia's needs rather than being developed for the Kazakhs themselves. Despite this, Kazakh intellectuals sought reform within the empire rather than outright independence, advocating for inclusion in imperial institutions and equal land rights.<sup>18</sup>

Between 1913 and 1914, several key reforms were introduced that directly impacted education, national identity formation, and political participation. One of the most significant changes was the expansion of Russian-controlled schools, which sought to replace Islamic madrasas with secular education. Madrasas at that time were referred to as centers of learning, where primarily were taught basics of Islamic teachings, theology, jurisprudence, and Arabic literature by local imams, muslim scholars. Baitursynov, along with other Alash intellectuals, responded by emphasizing the need to preserve Kazakh language and culture in educational institutions. His advocacy for linguistic reform, particularly the modernization of the Kazakh script, was an effort to strengthen national consciousness through literacy.<sup>19</sup>

Moreover, by covering problems concerning the question of autonomy, land issues, and cultural preservation, the launch of the "Qazaq" newspaper in 1913 was fundamental for developing national identity. This media form became a central platform for intellectuals to articulate the importance of religious and national identity in resisting colonial rule. As Bozakhaeva notes, the later appeared Alash movement used print media strategically to advance nationalist sentiment,

---

<sup>18</sup>Arynov, Zhumakhan, And Smagulova. "150th Anniversary Of The Birth Of The Leader Of The Nation Akhmet Baitursynov." p. 918

<sup>19</sup>Ахметжанова and Сарыбаев. "The Study Of Heritage Ahmet Baitursynov And His Adherents In The Period Of Independence Of Kazakhstan."p. 56

drawing parallels to similar movements in other Muslim-majority regions such as Volga Tatars or as Baitursynov refers to them the Nogays. Moreover, discussions surrounding the establishment of a Kazakh political entity intensified during this period. The future Alash leaders debated the extent to which Islamic identity should be integrated into their vision for autonomy, with some advocating for a secular national framework while others, including Baitursynov, insisted on maintaining religious traditions as a core part of national identity. Kendirbaeva highlights how these debates mirrored broader struggles among Muslim communities in the Russian Empire, where religious reform was often intertwined with political self-determination.<sup>20</sup> Thus, one of the major results of Russian rule over the Kazakh steppe was the development of a complex and multi-ethnic Islamic society on the Kazakh steppe.<sup>21</sup>

The Alash Orda movement, which emerged in the early 20th century, sought to achieve political and cultural autonomy for Kazakhs. It was formed by an influential circle of Kazakh intellectuals who were extremely worried about the loss of Kazakh identity under Russian colonial control, such as Akhmet Baitursynov the main editor of Qazaq newspaper, Alikhan Bukeikhanov, Mirzhakyp Dulatov, and others. The movement was driven by a vision of modernizing Kazakh society while preserving its cultural and religious traditions.<sup>22</sup> This newspaper became the prominent place for expressing the thoughts of all the intellectuals of that time. Most of the articles in the newspaper belonged to Alikhan Bukeikhanov, under at least three different nicknames he has been constantly publishing excerpts mostly referring to history and call for national unity of kazakhs.

---

<sup>20</sup>Kendirbaeva, G. (1999). "We are children of Alash..."

<sup>21</sup>Frank, 'Islamic Transformation on the Kazakh Steppe, 1742–1917: Toward an Islamic History of Kazakhstan under Russian Rule', p. 289

<sup>22</sup>Sabol, "Awake Kazak!": Russian colonization of Central Asia and the genesis of Kazak national consciousness, 1868-1920

Despite being in the same newspaper, the themes and attitude of Alikhan Bokeihanov and Akhmet Baitursynov regarding nation's unity differed. Akhmet Baitursynov's legacy was more about the language and muslimness while Bokeihanov claimed for legitimacy of the descendants of old turkic tribes. Baitursynov treated Islam as a crucial foundation for national identity, at the same time incorporating the notions of a theocratic state. Instead, he saw Islam primarily as a moral and cultural force that could unify the Kazakhs against Russian colonial assimilation. For Baitursynov, religion was important, but it had to be modernized and used to strengthen national consciousness, not control it.<sup>23</sup> Regarding the genealogy Baitursynov seemingly did not publish much articles. At the meantime Alikhan Bokeikhanov had a more secular and rational attitude toward religion. He highly criticized the rigidity of Sharia law, arguing that immutable religious laws could not match the evolving needs of modern society. He pointed out how Sharia might be unsuitable for governance and social change. He strongly valued genealogy as a tool for national history, but he criticized fabricated or exaggerated Islamic genealogies. He reframed Kazakh identity as Turkic and Central Asian strengthening his position as follower of a pan-Turkism, rooting it in historical and tribal lineage, not invented Islamic ancestry. The sharp difference in their publishing career is mostly undermined in today's literature and usually their characters are merged under one Alash leader's title. Therefore, the lack of studies about how and why their striking difference left unnoticed led this research focused particularly on two authors among others.

Generally, the Alash leaders advocated for national self-determination, political representation, and educational reforms that would empower Kazakhs to participate in governance. They faced significant challenges from Russian authorities, who viewed their activities as subversive. Land

expropriation policies, restrictions on Kazakh-language education, and attempts to suppress Islamic institutions all contributed to their struggle. In response, the Alash leaders sought to build educational programs, construct schools in Kazakh, and develop the political foundation for an independent Kazakh state. The newspaper also consisted of a lot of explanatory information, for example “Земство деген не?/не үшін керек?” (What is a Zemstvo? / Why is it needed?) to let the ordinary people be involved with national discourse and provide awareness.

Between 1905 and 1928, intelligentsia were not only communicating the centralized authority's aims and rhetoric to their respective communities, but also expressing their own opinions in those countries' best interests. They accomplished this by creating a vocabulary and strategies based on the political mindset of the colonists, containing its most revolutionary elements, as well as their own repertoire of activities..<sup>24</sup> At the time the printing culture popularized *inteleghencia* utilized *төте жазу* [tote zhazu] which is adaptation or development of arabic script to denote kazakh language. Such a movement was highly influenced by their counterparts, Jadidist reforms who took the Arabic alphabet as a base, adapting the corresponding notation of sounds to their particular mother tongue..<sup>25</sup>

Opposition with the colonial powers gave rise to political formations that matched the prevailing trends of the time, including petitions, gatherings, and protests. The intermediaries, who had previously served the imperial state, became dedicated politicians as a result of this controversy procedure. This transformation was realized realistically by means of the creation of nationalistic initiatives, their assimilation into the Communist Party of the Kazakh Autonomous Socialist

---

<sup>24</sup>Ohayon, Tetsu, Sultangalieva, Uyama, Hallez, and Amanžolova, "Mediators of The Empire in Central Asia (1820-1928)."

<sup>25</sup>*Iskhan, Dautova, and Ospanova, "Language policy and the Kazakh alphabet," p. 44*

Soviet Republic following the 1917 Revolution, and their ascension to elevated political positions.<sup>26</sup>

Later in the late nineteenth century, all the other Kazakh intellectuals shared anti-Tatarism and the concern for preserving “pure” Kazakh culture, as evidenced by articles of the Kazakh-Russian newspaper *Dala ualayatınıng gazetі*.<sup>27</sup> Despite their efforts, the movement was met with strong opposition from the Russian colonial administration, which saw their calls for autonomy as a threat to imperial control. Following the Bolshevik Revolution, the Alash Orda government briefly attempted to assert self-rule, but by 1920, the Soviet regime dissolved the movement, and many of its leaders were later persecuted. Nonetheless, their legacy lived on, influencing future generations of Kazakh nationalists and intellectuals. Baitursynov, as a key member, used his position as an editor and writer to articulate a vision of Kazakh identity that merged Islamic heritage with modern political aspirations. His writings emphasized the importance of religious education, cultural preservation, and national unity as the foundation for a strong Kazakh nation.

My research is based on the printed materials in the *Qazaq* newspaper. This newspaper was founded by Akhmet Baitursynov, Alikhan Bukeikhanov, and Mirzhakyp Dulatov by 1913. From the beginning the newspaper became one of the most significant nationalist publications of its time. Printed mainly in Orenburg, the newspaper was published in the Kazakh language, making it one of the key tools in the preservation and promotion of Kazakh national identity. The “*Qazaq*” covered a range of topics, including history primarily of kazakhs, political affairs and outlook of international news, cultural and educational reforms, land disputes, and the role of

---

<sup>26</sup>Ohayon, Tetsu, Sultangalieva, Uyama, Hallez, and Amanžolova, "Mediators of The Empire in Central Asia (1820-1928)."

<sup>27</sup>Tomohiko, Uyama. "Historiography of Local and Regional Studies in Western Kazakhstan: An Alternative to National History?" p. 19

religion in national consciousness. The newspaper advocated for the modernization of Kazakh society. It frequently addressed the Russian colonial administration's policies, critiquing land expropriation and the imposition of Russian educational standards that marginalized Kazakh traditions. One of its recurring themes was the importance of literacy and education in strengthening Kazakh self-awareness. This was one of the main principles of Baitursynov's linguistic reforms.

Due to nationalistic motives "Qazaq" faced multiple challenges from Russian authorities. Censorship efforts intensified as the publication gained influence, and many of its articles were deemed subversive. Russian officials frequently targeted Baitursynov and his colleagues, seeing their advocacy for Kazakh autonomy as a direct challenge to imperial rule. The increasing political repression that also combined with financial difficulties, forced the newspaper to cease publication in 1918. Nonetheless, its impact on Kazakh nationalism remained profound, shaping future movements for independence and self-governance. My research primarily looks at the 1913 and 1914 activity of the newspaper. Comparatively, the agitation of distinct religious identity and nationalistic discourse intensified by 1914. Starting from seventy fiftieth issue of the newspaper that was printed in 24th of august in 1914 at the end of the newspapers the label "Дозволено военной цензурой."

Baitursynov's works frequently invoked Islamic values as a moral foundation for national identity. He argued that Islam provided a unifying force for Kazakhs against colonial assimilation and that religious education was essential for preserving national consciousness. However, his approach to religion was nuanced; he did not advocate for theocratic rule but rather for Islam as a cultural and ethical foundation for national identity. In his articles in "Qazaq," he emphasized the role of Islamic teachings in moral and social cohesion, arguing that without a

strong ethical base, national unity would be impossible: “Егер біз де қазақ деген ұлт болып тұруды тілесек, қарнымыз ашпас қамын ойлағанда тіліміз, дін де сақталу қамын қатар ойлау керек.”<sup>28</sup> Here, Baitursynuly emphasizes the survival of Kazakh identity through preservation of the mother tongue and religion alongside each other. Because the education for local children is imposed in Russian-language schools to detach them from their native culture.<sup>29</sup>

He also supported the modernization of religious education, aligning with the Jadid reformists, who sought to integrate secular knowledge with religious instruction. In order to make religious information more widely available, Baitursynov, for example, promoted the use of the Kazakh language in religious instruction as an alternative to Arabic. According to Bozakhaeva, Baitursynov’s stance on religious education was a balancing act; he recognized the necessity of adapting Islamic traditions to the realities of the early 20th century while resisting complete secularization imposed by Russian colonial rule.<sup>30</sup> Since nomadism was no longer economically viable, Kazakh nationalism had to be founded only on the customary Kazakh culture rather than nomadic lifestyles.<sup>31</sup> This created the need to incorporate more distinct features such as turkic genealogy which provided legitimacy over central asian steppes, the language that proves the existence of a nation, and the religion to base their moral ethics on:

*“For centuries the Kirgiz [Kazakh] people occupied its own territory and lived its own life; but now a flood of colonists is inundating our steppes. What is our future to be? History teaches us that when a foreign element shows itself to be culturally stronger than the native population, it inevitably absorbs the latter. . . ., in short, foreigners are penetrating into our midst. The problem of the very existence of the*

<sup>28</sup>Qazaq newspaper, issue №2, 1913, 10th of February, p. 26

<sup>29</sup>Sabol, “*The touch of civilization*”: comparing american and russian internal colonization.

<sup>30</sup>Bozakhaeva, G. K. . The Kazakh intellectuals at the beginning of the 20th century.

<sup>31</sup>Fisher, “Qazaq Nationalism, 1900-1916” p. 58

*Kirgiz people is facing us in a most acute form. In order to preserve our autonomy we should struggle with all our strength in order to acquire education and culture.*

*We must in the first place develop our national literature”<sup>32</sup>*

Later, in his article Akhmet Baitursynov equates the losing the faith as part of the path to transforming to Russian: “Г. Сенат пен жер жұмысының бас мекемесі қазақ пен орыстар ауыл үй қондырып, жақындастырып, дінін, атын жоғалтып, орыс қылып “сен қазақ, біз орыс” деген сөздер болмас қамын жеген...”<sup>33</sup> In the newspaper, there were also several mentions of students and ordinary people being imprisoned for being Muslims. For example, in the city of Oskemen the man named Vaznikov was arrested under Article 82 chapter 1 after receiving the document of becoming Muslim from Volostnoi Imam.<sup>34</sup> Another case occurred in Kiev, where thirteen students were arrested as they were accused of organizing without permission, later each student was sentenced to prison for one month each while the owner of the apartment where it happened for two months.<sup>35</sup> Such articles showcasing the hatred aimed at Muslim Kazakhs repeated through several issues, raising the awareness about the problems people are facing. The tone of the text itself presented the case as a critique or problem that should be solved rather than advocating to give up their ‘Muslimness’ in order to get an education. Historical records note that the Russian Empire never fully intended to Russify Kazakhs religiously or in other words converting them to Orthodox Christianity was not their top priority.<sup>36</sup> However, the *Qazaq* article repeatedly calls the people to notice the attempts of

---

<sup>32</sup>Fisher, “Qazaq Nationalism, 1900-1916” p. 68-69

<sup>33</sup>Qazaq newspaper, issue №50, 1914, 14th of February, “Change of Gubernator,” p. 76 [translation: “The Senate and the Main Department of Land Affairs worked to settle Kazakhs and Russians together, bringing them closer, causing them to lose their religion and their name, and turning them into Russians — so that there would no longer be any talk of ‘you are Kazakh, we are Russian.’”]

<sup>34</sup>Qazaq newspaper, issue №12, 1913, 28th of April, p. 148

<sup>35</sup>Qazaq newspaper, issue №11, 1913, 21st of April, p. 135

<sup>36</sup>Sabol, “The touch of civilization”: comparing American and Russian internal colonization.

missionaries that leveraged land distribution to encourage religious conversion. According to Baitursynov, access to fertile land and the opportunity to transition to a sedentary lifestyle were often made contingent upon adopting Christianity and “*merge Kazakhs with Russian peasants*” (“қазақтарды мұжықтармен біріктіру керек”).<sup>37</sup> For Baitursynov it seemed as a strategy that weaponized economic vulnerability, turning basic survival needs into tools of spiritual and political coercion. Religious conversion was closely linked to broader demographic strategies. Baptized Kazakhs were often absorbed into Russian-speaking settlements, gradually losing their language and ethnic identity. Thus, Christianity functioned as a vector for not only spiritual but also cultural and demographic colonization. The Synod’s policy, as cited in the article, aimed to “merge Kazakhs with Russian peasants” through shared religious affiliation. Conversion to Christianity was seen as a means of eroding cultural distinctions and embedding Kazakhs within the imperial administrative system. Religion thus functioned not merely as a personal or spiritual matter but as a key technology of governance.

He introduces the methodology [методика] as an essential part of an alumnus of madrasa or Muslim teachings. Meanwhile, as was mentioned Kazakhs used *tote jazu*(төте жазу), those who graduated from Soviet ‘pedagogika’ courses need to learn basics of Muslim teachings (here he refers to “мұсылманша хат білу” where he refers more reading and writing skills, so they could transmit the knowledge in mother tongue). Further, he starts to list the school program that follows the exact same order: reading and writing skills, religion [дін], the mother tongue, the history of the nation, math, basics of trade, geography, and biology.<sup>38</sup> He initially brings up this question a year earlier. The message in both articles addresses the same problems the education

---

<sup>37</sup>Qazaq newspaper, issue №46, 1914, 16th of January, “Imposing the religious questions to the Land issues” p. 21

<sup>38</sup>Qazaq newspaper, issue №62, 1914, 17th of May, “School needs,” p. 215

system for Kazakh children faces: the funding and the scarcity of the teachers. Earlier in the same year under Baitursynov's edition the letter of Ibrahim Tasbolatov where he suggests to re-transfer money from religious charity to fund the opening of schools. It regarded specifically zeket, sadaqa and qurban shaly - the type of religious sacrifice of living scott - the sheep or lamb, people in later years stopped holding the sacrifices themselves but just donated the money needed to buy the animal and the service fees.<sup>39</sup>

The issue that adds a new dimension to the question of religious identity is the rise of Jadids. The two processes that have been evolving simultaneously affected the morals and values within the religion. For example, when the same question of education is brought up, the new terminology brought by Jadidist reforms could be seen in the articles. Baitursynov writes that in order to give a proper educational foundation there is a need to hire teachers that utilize the method of Усул саутие (Usul Sawtiya - Method of sounds or phonetic method) and Усул мәдие (Usul Madiya - “Method of madrasah” or traditional method).<sup>40</sup> The former is a system where children learn to read by learning the individual sounds of letters and then combining them into syllables and words, in other words, sound-based learning. This was the Jadidist reformist method, introduced in the late 19th to early 20th century, especially by reformers like Ismail Gasprinski. Meanwhile, Usul Madiya was the old teaching method used in traditional madrasahs, which taught students first to memorize letters (alphabet), and then memorize syllables and texts without necessarily understanding them. They usually impose memorizing the Qur'an or religious texts without proper understanding as well. This method was criticized as being slow, overly rigid, and often did not teach actual reading comprehension. Thus Jadidists viewed this as outdated and

---

<sup>39</sup>Qazaq newspaper, issue №2, 1913, 10th of February, “Letters to the reduction: What do writers think,” p. 33

<sup>40</sup>Qazaq newspaper, issue №29, 1913, 7th of September, “About the Education,” p. 351

unproductive associating it with backwardness, stagnation, and old-fashioned religious conservatism. Jadidists like Akhmet Baitursynuly rumored to be, supported the Usul Sawtiya method, as it helped students learn faster and better connect spoken and written language. Furthermore, broader trends made it seen as the key to modern education and national awakening. The debate between these two methods ties directly into the projection of religion on identity. The promotion of Usul Sawtiya by Baitursynuly reflects his intent to modernize Islam and education to serve Kazakh national interests, blending religious legitimacy with national progress. Taking into account the attitude of how the Christianization attempts were perceived, for Baitursynov it caused a big problem and obstacle in strengthening the position of Kazakhs as a nation within the broader realm of the Empire. Kazakh intellectuals frequently traced their country's origins to foreign civilizations in order to legitimate their territorial rights because composing a narrative is an interpretative process.<sup>41</sup>

The main comparison of Kazakh society's achievements as a nation is usually compared to the Nogays (Volga Tatars, but referred to as Nogays in the newspaper, later Nogays). Like Kazakhs, they were nomadic pastoralists, moving seasonally with their herds that live in current Dagestan and the lower regions of Volga.<sup>42</sup> Nevertheless, Nogays presented in the article as a leading muslim society under the Empire in the first place. In other words, Nogay was a reference point to showcase how far Kazakhs had "fallen behind". For example, The Nogays were often portrayed as having better religious education infrastructure (more madrassas, mosques). Every time in the newspaper the problem of lack of funding for books is mentioned, as an option there is always to use Nogay books, even though they always underline that their system does not

---

<sup>41</sup>Rottier, "Legitimizing the Ata Meken: the Kazakh intelligentsia write a history of their Homeland." p. 468

<sup>42</sup>Zeinullin, R., and T. H. Gabytov. "Ethnoculture Of The Nogais And The Heritage Of Dasht-I-Kipchak." p. 45

completely match the Kazakh students' needs.<sup>43</sup> They were seen as more sedentarized and organized both by the Empire and Kazakhs. Sometimes they were said to have better literacy rates, which were seen as evidence of stronger engagement with both religion and modern education. So by comparison, Kazakhs were encouraged to improve themselves by learning from the Nogays. There was a pan-Turkic and pan-Islamic sentiment within *Qazaq* newspaper circles. Referencing the Nogays however could both reinforce a common Muslim identity or help to construct a sense of "Kazakhness" as part of a broader Turkic civilization. Bokihanov underlines that when Kazakhs were wild and untamed, Russians tried to control them through force, while the Nogays stayed away, respecting Kazakh independence.<sup>44</sup> The Russian Empire categorized both Nogays and Kazakhs under the label "inorodtsy" (non-Russians). By comparing themselves to the Nogays, Kazakh intellectuals were trying to negotiate their position within the empire. Sometimes subtly pushing for equal treatment, arguing that if Nogays were progressing, Kazakhs should be granted similar opportunities. Except the Nogays, within the newspaper they covered the news and stories all over the world. Intelligence representatives also often brought up as an example to follow Japan's educational system and subsequently made contact to request recognition of the Alash Orda as an independent state from them.<sup>45</sup> Akhmet Baitursynov and others sincerely believed that examining the history of other cultures, particularly those that were more developed than they were, could instruct them a lot.<sup>46</sup> However, it is questionable that the influence of foreigners such as Nogays were indeed in favor of their views as they served orientalist policies. For example, the pro-Muslim inclinations of *Aiqap* authors, another Kazakh newspaper, were factors in favor of sedentarism. They believed that sedentarization would aid

---

<sup>43</sup>Qazaq newspaper, issue №29, 1913, 7th of September, "About Education," p. 350

<sup>44</sup>Qazaq newspaper, issue №11, 1913, 21st of April, "The issue of Muftiyat," p. 141

<sup>45</sup>Uyama, "Unmasking imperial history: Emotional Empire, Violent Politics of Difference, and Independence Movements in the Name of Autonomy." p. 125

<sup>46</sup>Rottier, "Legitimizing the Ata Meken: the Kazakh intelligentsia write a history of their Homeland." p. 468

Kazakhs in their religious development, because a semi-nomadic lifestyle would not be suitable for Muslim education and the application of Sharia law, thus, new Empire's settings would bring peace to the Steppe.<sup>47</sup> Nogay influence on Kazakh intelligentsia implied the submission of Steppe to the Orenburg Spiritual Assembly's authority.<sup>48</sup> Kazakh intelligentsia's activity formed from the diverse spectrum of broader intellectual modification, notably the Jadid movement and the Tatar print media, while originally being seen as strongly affected by Russian and European policies. Being the first in the area to suggest a cultural and political differentiation based on the idea of a geographical country,<sup>49</sup> Kazakh intellectuals integrated these concepts into a distinctive national identity despite their varied influences.

Before the Akhmet Baitursynov, there were attempts to build a national distinction of themselves within the broader Islamic realm under the Russian Empire. Between 1900 and 1915 there were five separate works bearing the title *Nasihat-i qazaqiya* (in Kazakh: "Қазаққа насихат" translates as "Advice to the Kazakhs" or "Counsel for Kazakhs"), some of which appeared in multiple editions, testifying to their popularity among Kazakh readers. It refers to a popular genre of Islamic-Kazakh moral and educational type of literature that appeared in the late 19th and early 20th centuries. In fact, this genre rapidly evolved in this period into a vehicle for a new Kazakh national identity propaganda and national program. The project's projection could be observed particularly in the works of Abai, Mizhaqip Dulatov and others, such as the *Oyan Qazaq*.<sup>50</sup> Their poetry of the precedent period translated economic decline, religious

---

<sup>47</sup>Zholdybalin, "Turkic Roots Of The Kazakh National Idea: Historiographical Analysis." p. 99

<sup>48</sup>Kendirbaeva, G. (1999). "We are children of Alash..." p. 13-15

<sup>49</sup>Zholdybalin, "Turkic Roots Of The Kazakh National Idea: Historiographical Analysis." p. 99

<sup>50</sup>Frank, 'Islamic Transformation on the Kazakh Steppe', p. 288

deterioration, and the loss of homeland, attributing these crises solely to imperial governance.<sup>51</sup> They tried to convert the mass to their main power, the support of the locals. Abai, in contrast to the zar-zaman poets, had connections with exiled reformers and saw potential for a reformed tsarist administration to improve Kazakh society. Peter Rottier states that Kazakh nationalism did not always seek self-determination, demonstrating that nationalist and anti-colonial thought are not inherently linked.<sup>52</sup> Instead, the contradictions within Russian imperial policies and knowledge systems unintentionally fueled Kazakh nationalist sentiment. The Russian Empire's bureaucratic and scholarly understanding of the steppe both reinforced colonial control and created ideological tensions that ultimately contributed to demands for Kazakh self-determination. The zar zaman poets however, unlike Abai, saw Islam as inseparable from Kazakh identity and rejected any possibility of religious revival through Russian imperial institutions. Their poetry expressed deep opposition to Russian rule, describing the colonizers in religious, rather than ethnic, terms lamenting the rule of "unbelievers" over Muslims.<sup>53</sup> Mirzhakyp Dulatuly in his publication in Qazaq newspaper recalls five muslim nations [мұсылман халқы] including Kazakhs being one of them.<sup>54</sup> Later he denotes that muslim people from zhetisu demands and that kazakhs does not have anything to add up to this demands. The issue is that muslimness was a shared feature for all the central asian communities, and among them intelligentsia always was underlining kazakhs distinctly. Ethno-cultural construction was constantly present, an ambiguous and conflict-ridden process through which people struggled to create islands of order and meaning within the flux and turbulence around them. The invention of tradition and ethnic identities, along with polities, religions, trading networks, and regional

---

<sup>51</sup>Campbell, "Knowledge and Power on the Kazakh Steppe, 1845-1917" p. 293

<sup>52</sup>Rottier, *Creating the Kazak nation: The intelligentsia's quest for acceptance in the Russian Empire*,

<sup>53</sup>Campbell, "Knowledge and Power on the Kazakh Steppe, 1845-1917" p. 293

<sup>54</sup>Issue №58, 16th of April, 1914

economies, were present long before the colonial empires arrived to take control and attempt to integrate the land more directly into the global economy of capitalist modernity. The modern ethnicities originate in the colonial period, however, and they are both clearly derived from the character of pre-colonial societies and profoundly influenced in form, scope, and content by the social, economic, cultural, and political forces of colonialism.<sup>55</sup>

The discourse of nationalism is distinctively modern. Because the majority of nationalistic discourse claims that the fact of existence of a community is an always-existing reason for action, whether or not as a legacy of a past heritage or as a product of contextually particular events of groundwork. Therefore, it is difficult to remain entirely grounded in this matter. Regardless of the preferences, locals are all involved in national debate as part of the community. Everyone only has to continually encourage themselves to consider the definitions and assumptions of this discourse they are supporting, because they are so embedded in both our concepts and our daily vocabulary that they are nearly impossible to abandon or even change.<sup>56</sup>

The notion that "society" is a term that refers to autonomous entities with distinct borders serves as a straightforward illustration. Especially, nationalist sentiment continues to be the most common language used in efforts to define political entities, assert privileges to self-determination, and establish legitimate authority by referring to "the people" of an entity.<sup>57</sup>

According to the constructivist method, nationality is an evolving phenomenon that could only be examined in particular situations rather than a fixed state or nature. According to the theory of social construction, ethnicity is not a permanent fundamental identity but rather the dynamic

---

<sup>55</sup>Berman, "Ethnicity, Patronage And The African State: The Politics Of Uncivil Nationalism," p. 310

<sup>56</sup>Calhoun, "Nationalism and ethnicity," p. 214

<sup>57</sup>Calhoun, "Nationalism and ethnicity," p. 211

result of ongoing, sometimes conflictual interactions between political, economic, and cultural factors that are internal as well as external to emerging ethnic groupings.<sup>58</sup> To this discourse could be a great addition the article originally belongs to Raimzhan Marsekov (Baitursynov being an editor of the issue in general) on the question “Do Kazakhs need a separate Muftiat?”<sup>59</sup>

Bokeihanov’s view is more secular and comparatively presents himself in the realm of Pan-Turkism rather than Jadidism. Under his various nicknames there are stories mostly covering the history of Kazakhs, starting from old Turkic tribes in the arena, debunking the misconceptions and rumors about its origins. Throughout the 1913 issuance of the newspaper, he had a special series of sections called “Қазақтың тарихы” (the history of Kazakhs), where he was collecting all the genealogical and oral history emphasizing the long existence in the area. In the 1913 issue the newspaper discusses on its pages the rumor about Kishi zhuz being related to the Prophet’s companion - Sahabi. According to this tales, the representatives of Kishi huz including its molda and imams, was spreading the story that back at the times of the prophet, he himself blessed one of his companions Anis [Әніс] with grow of livestock so he will not be in shortage of cattle until the day of judgement.<sup>60</sup> Later on, as his cattle multiplied constantly, this sahabi moved through sahara to the Kazakh steppes, where the current Kishi zhuz inhabited. Thus, the ancestor of the Kishi zhuz population was Anis Sahabi. The author wrote the passage by the nickname “Түрікт баласы” which translates as ‘The child of Turks’. In the passage, he blames for that the arrogance of the people in Mekke, where kazakhs went to pilgrimage and was looking for their ‘шежіре’. To claim their authority, people in Mecca told them the story above, so people since then started to believe that Kishi Zhuz are all descendants of one of the Sahabi.

---

<sup>58</sup>Berman, “Ethnicity, Patronage And The African State,” p. 310

<sup>59</sup>Issue №43, 22nd of December, 1913, Do Kazakhs need a separate Muftiat? p. 522

<sup>60</sup>Qazaq newspaper, issue №9, 1913, 6th of April, “Қазақтың тарихы” section

Bokeihanov writes highly critical about evolvment and spread of such rumors. He dates back the establishment of Kazakh turkic tribes earlier for about seven hundred years before the Prophet's times. Overall, his tone was more nationalistic, claiming the agency of Kazakhs being solely Turks, related more to Central Asian tribes. There are more cases where, for example, the Qurban'ali Khalidi chides the Kazakhs for altering their genealogies, replacing Chingisid ancestors with Muslim saints and Qur'anic figures.<sup>61</sup> Therefore, Bokeihanov although uses Islamic concepts (e.g., hadith, shezhire), he presents a rationalized, almost secular genealogy of Kazakhs: "The Kazakhs are non-Muslims, at very most half-Muslims. The preservation of customs and traditions is useful to the Kazakhs. The Shariat is harmful to the Kazakhs."<sup>62</sup> He criticizes religious "fanaticism" and tries to demystify identity through historicism and comparison with Kyrgyz or Arab genealogies. He brings up the shezhire, the system of tracing the genealogy, usually in oral records, however taking its roots from Islamic legitimacy with integration of steppe traditions.

In his article that was issued in the main page of the newspaper, he openly debunks both of the administrative systems: Russian and Muslim. The Russian legislative system does not work for Kazakhs because it is not accessible to the ordinary people. The law could be manipulated easily by the Russian side, meanwhile their maintenance will be expensive. According to Bukeykhanov, the main intention of Russian policy was not just to sedentarize the Kazakh people but also to destroy the unique Kazakh culture. Therefore, even after seizing the land of Kazakhs and submitting it to the monarch, Russian control was in fact hostile to the Kazakh

---

<sup>61</sup>Frank, 'Islamic Transformation on the Kazakh Steppe', p. 287

<sup>62</sup>Fisher, "Qazaq Nationalism, 1900-1916" p. 69

people.<sup>63</sup> On the other hand, the Sharia law is criticized for being abused by the ones who did not fully embrace it. There is a heavy accusation that Sharia is immutable, and contrasts it with the changing nature of social and legal systems. The article critiques rigid traditionalism and highlights the conflict between unchanging religious law and the evolving needs of society. He begins by stating that Sharia is unchangeable, thus, it doesn't move or evolve. Bokeihanov emphasizes that life is full of changes. Something unchangeable like Sharia can't always suit all situations or societies equally.<sup>64</sup> If the rules of Sharia are taken literally and strictly, they might not align with modern governance or legal needs. For example, according to Sharia, it is permissible to marry off children of two brothers (a boy and a girl from two brothers). But if this rule were used as a legal foundation for governance, would it be appropriate or practical? Criticism also touches the blindly utilizing the Sharia to modern governance. He questions whether applying Sharia literally as state law would serve justice or societal needs. He suggests that if Sharia were strictly applied today, governance might fall into the hands of those lacking in ethical substance, like "our leadership being like the gossipy women of Chinese court" (a metaphor implying moral decline or a lack of seriousness). He concludes his thought with a sarcastic remark that to what extent there is a need for beautiful legs if they could not walk.

Interestingly, there is an article also by Turik Balasy, where he mentions the shift of the legal system by the Russian Empress. Both Wali Khan - son of Abylai Khan of Middle Hord (the one third of Kazakh Khanate, that consisted of three distinct tribal unities: Junior Hord in today Western Kazakhstan, Middle Hord - Central and Northern Kazakhstan; and Senior Hord in South-Eastern Kazakhstan), and Abilkhair Khan of Junior Hord swore to be subjects of the

---

<sup>63</sup>Fisher, "Qazaq Nationalism, 1900-1916" p. 58

<sup>64</sup>Issue №50, 14th of February, 1914, "Again about the governance," p. 70

Russian Empire by placing their hands on the Quran. Under the rule of Igelstrom, the Russian administrator for the Orenburg region, in order to regulate the spiritual activity of the local muslim community established Muftiyat, thus active at that time rulers Bokei and Wali applied to be under the Muftiyat. Therefore, marriage (neke), divorce (talaq), and heritage issues passed to Muftiat's responsibility. However, Bokeihanov claims that the law system of Kazakhs was established in 1600 and adapted throughout the years. Thus, the Muslim laws clashed with already established long-followed local legislation. For example, widowed women after four month and ten days could marry anyone she wants,<sup>65</sup> however, in 'Kazakh' law she was forced to stay in the family of the late husband through amengerlik<sup>66</sup> [әменгерлік - kazakh law where a woman should marry the brother of her late husband, usually to take care of the children and keep them under the same family]. Another example, after the death of a man, if he did not have any heirs, then one fourth of his estate will be inherited by his wife.<sup>67</sup> However, such distribution of the heritage was unpleasant for most part of the local community. Thus, some of the clans complained and later such tribes as Argyn (Арғын) and Kypshaq (Қыпшақ) from the Middle Hord left the muftiyat. Due to the dominance of Shariyah, the authority of local sultans and bii's decree was not legit anymore. Before the new policy [Степное положение] the expedition committee from Petersburg was sent to collect the needs of the local population. People complained to be free from muftiyats' influence hence they have been freed from Shariyah law since 21st of October, 1868.

Айтамын үгіт қылып қазақ халқын,  
 Көңіліңіз дін жағына сонша салқын!  
 Дін қойса, заң қоюға риза емес,

<sup>65</sup>Quran, Surah 2 - Al-Baqarah, Ayah (verse) 234

<sup>66</sup>Qazaq newspaper, issue №11, 1913, 21st of April, "The issue of Muftiyat," p. 141

<sup>67</sup>Quran, Surah 4 - An-Nisa, Ayah (verse) 11

Бұрынғы қоя алмайсыз ата салтын<sup>68</sup>

Through this citation Baitursyniv tried to express how back then, it was easy for Kazakhs to become part of the Muftiyat (Islamic religious administration), but now, many Kazakhs wish to return to religious belonging but feel excluded or distant from it. However his tone is full of sarcasm or critique “If in the old days, Kazakh leaders couldn’t even predict what lay beyond a door or curtain, why are we blaming the modern people now?”<sup>69</sup> By questioning whether it’s fair to blame ordinary people (the crowd) when even past leaders lacked vision and foresight he calls out the leadership, not just the masses implying that Kazakhs have always had a complicated relationship with religion, law, and tradition. There’s a disconnect between desire for religion and resistance to change.

One of the main concerns of both Alikhan Bokeihanov and Akhmet Baitursynov is that there are no representatives of the interests of the Kazakh nation in DUMA. Most feasible way to acquire some voice was to have the representatives at least in one of the syezd (съезд in russ) DUMA or religious conferences. As there were no valid kazakh individuals within both circles, their needs were not considered by the Russian administration (for example the 48th issue on 31st of January and 51st issue on 21st of February, 1914). Furthermore, Baitursynov constantly provides cases of Nogay who have their representatives in religious conferences that could advocate for their rights in governance of their land issues. The primary concern of the first wave of the Kazakh intelligentsia was the subject of the ancestral privileges of Kazakhs regarding their territory,

---

<sup>68</sup>Quote from Akmolla (Kazakh poet and thinker): Translation: “I advise and preach to the Kazakh people: Your hearts are so cold toward religion! If religion is imposed, you’re not happy with the law either, You can’t abandon your old customs - This is what he laments about.” (from Qazaq newspaper, issue №11, 1913, 21st of April, “The issue of Muftiyat,” p. 141)

<sup>69</sup>Qazaq newspaper, issue №11, 1913, 21st of April, “The issue of Muftiyat,” p. 141

which was more concerningly a territorial issue than a question of statehood aspirations.<sup>70</sup> Russian officials feared both Pan-Islamism and Pan-Turkism among Kazakhs.<sup>72</sup> However, despite the disagreement in the views regarding the religion, Pan Islamism was not the main priority for Kazakh intelligentsia. After their attempts to enter the administrative circles, there was a notable Kazakh participation during the Third Muslim Congress.<sup>73</sup> That Muslim Congress was usually led by Nogays, which prioritized the "middle dialect" reformist ideas of their leadership. Therefore, their priorities such as pan-Islamic and pan-Turkism as their main objectives were comparatively irrelevant for Kazakhs. They prioritized the mother tongue Kazakh language over all others, and because of their long-standing hostility against their Tatar teachers, the Kazakhs did not endorse pan-Turkism.<sup>74</sup> The Kazakhs wanted to modernize their own distinct nationality, while the Nogays wanted to unite all of Russia's Turkic Muslims. The secondary role of Islam in the framework of Kazakh nationalism also made them uninterested in pan-Islam. On the other hand, as intelligentsia was not satisfied with Muslim Congress, the State Duma became the most important target area of modern Kazakh nationalism. Even though the Kazakhs fully attended only the Second Duma, the Steppe's political consciousness was raised by the experience of electing representatives through assemblies and sending these delegates to St. Petersburg. Therefore, Kazakh nationalism that's known in history today was sparked by the Duma, particularly by the journalistic coverage of its discourses, the commentaries to it and opinion about the meetings in the new wave of the media - newspapers.<sup>75</sup> Communication is a fundamental component of contemporary nationalism.

---

<sup>70</sup>Zholdybalin, "Turkic Roots Of The Kazakh National Idea: Historiographical Analysis." p. 98

<sup>71</sup>Kendirbay, Gulnar. "The national liberation movement of the Kazakh intelligentsia at the beginning of the 20th century. p.491

<sup>72</sup>Sabol, *"The touch of civilization": comparing American and Russian internal colonization.*

<sup>73</sup>Fisher, "Qazaq Nationalism, 1900-1916" p. 55

<sup>74</sup>Fisher, "Qazaq Nationalism, 1900-1916" p. 55

<sup>75</sup>Fisher, "Qazaq Nationalism, 1900-1916" p. 55

The nationalistic themes of newspapers were popular. Although there were relatively few literate Kazakhs and materials were published overall, their impact was far more than what the existing Russian figures might suggest. According to the report from 1910 by governor-general of Turkestan, Samsonov :

*“A great many publications are being issued in the native languages continuously, [and] . . . are sold at extremely low prices, being distributed quickly without leaving a trace (as a consequence of which a majority of such publications remain) completely unknown not only to Russian scholarly institutions but also to the local administration.”*<sup>76</sup>

Actually, there were more newspapers, and the first newspaper was also named Qazaq (Kirgizskoi gazeti in kaz) issued by Mukhamedzhan Seralin, another intellectual in 1907 with only a single issue as it was banned by the officials.<sup>77</sup> In 1911, he started to print another newspaper called Aiqap. Both Qazaq and Aiqap newspapers increased their issues being printed twice in month starting from 1913,<sup>78</sup> which even though in their first years only were not popular. However, the diversity of people who accounted for the content of their chapters, served on their publishing panels, and subsequently influenced later Kazakh nationalist movements was more important to Aiqap and Qazaq's contribution to early Kazakh nationalist thought than their combined readership or the range of articles they published.<sup>79</sup> Nonetheless, there is still a clearer shift which shows how the Kazakh intelligentsia matured. There were merely goals and no coherence in the course of activity of intelligentsia, however later in the 20th century, goals and initiatives were unified.<sup>80</sup> In this purpose, two prominent figures in this movement Akhmet

---

<sup>76</sup>Fisher, “Qazaq Nationalism, 1900-1916” p. 65

<sup>77</sup>Альжанова, "The role of national intelligentsia in the development of the first Kazakh newspapers." p. 34

<sup>78</sup>Альжанова, "The role of national intelligentsia in the development of the first Kazakh newspapers." p. 35

<sup>79</sup>Альжанова, "The role of national intelligentsia in the development of the first Kazakh newspapers." p. 36

<sup>80</sup>Альжанова, "The role of national intelligentsia in the development of the first Kazakh newspapers." p. 36

Baitursynov and Alikhan Bokeikhanov integrated particular tools as religious belonging and turkic legitimacy in advocating the rights to be considered as a community. By covering the DUMAs, the patriotic press had shown its worth to the state; when Central Asians were excluded from the Duma, their journalistic publication was also outlawed.<sup>81</sup> Nevertheless, Kazakh literature publication was also growing and was able to sustain the nationalist and reformist trends during this time.

A more complicated story of Kazakh nation-building is shown by the complex interplay between Islam and nationalist sentiment in the theoretical works of Akhmet Baitursynov and Alikhan Bokeikhanov than is suggested by the traditional dichotomies of contemporary secularism against traditional religion. Despite working in the same newspaper, Bokeikhanov and Baitursynov represented essentially different and only in some sense complementary approaches to review the nationalistic sentiments. At the end, they supposedly targeted two different segments of the readers so there would be more support for the Kazakh nationalism movement in total. For Baitursynov Islam was viewed as a crucial moral and cultural glue that may preserve Kazakh identity in the face of Russian colonial invasion into the administrative and cultural realm of the nation. He tried to demonstrate a conception of how faith might be used as a tactical tool for social resilience and national cohesion through his balanced acceptance of Islamic heritage. He argues that modernization without compromising may result in the failure of its fundamental function. On the other hand, Bokeikhanov's involvement with nationalism tended to view Kazakh nationality in a more secular and rationalist manner. Bokeikhanov brought up the discussion about historical continuity that transcends and surpasses Islamic allegiance by tracing

---

<sup>81</sup>Fisher, "Qazaq Nationalism, 1900-1916" p. 60

Kazakh roots back to Turkic ancestry and challenging false Islamic genealogy. A pragmatic approach to administration and social development is further demonstrated by his pessimism regarding the immutability of Sharia law and support for flexible legal systems. Even Bokeikhanov, however, acknowledged the persistent symbolic capital Islam had among the Kazakh masses and was unable to fully separate religious aspects from national speech.

What emerges from this study is not a simple dichotomy between secularism and religiosity, but a dynamic spectrum of strategic appropriations. By observing their work, it could be concluded that both thinkers admitted that national identity could not be constructed in a cultural vacuum. They fought against the inherited structures of imperialism and emerging global models of nationalism, negotiating a distinct Kazakh consciousness that was not erased but integrated these complex inheritances. Their such actions align perfectly with the earlier mentioned Benedict Anderson's idea of the nation as an "imagined community," where print culture and shared symbols, including religious or ethnic ones expressed in the simple narrations could become the scaffolding of collective identity. Moreover, their differing engagements with Islam reveal the adaptability and strategic fluidity of nationalist discourse under colonial conditions. Baitursynov's modernization of religious education, insistence on the use of Kazakh language in religious instruction, and critiques of missionary efforts highlight how Islam served not merely as a relic of tradition or something imposed earlier by the Arabs, but as a site of contestation and innovation. Meanwhile, Bokeikhanov's invocation of Turkic genealogies and his critiques of rigid religious orthodoxy suggest an effort to craft a national identity that could withstand the pressures of both colonial subjugation and internal stagnation.

Importantly, this analysis weakens simplistic readings of early Kazakh nationalism as either fundamentally Islamic or straightforwardly secular. The reality of the process where semi-nomadic Kazakh tribes centralized and became more united as a statehood is actually textured multi-dimensional space where religious identity was neither blindly preserved nor totally rejected. Each view had their own opposition, however, both Bokeikhanov and Baitursynov tried to critically engage and respond to the ones that “disrupted” the understanding of nationhood as a new reality. Thus, we could observe the strategically repurposed, imaginatively expanded understanding of kazakhs into a broader vision of national survival and autonomy. Both Baitursynov and Bokeikhanov, in their different ways, understood that to build a resilient nation under colonial domination required more than political resistance. In broader context, their efforts reflect the similar strategies by nationalist thinkers in colonized nations such as Turkey, where religion was likewise reimagined to serve nationalist ends. The Kazakh case thus contributes valuable insight into how faith and strategy can coexist, conflict, and coalesce in the formation of national identities under imperial rule. Recognizing the strategic deployment of Islam in Kazakh nationalist thought not only enriches our understanding of figures like Baitursynov and Bokeikhanov but also challenges prevailing historiographical tendencies that underestimate the ideological complexity of anti-colonial movements.

From the other perspective, the intelligentsia was aware that calling for freedom openly was unrealistic and would only result in persecution from the local police. Therefore, they choose to prioritize call for the legal rights in their way to future request for autonomous culture inside the Russian Empire. The intelligentsia members also realised that modernization was an essential prerequisite for any future political autonomy. According to Bukeykhanov, the Kazakhs' main

fight was not to establish an independent state right away but rather to protect their distinctive culture against Russian attempts at Russification. The Westernized political ideology implied by contemporary nationalism was not understood by the Kazakh people. Seralin also mentioned in his work that the ‘glimmer’ of hope revolution in 1905 promised did not fulfill due to Kazakhs being unprepared for it.<sup>82</sup> It seems that the only things that Kazakh intelligentsia wanted up to 1916 were freedom of culture and the political privileges necessary to maintain it. Contemporary analysts believe that the Kazakhs failed to experience "real" nationalism since activists failed to demonstrate any explicit aspirations for political or territorial independence.<sup>83</sup> Ultimately, the story of early twentieth-century Kazakh nationalism. The intertwined and divergent paths of Baitursynov and Bokeikhanov reflect that the nation was not merely a recovery of an ancient essence, nor a wholesale invention of the Empire's propaganda. Thus, despite falling under the period of forced nation building, the nationalistic discourse of the Kazakh people was carefully negotiated at the crossroads of faith, strategy.

---

<sup>82</sup>Альжанова, "The role of national intelligentsia in the development of the first Kazakh newspapers." p. 34

<sup>83</sup>Fisher, "Qazaq Nationalism, 1900-1916" p. 73

## **Bibliography**

- Abashin, S. Движение Алаш. Сборник материалов судебных процессов над алашевцами. Ел-Шежіре. (2011)
- Ахметжанова, А. Т., And М. С. Сарыбаев. "The Study Of Heritage Akhmet Baitursynov And His Adherents In The Period Of Independence Of Kazakhstan." *Электронный Научный Журнал «edu. E-History. Kz»* 1 (2017): 46-53.
- Альжанова, А. "The role of national intelligentsia in the development of the first Kazakh newspapers." *Серия Журналистики* 52, no. 2 (2019): 32-37.
- Anderson, B. *Imagined communities: Reflections on the origin and spread of nationalism*. In *The new social theory reader*. Routledge (2020): pp. 282-288. .
- Allen J. Frank, 'Islamic Transformation on the Kazakh Steppe, 1742–1917: Toward an Islamic
- Arynov, Zhumakhan, And Smagulova Aigerim. "150th Anniversary Of The Birth Of The Leader Of The Nation Akhmet Baitursynov." *Editor Coordinator* (2020): 916-924.
- Bozakhaeva, G. K. . The Kazakh intellectuals at the beginning of the 20th century. In *Proceedings of the International Conference on Advances in Science and Technology*. Research and Publishing Center (2017)
- Berman, B. J. "Ethnicity, Patronage And The African State: The Politics Of Uncivil Nationalism." *African Affairs* 97, no. 388 (July 1, 1998): 305–41. <https://doi.org/10.1093>.

- Biran, Michal. "The Chaghadaids and Islam: The Conversion of Tarmashirin Khan (1331-34)." *Journal of the American Oriental Society* 122, no. 4 (2002): 742-52. <https://doi.org/10.2307/3217613>.
- Castle, Gregory. "Irish Revivalism: Critical Trends and New Directions." *Literature Compass* 8, no. 5 (2011): 291-303. <https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1741-4113.2011.00796.x>
- Campbell, Ian Wylie. 2011. "Knowledge and Power on the Kazakh Steppe, 1845-1917." <https://deepblue.lib.umich.edu/handle/2027.42/86561>.
- Calhoun, Craig. "Nationalism and ethnicity." *Annual review of sociology* 19, no. 1 (1993): 211-239.
- Iskhan, B. J., S. B. Dautova, and B. R. Ospanova. "Language policy and the Kazakh alphabet." *Международный журнал экспериментального образования* 4-2 (2014): 44-47.
- Fisher, Lyn R. "Qazaq Nationalism, 1900-1916" in *Qazaqjylyq| Nationalism and revolution in Kazakhstan, 1900-1920*. University of Montana (1989): 48-74.
- Kadioğlu, Ayşe. "The paradox of Turkish nationalism and the construction of official identity." *Middle Eastern Studies* 32, no. 2 (1996): 177-193. <https://www.jstor.org/stable/4283799>
- Kendirbaeva, G. (1999). "We are children of Alash..." The Kazakh intelligentsia at the beginning of the 20th century in search of national identity and prospects of cultural survival. *Central Asian Survey*, 18(1), 5-36.
- Kendirbay, Gulnar. "The national liberation movement of the Kazakh intelligentsia at the beginning of the 20th century." *Central Asian Survey* 16, no. 4 (1997): 487-515.

- Kendirbaeva, A. S. (2015). The spread of Jadidist ideas in the Kazakh steppe in the late 19th and early 20th centuries. *Bulletin of Leningrad State University*.
- Ohayon, Isabelle, Tetsu Akiyama, Gulmira S. Sultangalieva, Tomohiko Uyama, Xavier Hallez, and Dina A. Amanžolova. "Mediators of The Empire in Central Asia (1820-1928)." *Cahiers du monde russe* 56, no. 4 (2015): 336.
- Rottier, P. (2003). The Kazakness of sedentarization: promoting progress as tradition in response to the land problem. *Central Asian Survey*.
- Rottier, Peter. "Legitimizing the Ata Meken: the Kazakh intelligentsia write a history of their Homeland." *Ab Imperio* 2004, no. 1 (2004): 467-486.
- Rottier, P. (2005). Creating the Kazak nation: The intelligentsia's quest for acceptance in the Russian Empire, 1905–1920. The University of Wisconsin-Madison.
- Sabol, S. (2003). *Russian colonization and the genesis of Kazakh national consciousness*. Palgrave Macmillan.
- Sabol, Steve. *"The touch of civilization": comparing American and Russian internal colonization*. University Press of Colorado (2017).
- Sabol, Steven O'Neal. *"Awake Kazak!": Russian colonization of Central Asia and the genesis of Kazak national consciousness, 1868-1920*. Georgia State University, 1998.
- Said, Edward W. "Orientalism." In *Social theory re-wired*, pp. 402-417. Routledge, 2016.
- Smith, Anthony D. *Ethno-symbolism and nationalism: A cultural approach*. Routledge, 2009.

- Uyama, Tomohiko. "Historiography of Local and Regional Studies in Western Kazakhstan: An Alternative to National History?." *Publication of the Central Eurasian Studies Society* 7, no. 2 (2008): 16.
- Uyama, Tomohiko. "Repression of Kazakh Intellectuals as a Sign of Weakness of Russian Imperial Rule. The paradoxical impact of Governor AN Troinitskii on the Kazakh national movement." *Cahiers du monde russe. Russie-Empire russe-Union soviétique et États indépendants* 56, no. 56/4 (2015): 681-703.
- Uyama, Tomohiko, and Kimitaka Matsuzato. *The Geography of Civilizations: a spatial analysis of the Kazakh intelligentsia's activities, from the mid-nineteenth to the Early twentieth Century*. na, 2000.
- Uyama, Tomohiko. "Unmasking imperial history: Emotional Empire, Violent Politics of Difference, and Independence Movements in the Name of Autonomy." *Ab Imperio* 2022, no. 1 (2022): 121-126.
- Varshney, Ashutosh. "Contested meanings: India's national identity, Hindu nationalism, and the politics of anxiety." *Daedalus* 122, no. 3 (1993): 227-261. <https://www.jstor.org>
- Zeinullin, R., and T. H. Gabytov. "Ethnoculture Of The Nogais And The Heritage Of Dasht-I-Kipchak." *Вестник КазНУ. Серия философии, культурологии и политологии* 82, no. 4 (2022): 44-50.
- Zholdybalin, R. M. "Turkic Roots Of The Kazakh National Idea: Historiographical Analysis." *Journal Of History/Habarşy Tarihi Seriâsy* 114, No. 3 (2024).