

**Modernization Without Transformation: The De-Baization
Campaign and Class Politics in Soviet Kazakhstan**

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Alua Yesserkepova

First Advisor: Dr Mollie Arbuthnot

Second Advisor: Dr Mikhail Akulov

Table of contents

Introduction.....	2
Methodology.....	5
Historiography.....	7
Context.....	12
Class, Compliance, and Cultural Persistence.....	24
State Neglect, Terror, and Forced Compliance.....	31
Conclusion.....	42
Bibliography.....	45

Introduction

In July of 1932, an anonymous author challenged the Soviet class politics in a complaint addressed to Mikhail Kahiani and Izmukhan Kuramysov, the secretaries of the Kazakh Regional Committee of VKP(b), and Uraz Isaev, chairman of the Council of People's Commissars of the Kazakh ASSR. The unnamed author identified themselves as a communist, who represented the broader social dissatisfaction and resistance to the sovietization of Kazakh auls (villages). The writer attributed the civilian discontent to the excessively coercive methods employed by the state in promoting class consciousness and liquidating bourgeois elements among the Kazakh masses that resulted in famine, death, resettlement, and "destruction of the nation."¹ Based on the detrimental consequences of the Soviet class warfare project, the author concluded: "Но исходя из того, что Вы делаете, у меня язык не поворачивается сказать, что в Казахстане идет социалистическое строительство."² In the context of this anonymous letter, the ideological mobilization of class identities in Soviet Kazakhstan appeared as a straightforward process that permitted no other alternative modes of implementation besides violence. However, the subject of class politics was a highly nuanced topic fraught with difficulty and debate.

Given the complexity of the subject matter, this essay discusses the 1928 de-Baization campaign in Soviet Kazakhstan as a state project that intended to foster class rhetoric and consciousness but ultimately failed to achieve ideological transformation of pastoral nomads. Although ideology was not the only dimension of de-Baization, it appeared as a central aspect of the policy that shaped and encompassed its other aspects, including political, social, and economic objectives. Therefore, this research focuses primarily on the ideological framework of

¹ "Pis'mo anonimnogo avtora rukovodstvu KASSR o ne soglasii s vnutrennej politikoj partii" In *Iz istorii deportacij. Kazahstan 1930-1935 gg.*, no. 233 (Almaty: LEM, 2012), 510.

² "Pis'mo anonimnogo avtora rukovodstvu KASSR o ne soglasii s vnutrennej politikoj partii", 510.

the campaign, analyzing the reaction of local Kazakhs to its implementation and the regime's coercive mechanisms in cultivating compliance with state directives.

The theoretical controversy over the manner of implementing class consciousness among pastoralist nomads can be summarized in the major dichotomy between the top-down 'Stalinist' approach and the gradualist, gradualist alternative.³ As a prominent supporter of the former strategy, Filipp Goloshchyokin, appointed as the First Secretary of the Kazakh Regional Committee in 1925, framed property confiscation and expulsion of local elites as an obligatory political strategy needed to eliminate patriarchal-clan traditions and backward semi-feudal influences, thereby sustaining Soviet modernization of the rural areas⁴. It is worth mentioning that this framework was supported not only by the representatives of higher Soviet authorities but also by the members of the Kazakh intelligentsia. For instance, Gabbas Togzhanov, a cultural-political scholar and literary critic, advocated for the imposition of repressive measures against regional elites and subsequently expressed concern regarding its pace: "...этот процесс, процесс классового пробуждения казахских трудящихся вообще и бедноты в частности идет не так быстро, как это нам хотелось бы..."⁵ At this point, the 'Stalinist' approach denoted a rapid process of elimination of wealthy Kazakhs and traditional notions of social stratification through the use of violence. In contrast to this model of swift intervention, a Soviet researcher and statistician named Vladimir Sokolovsky endorsed an in-depth analysis of existing natural, economic, tribal, and class phenomena that constituted socio-political conditions of the

³ Žakiševa, Saule. *Materialy Gosudarstvennoj komissii po polnoj rehabilitacii žertv političeskijh repressij. 20-50 gody HH veka*. (Astana: Institute of History and Ethnology named after Sh. Sh. Ualikhanov, 2022), 7.

⁴ "Dokladnaja zapiska Kazkrajkoma VKP(b) v CK VKP(b) «O konfiskacii sredstv i orudij proizvodstva u krupnyh bajskih hozjajstv i lic iz byvših privilegirovannyh soslovij i rodovyh grupp»" In *Ašaršylyk. Golod. 1 Tom. 1928-1934*, no. 31 (Almaty: Atamūra, 2021), 192.

⁵ Togzhanov, Gabbas. *O kazahskom aule*. (Kyzylorda: KAZGISA, 1927), 19.

Kazakh auls prior to the construction of the socialist consciousness in the region⁶. Although Sokolovsky encouraged sovietization of the steppe, his framework proposed thorough research as a beginning and indispensable part of transforming the Kazakh ASSR according to the ideological objectives of the state before applying mass coercion. The research-centered approach was further elaborated by Sergey Shvetsov (also a statistical scientist), who disputed the perceived association between nomadism and backwardness: “Казахское, как и всякое иное кочевое хозяйство, не есть низшая ступень развития...Кочевой быт не враждебен развитию и культуре.”⁷ Taken together, ideas of Sokolovsky and Shvetsov challenged the ones of Goloshchyokin and Togzhanov, undermining both the urgency of advancing class warfare and the assumed link of archaic nomadic practices with cultural inferiority.

Nevertheless, the top-down approach prevailed in the ideological aims and conventions which found their manifestation in the 1928 de-Baization campaign. In its essence, de-Baization was a transformative policy aimed at forcibly dismantling the traditional social, cultural, and economic composition of the Kazakh aul to pave the way for subsequent Soviet collectivization. The campaign’s primary objective was the liquidation of the wealthy herders (bais), semi-feudal elements, descendants of khans/sultans, and other privileged groups who maintained political and economic dominance through lineage connections⁸. Regardless of the transformative and emancipatory mission it carried, the de-Baization policy marked one of the most destructive and violent chapters in Kazakh history. This outcome derived directly from the initial incompatibility of the Soviet agenda with clan/kinship ties that constituted the formation of Kazakh traditional

⁶ Sokolovsky, Vladimir. *Kazahskij aul*. (Tashkent: Central Statistical Administration of the Kazakh ASSR, 1926), 35.

⁷ Shvetsov, Sergey. “Priroda i byt Kazakstana” In *Kazakskoe hozjajstvo v ego estestvenno-istoričeskikh i bytovyh uslovijah*. (Kyzylorda: People’s Commissariat of Agriculture of the Kazakh ASSR, 1926), 104.

⁸ “Protokol sobranija Ural’skogo okružnogo aktiva o praktičeskom provedenii konfiskacii” In *Ašaršylyk. Golod. 1 Tom. 1928-1934*, no. 85 (Almaty: Atamūra, 2021), 302.

society. Without proper cultural assimilation, the diverse ethnic groups of Kazakhstan could not be effectively adapted to the strict class categorizations. This tension resulted in a lack of genuine compliance in the masses with Soviet class politics. Speaking specifically, Kazakhs continued to practice traditional customs and strengthen kinship ties by effectively concealing their actions under the conventions of de-Baization. Moreover, there was a tendency to use imposed class identities as instruments to secure tangible social benefits or avoid repression across all layers of social stratification. The mentioned aspects indicated the limitations of Soviet efforts at sustaining ideological transformation of the steppe, which led instead to the persistence of pre-existing social structures. The absence of adherence to the promoted class rhetoric was further addressed by the state with a series of violent interventions, including administrative neglect, intimidation, and violation of basic human rights. In this way, the de-Baization campaign, as a manifestation of Soviet power, was unable to ideologically transform Kazakh agrarian society and achieve genuine local compliance among pastoralist nomads. Its failure was subsequently compensated through intense state-imposed terror aimed at forcibly obtaining conformity and socio-political passivity of the masses.

Methodology

This research project is based on close reading of primary sources regarding the 1928 de-Baization campaign. All primary sources employed in this study can be divided into two broader groups: official party documents and ego-documents and petitions, both drawn from the collections of the Russian Historical Society and the Archive of the President of the Republic of Kazakhstan. Sources from the first category include party reports, speeches, resolutions, stenographic records, and investigative materials. These types of documentation are utilized to

provide a comprehensive analysis of the ideological, political, and social dimensions of the modernization of the Kazakh aul from the perspective of the Soviet state. Moreover, administrative decrees reveal the institutional mechanism behind planning, implementation, and consequent management of the immediate consequences of the de-Baization policy. On the other hand, ‘ego-documents and petitions’ serves as an umbrella term encompassing the wide range of primary sources such as autobiographies, personal letters, formal complaints, and collective appeals produced by the members of the Kazakh public. Incorporation and discussion of the ego-documents and petitions enables the research to offer an examination of how state policies were experienced at the individual level, thereby legitimizing personal narratives. In this way, this project attempts to explore the subjects of class politics and de-Baization from the perspective of state intervention while foregrounding individual stories. It is important to note that the research methodology is also complemented with the theoretical frameworks and scholarly contextualizations formulated by Kazakhstani and international historians.

The main limitation of the project stems from the bias present in both the Soviet official documents and ego-documents. To be specific, primary resources belonging to the category of party documentation often reveal the state’s paranoid tendency to link all forms of social deviation to class rhetoric. Due to this phenomenon, any administrative disturbances were routinely given an ideological framing, distorting the more realistic interpretations of the events. On the other hand, by virtue of being authored by individuals, the ego-records and petitions reflect a highly subjective perception of the de-Baization campaign. At this point, consultation with the secondary sources does not fully resolve the problem of inherent bias of the primary evidence, as the existing literature on the topic tends to provide conflicting views on the same issues.

Another methodological limitation lies in the fact that ethnic backgrounds of the authors of ego-accounts are not distinguished in this study. Although all personal narratives were written by the residents of the Kazakh ASSR, some of them were produced by ethnic Russians who could be less culturally integrated and accustomed to the nomadic kinship ties or clan relations. This could be an obstacle to articulating a nuanced understanding of the socio-cultural transformation endured by the residents of the traditional Kazakh aul under the de-Baization policy.

Despite the presence of certain constraints with the research methodology, they should not impose substantial risk on the validity and significance of the project. Regardless of the bias, primary sources provide a valuable factual base for the discussion of de-Baization as an instrument of class warfare in Soviet Kazakhstan. While the question of ethnicity does not hinder the analysis of personal stories and experiences, as all authors of the ego-documents and petitions were inhabitants of the Kazakh territories well before the imposition of the de-Baization campaign in 1928.

Historiography

Existing historiography offers a range of scholarly works on the topic of de-Baization, providing different perspectives and interpretations of the ideological transformation of the Kazakh aul. The bulk of literature analyzes the de-Baization campaign as a part of a broader collectivization campaign, discussing its social, political, economic, and cultural impact. As it was already mentioned, the opinions of historians of de-Baization differ sharply. The following disagreement derives directly from the origin of the source, being dependent on the temporal and political background behind its publication. Consequently, it seems necessary to divide academic

literature into two major groups: historiography produced during the Soviet Union, and sources published after its fall.

Turning to the discussion of Soviet-era historiography on the de-Baization policy, it is important to mention scholars such as A. Tursunbayev, who, writing in the 1950s, celebrated the victory of socialism as a result of class warfare in the Kazakh aul. In his analysis of the 1920s-1930s, Tursunbayev employed extensive praise of the Soviet efforts in promoting class consciousness among Kazakhs, while simultaneously drawing on the ideas of Karl Marx, Friedrich Engels, and Vladimir Lenin. According to the author, the Soviet intervention was a modernizing force that successfully overcame the opposition of bourgeois nationalist leaders (namely Ahmet Baitursynuly and Alikhan Bukeikhanov), who, in his assessment, sought to resist the ideological development of Kazakhs⁹. Similar arguments were articulated in the work of Grigorii Dakhshleyger, who presented the 1928 confiscation procedures as a historically necessary stage in the liberation of regional laboring masses¹⁰. More importantly, the author celebrated the successes of the de-Baization policy achieved between 1926 and 1932 in transforming aul and liquidating exploitative elements¹¹. In his work, Dakhshleyger adopted a strict Marxist-Leninist perspective, advocating for the dictatorship of the proletariat and the complete eradication of patriarchal-feudal relationships in the aul¹². In addition, he dedicated a significant portion of his analysis to the critique of Shvetsov. As it was already noted, Shvetsov argued that nomadic groups were not intrinsically counter-progressive, making it conceptually misleading to label them as backward. Dakhshleyger perceived Shvetsov's statement as the defense of political and economic interests of kulak-bai elements, which could potentially hinder

⁹ Tursunbayev, A. *Pobeda kolhoznogo stroja v Kazahstane*. (Alma-Ata: Kazakh State Publishing Press, 1957), 8.

¹⁰ Dakhshleyger, Grigorii. *K Harakteristike Social'no-Èkonomičeskikh Otnošenij v Kazahskom Aule (1921-1928gg.)*. (Moscow: Institute of History of the Academy of Sciences of the USSR, 1961), 8

¹¹ Dakhshleyger, *K Harakteristike Social'no-Èkonomičeskikh Otnošenij v Kazahskom Aule (1921-1928gg.)*, 6.

¹² Dakhshleyger, *K Harakteristike Social'no-Èkonomičeskikh Otnošenij v Kazahskom Aule (1921-1928gg.)*, 45.

the class-based modernization of the steppe¹³. Although Shvetsov's understanding of the Kazakh society varied drastically from interpretations of Tursunbayev and Dakhshleyger, it would be inaccurate to suggest that he was against the de-Baization campaign. Operating within the state-administered publishing institution, Shvetsov was structurally prevented from openly expressing his disapproval of Soviet class politics. Therefore, his statement on nomadism was framed as a part of an ethnographic analysis of the Kazakh ASSR, rather than an ideologically or politically charged narrative. In this way, it appears fair to conclude that academic literature published within the temporal and territorial borders of the USSR largely displayed a positive assessment of de-Baization, presenting the imposed class warfare as the ultimate instrument of Soviet modernization.

With the dissolution of the Soviet Union and the consequent increased availability of archival resources, a new body of critical literature on the topic of de-Baization emerged. The transition between Soviet and post-Soviet historiography captures a significant shift towards reassessment and problematization of class politics. To illustrate, Žuldyzbek Abylhožin, a contemporary Kazakhstani historian, described Soviet intervention as a policy of ethnic genocide, equating it to Holodomor and the Holocaust¹⁴. The scholar's main argument propagated that the state manipulated class interests to justify large-scale violence and expropriation, thereby destroying the synergetic ecosystem of the nomadic society¹⁵. The following interpretation was further reinforced by another Kazakh historian, Saule Žakiševa, who regarded the de-Baization campaign as an oppressive mechanism grounded in a systematic denial of individual property rights¹⁶. It is important to note that contemporary academic

¹³ Dakhshleyger, *K Harakteristike Social'no-Èkonomičeskij Otnoženij v Kazahskom Aule (1921-1928gg.)*, 8.

¹⁴ Abylhožin, Žuldyzbek. *Očerki Social'no-Èkonomičeskij Istorii Kazahstana XX Vek*. (Almaty: University Turan, 1997), 4.

¹⁵ Abylhožin, *Očerki Social'no-Èkonomičeskij Istorii Kazahstana XX Vek*, 6.

¹⁶ Žakiševa, *Materialy Gosudarstvennoj komissii po polnoj rehabilitacii žertv političeskij repressij*, 4.

literature produced by Kazakh scholars is not isolated from Soviet-era historiography. In other words, both authors actively engaged in the dialogue with Soviet historians, either supporting or challenging their statements. For instance, Žakiševa, in her dissertation, presented the vision of Shvetsov and Sokolovsky as a more appropriate model for the implementation of de-Baization while contesting its actual realization under the guidance of Goloshchyokin¹⁷.

Taking into account the scholarship of Kazakh colleagues, a significant body of foreign literature and research emerged. Similarly to Kazakhstani historians, foreign authors also exhibited a tendency to discuss the de-Baization campaign within the greater context of collectivization and famine. Academic papers written by such experts as Alun Thomas offered an extensive analysis of the destructive consequences of Soviet projects directed at fostering class warfare in Soviet Kazakhstan. For instance, Thomas stated that nomadic pastoralism was less of a target of collectivization and more of its victim¹⁸. The author proceeded to elaborate on his argument by claiming that Soviet interventionist campaigns were often executed in a post hoc manner instead of being coherently structured projects¹⁹. This mode of implementing radical policies like de-Baization, resettlement, and collectivization ultimately resulted in widespread devastation, which Thomas referred to as “humanitarian catastrophe, precipitated by the party but hardly coordinated by it, and culminating in millions of fatalities.”²⁰

The violence involved in socialist reorganization of Kazakh society was also explained by Robert Kindler, who claimed that threat and administrative terror served as instruments to enforce communist will in the steppe, even if the success was often only sporadic²¹. According to Kindler, the regime believed that socioeconomic conditions of aul in the 1920s could not be

¹⁷ Žakiševa, *Materialy Gosudarstvennoj komissii po polnoj rehabilitacii žertv političeskijh repressij*, 7.

¹⁸ Alun, Thomas. *Nomads and Soviet Rule*. (London: I.B.Tauris and Co. Ltd, 2018), 157.

¹⁹ Thomas. *Nomads and Soviet Rule*, 158.

²⁰ Thomas. *Nomads and Soviet Rule*, 157.

²¹ Kindler, Robert. *Stalin's Nomads: Power and Famine in Kazakhstan*. Trans. by Cynthia Klohr. (Pennsylvania, [Pittsburgh]: University of Pittsburgh Press, 2018), 70.

reconstructed through peaceful measures, demanding rapid revolutionary action²². It is worth mentioning that throughout his research, Kindler employed individual stories of members of the Kazakh community to illustrate how state policies were experienced by the local population. In his discussion of violence associated with class politics of 1928, the historian used the story of Aktau Adenov to showcase the torture the bais underwent during confiscation campaigns²³. Although Kindler framed state-induced turmoil, instability, and repetitive excessive violence as primary driving forces behind the sovietization of Kazakhstan, he additionally emphasized the role of locals (both party workers and general public) in exacerbating the crisis and facilitating liquidation of the elite.

The following idea was further supported by Sarah Cameron, which was especially evident in her statements like “...the peculiarly destructive nature of the confiscation campaign was due to the fact that it was primarily carried out by insiders, rather than by outsiders.”²⁴ Perspectives offered by Kindler and Cameron rejected one-sided representation of the de-Baization campaign, showcasing how local party workers manipulated state directives and escalated violence. As it was previously mentioned, the de-Baization policy appeared in foreign historiography as an indispensable part of the broader Soviet intervention. Cameron framed this relationship as de-Baization foreshadowing the famine, highlighting the deliberate readiness of the regime to accept risks of mass starvation and suffering to fulfill its ideological interests²⁵.

With regard to the discussed historiography, this research paper examines the implementation and immediate consequences of de-Baization that continued into further Soviet policies of class warfare. In doing so, this essay emphasizes the importance of the individual

²² Kindler, *Stalin's Nomads*, 80.

²³ Kindler, *Stalin's Nomads*, 80.

²⁴ Cameron, Sarah. *The Hungry Steppe : Famine, Violence, and the Making of Soviet Kazakhstan*. (Ithaca [New York]: Cornell University Press, 2018), 71.

²⁵ Cameron, *The Hungry Steppe*, 88.

experiences of inhabitants of Kazakh auls, demonstrating the human dimension of state-directed socialist transformation. By juxtaposing party documents and personal narratives, the work reveals profound differences between the envisioned civilizing mission of de-Baization and the actual mechanism of social devastation that locals endured, which constitutes its main contribution to the existing discussion.

Context

The stratification of traditional Kazakh society before Soviet intervention was based on hereditary clan affiliations and secondarily determined by one's economic status²⁶. The most distinctive social division involved categorizing individuals according to their genealogical background into 'Ak suyek' (white bones) and 'Kara suyek' (black bones)²⁷. Ak Suyek was a hereditary aristocracy, constituting a closed community of people who descended from the Chinggisid lineage and were bound by kinship ties with the khanal ruling elite²⁸. Based on their inherent influence, representatives of the white bones clan enjoyed significant social and political privileges. For instance, they exercised state authority, actively participated in local governing, possessed vast domains of land, served as religious leaders, and were exempt from paying taxes²⁹. The prestige of Ak Suyek members was institutionalized and transmitted across generations by Zheti Zhargy, the set of legal and customary laws of the Kazakh Khanate³⁰.

²⁶ Hudson, Alfred. *Kazak Social Structure*. Yale University Publications in Anthropology, no. 20, New Haven, (Connecticut: Human Relations Area Files Press, 1964), 55.

²⁷ Sailaubay, Yerlan, & Zhanbossinova, Albina. *Kazakh Nomads, Social Class Transformations and Soviet Power during the Period of Collectivization*. Central Asian Survey, (Oxford: Taylor & Francis Group, 2024), 1.

²⁸ Sailaubay, & Zhanbossinova, *Kazakh Nomads, Social Class Transformations and Soviet Power during the Period of Collectivization*, 1.

²⁹ Teleuova, E. *Social Structure and Social Stratification of Traditional Society*. Journal of history, no. 3, (Almaty: Al-Farabi Kazakh National University, 2018), 50.

³⁰ Teleuova, *Social Structure and Social Stratification of Traditional Society*, 49.

Meanwhile, Kara Suyek denoted an open social group, which consisted of ordinary Kazakhs³¹. Compared to Ak Suyek, individuals within the Kara Suyek clan had to gain influence through merit and personal qualities rather than hereditary connections. Despite the lack of inherent social capital, powerful leaders like biys (judges), batyrs (warriors), and aksakals (elder leaders of auls) rose from Kara Suyek based on the principles of meritocracy in the Late Middle Ages³². All of the mentioned figures were highly respected in the indigenous Kazakh community and possessed considerable wealth³³. Therefore, it is inaccurate to conclude that one's belonging to a particular group predetermined their economic and social standing. To be specific, an affiliate of the Ak Suyek could economically be poor while exercising legal and political prerogatives inherent to their lineage³⁴. Furthermore, the rigidity of distinctions between Ak and Kara Suyek was significantly weakened by the end of the khanate governance (caused by the Russian expansion of the 18th-19th centuries), thereby undermining the authority of these groups as distinct social castes.

In terms of economic stratification, a person's wealth was determined by the number of livestock and property they owned. Individuals with the most possessions were referred to as *bais* (the rich). Below the wealthy stood the poor and middle classes, who were constantly in a precarious position due to the few cattle they owned (the loss of which would subject them to complete dependency on the rich)³⁵. The higher and lower stratas of traditional Kazakh society coexisted in a complex symbiotic relationship, characterized by mutual aid and obligatory solidarity. For instance, pastoralist nomads relied upon practices like *saün berü*, which involved a wealthy kin member lending a milk cow to a less affluent person for the winter to ensure

³¹ Hudson, *Kazak Social Structure*, 55.

³² Teleuova, *Social Structure and Social Stratification of Traditional Society*, 51.

³³ Teleuova, *Social Structure and Social Stratification of Traditional Society*, 53.

³⁴ Teleuova, *Social Structure and Social Stratification of Traditional Society*, 53.

³⁵ Hudson, *Kazak Social Structure*, 57.

protection during environmental instabilities³⁶. At this point, the interaction between the rich and the poor in the context of indigenous Kazakhstan was more elaborate and nuanced than a mere exploitation of the latter. With that being said, the existing historiography offers a wide range of theoretical and scholarly readings of the same concepts that occurred in the economic life of the aul. To illustrate, contrary to Cameron's interpretation of *saün berü*, Dakhshleyger presents this custom as one of the most widespread pre-capitalist methods of exploiting the poor segment of the Kazakh village in the 1920s³⁷. Although the author acknowledges the charitable and supportive aspect of lending livestock, Dakhshleyger argues that the poor recipient was nevertheless expected to reciprocate the bai's assistance through intense labor or monetary compensation³⁸. Under this conceptualization, *saün berü* appears as a calculated act of investment, rather than a measure to ensure societal continuity and survival. With regard to the divergence in academic interpretations, the traditional relationship between pastoralist Kazakhs should not be idealized or treated as an absolute and harmonious framework devoid of class tensions.

It is worth noting that the following classes were impermanent and could be influenced by external factors. Speaking specifically, the roles of the rich and the poor could rapidly shift in the course of a single season due to the steppe landscape that required persistent adaptation³⁹. Moreover, as it was mentioned by Geiss, "Due to the common ownership of pastures, they [pastoralist nomads] also lacked the institution of property as an origin of social inequality and as a means of 'exploitation.'"⁴⁰ These features of traditional Kazakh society imposed theoretical issues upon Tsarist authorities and Soviet Marxists, as nomads lacked strict class-based

³⁶ Cameron, *The Hungry Steppe*, 32.

³⁷ Dakhshleyger, *K Harakteristike Social'no-Èkonomičeskikh Otnošenij v Kazahskom Aule (1921-1928gg.)*, 35.

³⁸ Dakhshleyger, *K Harakteristike Social'no-Èkonomičeskikh Otnošenij v Kazahskom Aule (1921-1928gg.)*, 36.

³⁹ Cameron, *The Hungry Steppe*, 34.

⁴⁰ Geiss, Paul Georg. *Pre-Tsarist and Tsarist Central Asia : Communal Commitment and Political Order in Change*, (Oxford Taylor & Francis Group, 2004), 146.

stratification or an elaborate division of labor⁴¹. Due to the conceptual challenges of classifying the Kazakh pastoralist community within the Marxist framework, the Soviet state decided on categorizing the regional classes according to the stratification of Russian peasantry. In other words, the social stratification of Kazakhs was based on the model applied to Russian villages, adhering to the same principles and conventions. As it was outlined by Goloshchyokin, “Мы строим советы в ауле так же, как в Курской, Тверской и других губерниях центральной России.”⁴² It is fair to assume that the following approach overlooked the cultural composition of the Kazakh aul, thereby making the imposed class hierarchy of the nomad economy unrepresentative of the reality of Kazakh society.

Nevertheless, it would be analytically misleading to perceive the de-Baization campaign through the lenses of ethnocentrism and dichotomy between Russian and Kazakh societies. To be exact, de-Baization cannot be framed as a purely external and ethnically charged intervention but rather a policy that was executed by employed representatives from the local community. In terms of their reaction to de-Baization, Kazakhs did not present a uniformly oppositional stance, with many actively facilitating and participating in repressive measures (including confiscation, redistribution, external exile, etc.). As it was stated by Kindler, “Native cadres and activists were themselves deeply involved in identifying and persecuting affluent bais.”⁴³ Former chairman of the Enbekshilder district and member of the Central Executive Committee of the Kazakh ASSR, Sadykbekov appeared as one of the examples of local reinforcers of state-imposed class politics. It is worth noting the omnipresent nature of the campaign, as it targeted all layers of society, including those participating in its enforcement, such as Sadykbekov. Despite his prominent position within the apparatus, in November of 1930 his father, Bek Sadykbekov, was regarded as

⁴¹ Geiss, *Pre-Tsarist and Tsarist Central Asia: Communal Commitment and Political Order in Change*, 146.

⁴² Goloshchyokin, *Očerednye zadači VKP (b) v Kazakstane*, 70.

⁴³ Kindler, *Stalin's Nomads*, 86.

a bai and exiled to the Arys district.⁴⁴ Unable to bear “такую незаслуженную политически смертельную кару,” Sadykbekov ultimately decided to terminate his career in party apparatus, with no record showing that he abandoned his pro-Soviet views.⁴⁵ Therefore, de-Baization cannot be framed as a purely external and ethnically charged intervention but rather a policy that was executed by employed representatives from the local community.

Based on the established class structure of Russian villages, in the 1926 letter of Kazraikom, Goloshchyokin defined bais (the wealthy) as the highest strata of Kazakh society that possessed valuable means of production and shared exploitative aspirations⁴⁶. Bais were presented as the bourgeois elite that controlled both political and economic notions in Soviet Kazakhstan. Interpreting the interests of the wealthy as direct manifestations of capitalism, the state designated this group as a hazardous element that the party must combat. This attitude derived from the comparison Goloshchyokin formulated between Kazakh bais and Russian kulaks, concluding that “и кулак, и бай—эксплуататоры, конечно, вреден и тот и другой, и бить их нужно обоим.”⁴⁷ The presented theoretical correspondence fails to define the underlying nature of bais as a class by simply standardizing it according to the existing framework of Russian society. It is important to note that in the subsequent documents, bais were often depicted as “прислужники царской колонизаторской политики.”⁴⁸ The following analogies positioned the upper class as an enemy incompatible with socialist transformation, simultaneously framing the Soviet initiatives as liberating and modernizing. As for classification, any household employing rural wage laborers (batraki) or owning a herd of more than 35 was

⁴⁴ “Telegramma predsedatelja Ėnbekšil’derskogo rika o nezakonnoj vyselke otca Sadykbekova” In *Iz istorii deportacij. Kazahstan 1930-1935 gg.*, no. 138 (Almaty: LEM, 2012), 370.

⁴⁵ “Telegramma predsedatelja Ėnbekšil’derskogo rika o nezakonnoj vyselke otca Sadykbekova”, 370.

⁴⁶ Goloshchyokin, *Očerednye zadači VKP (b) v Kazakstane*, 70.

⁴⁷ Goloshchyokin, *Očerednye zadači VKP (b) v Kazakstane*, 70.

⁴⁸ Goloshchyokin, Filipp I. “V medlennoj i upornoj bor’be izžit’ gruppovšinu —zaključitel’noe slovo po očetu krajcoma V kraevoj konferencii,” in *Partiinoe stroitel’stvo v Kazakstane, 1925-1930 gg.* (Moscow, 1930), 46.

regarded as a kulak-bai unit.⁴⁹

The 1930 Politburo decree further elaborated the concept of kulak-bais by offering 3 distinct ascribed categories of bourgeois elements. The categories were determined based on their perceived threat to the regime, with Category I regarded as the most hazardous and Category III as the least. It is worth noting that the severity of punitive measures also varied according to the category, subjecting accused bais to face penalties specific to their assigned group. This typology was meant to function as an administrative framework to ensure the proletarianization of Kazakh society and suppress any attempts at counterrevolutionary actions against Soviet policies.⁵⁰

Category I comprised politically active elements who organized, supported, or participated in oppositional movements. Although Category I was primarily defined by one's political affiliation rather than personal wealth and possessions, its members were still referred to as “кулацкий актив.”⁵¹ Individuals assigned to this group were often involved in banditry and terrorist acts, prompting the Soviet authorities to consider them the most significant hazard.⁵² The state mandated immediate liquidation of the representatives of Category I by means of confiscation of all property, confinement in concentration camps, and execution.⁵³

Category II was to consist of the remaining part of ‘kulak activists,’ specifically targeting the most privileged layers of social stratification such as wealthy landowners, semi-feudal bais, and members of the traditional elite. Punitive measures for Category II included property

⁴⁹ “Zaključenie komissii obkoma po voprosam razgraničeniya baja ot serednjaka i opredeleniya priznakov polufeodal'no-kulackih hozjajstv, podležaših likvidacii” In *Iz istorii deportacij. Kazahstan 1930-1935 gg*, no. 26 (AP RK, 2012), 86.

⁵⁰ “Postanovlenie Politbjuro CK VKP (b)” In *Iz istorii deportacij. Kazahstan 1930-1935 gg*, no. 8 (Almaty: LEM, 2012), 55.

⁵¹ “Postanovlenie Politbjuro CK VKP (b)”, 55.

⁵² “Postanovlenie Politbjuro CK VKP (b) «O kollektivizacii i bor'be s kulačestvom v nacional'nyh èkonomičeski otstalyh rajonah»” In *Iz istorii deportacij. Kazahstan 1930-1935 gg*, no. 49 (Almaty: LEM, 2012), 121.

⁵³ “Postanovlenie Politbjuro CK VKP (b)”, 55.

confiscation and forced relocation to the remote regions of the USSR or distant districts of the Kazakh ASSR.⁵⁴ In addition, notable figures like influential religious leaders (ishans and mullahs), descendants of khans/sultans, and former tsarist officials were generally treated as other members of this category.⁵⁵

The rest of bais, who possessed less wealth and influence, were allocated to Category III. In terms of residence and resettlement, unlike two previous categories, representatives of the final group remained within their administrative districts but were obliged to leave their original households.⁵⁶ Moreover, despite the fact that members of Category III underwent confiscation of property, the state permitted them to keep one horse or camel, a cow, a plow, a harrow, a cart, and provisions of meat or grain for two months as a minimum subsistence.⁵⁷

The middle level of Kazakh society was designated as the *serednyaki*, the main mass of regional nomads that was meant to become the ideological backbone of the new Soviet aul. Party authorities, under the leadership of Goloshchyokin, aimed to urge the middle pastoralists to act alongside the poor to win ideological warfare against the privileged, thereby constituting a unified class front.⁵⁸ The total number of family members in a middle-class household could not exceed 10-12 individuals; consequently, its permitted land allotment was 15-18 tanaps⁵⁹, and livestock ownership was restricted to no more than 35 head of cattle.

Bednota (the poor) referred to the group at the lowest level of social stratification.

⁵⁴ “Postanovlenie Politbjuro CK VKP (b)”, 55.

⁵⁵ “Protokol ob’edinennogo zasedanija CIK i SNK KASSR ob utverždenii proekta dekreta o konfiskacii i vyselenii krupnejših bajskih hozjajstv” In *Ašaršylyk. Golod. 1 Tom. 1928-1934*, no. 77 (Almaty: Atamūra, 2021), 285.

⁵⁶ “Postanovlenie Politbjuro CK VKP (b)”, 55.

⁵⁷ “Protokol zasedanija trojki pri Pavlodarskom otdel’ OGPU o prožitočnom minimume i orudijah proizvodstva likvidiruemyh kulacko-bajskih hozjajstv” In *Iz istorii deportacij. Kazahstan 1930-1935 gg*, no. 62 (Almaty: LEM, 2012), 136.

⁵⁸ “Dokladnaja zapiska predsedatelja KazCIK o predvaritel’nyh itogah hozjajstvenno-političeskikh kampanij v kazahskih i uzbekskih volostjah Čimkentskogo uezda” In *Ašaršylyk. Golod. 1 Tom. 1928-1934*, no. 11 (Almaty: Atamūra, 2021), 86.

⁵⁹ A traditional unit of land measurement.

According to the 1928 report of the Kazakh Regional Committee on the socio-economic and political situation of the republic, approximately 60-65% of households in the region were exempted from agricultural taxes due to their complete inability to meet financial obligations.⁶⁰ It was asserted that the poor were historically exploited by representatives of higher classes and necessitated urgent assistance from the state to escape their condition. Due to the lack of the conventional proletariat in Soviet Kazakhstan during the 1920s, *bednota* was perceived as a group that would embody and promote the socialist ideology across the region. Intentional portrayal of the poor as oppressed and marginalized in the early letters served as justification for the subsequent violent purges aimed at the wealthy.⁶¹

In this way, by 1926, Goloshchyokin implemented a tripartite social stratification, which was further simplified into 2 opposing parties: the comrades (the middle peasants and the poor) and the enemy (the wealthy). The administrative significance of the following class layout grew to the point that it became an integral part of the greater political processes. To be exact, Goloshchyokin's classification of Kazakh society began to appear as a defining element of agitation in favor of sedentarization and modernization of Soviet Kazakhstan:

Sedentarization is the liquidation of the bai-semi-feudalist.

Sedentarization is annihilation of tribal relations.

Sedentarization is the meaningful ascent of the economic and cultural prosperity of the aul working masses and it is thereby their liberation from the bai cabal.⁶²

⁶⁰ "Iz obzora Kazkrajcoma VKP(b)o social'no-ekonomičeskom i političeskom položēnii respubliki" In *Ašaršylyk. Golod. I Tom. 1928-1934*, no. 14 (Almaty: Atamūra, 2021), 96.

⁶¹ Goloshchyokin, Filipp I. "Pis'mo sekretarja Kazakstanskogo krajcoma Gološekina v CK VKP o nacional'nyh otnošenijah", edited by Ishakov. (Russian Perspectives on Islam), 117-118.

⁶² Tsentral'nyy Gosudarstvennyy Arkhiv Respubliki Kazakstan, f. 1179, op. 6, d. 4, l. 7. (cited in *Nomads and Soviet Rule* by Alun Thomas, 158)

Although it was not specific to Kazakh realities, the described class-based categorization became a theoretical framework guiding subsequent state policies in the region, including de-Baization. The 1928 de-Baization campaign was a radical social engineering project designed to sustain the sovietization of Kazakh auls by liquidating local bourgeois, semi-feudal, patriarchal, and nationalistic elements that the state perceived as backward and counter-progressive. Traditional foundations of nomadic society such as clan affiliations, kinship ties, and lineage connections were intended to be dismantled under de-Baization, as they were believed to be instruments the rich used to conceal exploitation and class contradictions.⁶³ Moreover, this policy functioned as a party-directed mechanism of mobilization in the middle and lower layers of society, which aspired to liberate the less affluent from the oppression and economic dependency on the wealthy.⁶⁴ In order to achieve this emancipation, the state explicitly sought to “крепко ударить по экономической мощи бая, чтобы создать условия для хозяйственного и культурного подъема аула и улучшения экономического положения бедноты.”⁶⁵ The efforts to suppress bias were executed through a set of specific administrative procedures that included deprivation of electoral rights, public show trials, and repressive measures assigned based on one’s category. Meanwhile, the property confiscated from the rich was meant to be organized into collective farms (kolkhozes), with 60-70% of it redistributed among the poorest households.⁶⁶ In this way, the policy was envisioned to achieve social equality by means of class warfare and make Soviet ideology an indispensable part of the Kazakh community.

⁶³ “Iz obzora Kazkrajкома VKP(b)o social’no-èkonomičeskom i političeskom položenii respubliki”, 96.

⁶⁴ “Postanovlenie Prezidičia Vserossijskogo CIK o lišenii prava na zemlepol’zovanie i proživanie v mestah postojannogo žitel’sтва krjčinyh baev i skotopromyšlennikov s sem’jami i konfiskacii ih imušestva” In *Ašaršylyk. Golod. 1 Tom. 1928-1934*, no. 18 (Almaty: Atamūra, 2021), 131.

⁶⁵ “Iz obzora Kazkrajкома VKP(b)o social’no-èkonomičeskom i političeskom položenii respubliki”, 97.

⁶⁶ “Postanovlenie CK 6KP(b) o konfiskacii hozjajstv i vysylke naibolee krupnyh skotovodov” In *Ašaršylyk. Golod. 1 Tom. 1928-1934*, no. 58 (Almaty: Atamūra, 2021), 253.

Taxation during the de-Baization campaign was another vital tool to force the population into kolkhozes and foster class warfare. Speaking specifically, the Soviet state restructured the fiscal system as an omnipresent economic pressure aimed at collecting resources from the public and simultaneously liquidating the bourgeois elements. The forms of payments included cash, agricultural products, livestock, and raw materials, as well as a variety of regionally specific installments like utility waste (animal bones).⁶⁷ While all layers of Kazakh society were subjected to fulfill fiscal obligations, taxation operated through selective exemptions, different rates, and class-based quotas. For instance, the individual taxation system was imposed upon the wealthy, requiring them to pay taxes at a higher rate based on the accusations of exploitation.⁶⁸ The poorest households were exempt from the unified tax and provided with monetary benefits from local discount funds.⁶⁹ On the other hand, *serednyaki*, while being officially recognized as an ally of the regime, suffered from unstable tax rates. To be exact, in the course of 1928, tax calculations for the middle class shifted from a per capita principle to a per household basis, causing an increase of approximately 136-139%.⁷⁰ Moreover, sometimes Soviet officials miscalculated and purposefully overreported the possessions of middle households, pushing them into a tax bracket closer to the rich.⁷¹ This type of misalignment with reality demonstrated

⁶⁷ “Iz doklada [sekretarja KazCIKa A. A. Asylbekova v Kazkrajkom VKP (b) o poezdke v Sarysujskij i Talasskij rajony dlja vyjasnenija sostojanija del v svjazi s kollektivizaciej” In *Iz istorii deportacij. Kazahstan 1930-1935 gg.*, no. 116 (Almaty: LEM, 2012), 249.

⁶⁸ “Individual’nyj porjadok obloženija kulackih hozjajstv” In *Iz istorii deportacij. Kazahstan 1930-1935 gg.*, Primečanie (Almaty: LEM, 2012), 710.

⁶⁹ “Doklad upolnomočennogo Kazalinskogo UK VKP(b) po Aktjubinskoj volosti «Ob itogah kampanii po sboru sel’hoznaloga, nedoimok prošlyh let, semssudy, vodsborna, organizacii i provedenija samoobloženija i realizacii krest’janskogo zajma»” In *Ašaršylyk. Golod. 1 Tom. 1928-1934*, no. 16 (Almaty: Atamūra, 2021), 106.

⁷⁰ “Stenogramma zasedanija bjuro Kazkrajkoma VKP(b) po obsuždeniju doklada komissii CK VKP(b) o narušenijah revoljucionnoj zakonnosti v period provedenija hlebozagotovitel’noj i nalogovoj kampanij v Semipalatinskij gubernii” In *Ašaršylyk. Golod. 1 Tom. 1928-1934*, no. 93 (Almaty: Atamūra, 2021), 334.

⁷¹ “Stenogramma zasedanija bjuro Kazkrajkoma VKP(b) po obsuždeniju doklada komissii CK VKP(b) o narušenijah revoljucionnoj zakonnosti v period provedenija hlebozagotovitel’noj i nalogovoj kampanij v Semipalatinskij gubernii”, 336.

the fluidity of class categories, due to which a representative of the middle strata could become a kulak-bai element on the administrative level. The variability of one's class affiliation was solely determined by the way the state perceived them, a dynamic evident in all dimensions of the de-Baization campaign that extended way beyond the matters of taxation.

The importance of de-Baization was additionally articulated by the strategic aspiration that it would bring the year of the Little October to completion and finalize the political integration of Kazakhstan into the Soviet governance system. The concept of Little October was propagated by Goloshchyokin as a necessary developmental stage for Kazakh auls, as he believed that the ideological advancements of the 1917 October Revolution had bypassed the region, allowing semi-feudal, traditional, and patriarchal social structures to remain in power.⁷² At this point, the Little October and the de-Baization campaign shared the same objectives in regard to the class warfare and the rise of the Kazakh laborers.

The connection between the policies can be described as a strategic framework-execution relationship, in which de-Baization served as an instrument to implement the overarching political project of collectivization. Despite the inherent connection between two policies, de-Baization and collectivization cannot be understood as a single state initiative that carried the same social, economic, and political premises. They were different measures that occurred within designated time frames and pursued distinct objectives. To be specific, collectivization, launched in late 1929, was an extensive and radical program directed at reorganizing individual peasants and nomadic households into collective agricultural productive units (kolkhozy), with the state expropriating their land, livestock, and other valuable resources.⁷³ The primary goal of

⁷² Goloshchyokin, Filipp I. "Očerednye zadači VKP (b) v Kazakstane —doklad II plenumu kraevogo komiteta VKP (b), 1926 g.," in *Partiinoe stroitel'stvo v Kazakstane, 1925-1930 gg.* (Moscow, 1930), 72.

⁷³ Cameron, *The Hungry Steppe*, 97.

collectivization was to acquire funds needed to finance industrialization by assuming control over food supply and building regional production “on the back of agriculture.”⁷⁴ Although the collectivization policy encompassed additional objectives to sustain social transformation and strengthen political control over the Kazakh countryside, it had a distinct economic motive.

It is also important to acknowledge the substantial difference in the scales of de-Baization and collectivization campaigns. According to Žakiševa, by April of 1929, de-Baization was framed as a successful policy that resulted in the confiscation of a total of 696 households (with 562 being designated as Category I and 134 as Category II).⁷⁵ On the contrary, collectivization implied far more reaching intervention, as the 1930 Central Committee directive demanded 554,000 out of 566,000 nomad households (nearly 98%) to be sedentarized by the end of the First Five-Year Plan.⁷⁶

With that being said, this essay contends that the consequences of the de-Baization campaign cannot be analyzed in isolation and without reference to collectivization-era documents. Regardless of the fact that bais were eliminated as an economic group by 1930⁷⁷, the label of kulak-bai persisted into the collectivization period, gaining greater political significance and meaning. Repressive measures against so-called exploitative elements continued after de-Baization, while maintaining the same rhetoric of class warfare. At this point, the ideological basis of the smaller campaign gradually transmitted to the larger policy, keeping the tripartite stratification as the primary instrument of radical social engineering. The same claim can be made in regards to violence, which was inherited from the 1928 confiscation and subsequently intensified during collectivization. Therefore, discussion of sources dating to 1930-1933 appears

⁷⁴ Cameron, *The Hungry Steppe*, 97.

⁷⁵ Žakiševa, *Materialy Gosudarstvennoj komissii po polnoj rehabilitacii žertv političeskijh repressij*, 37.

⁷⁶ Pianciola, Niccolò, & Finnel, Susan. *Famine in the Steppe: The Collectivization of Agriculture and the Kazak Herdsmen, 1928-1934*. Cahiers Du Monde Russe 45, no. 1/2 (Paris: EHESS, 2004), 155.

⁷⁷ Kindler, *Stalin's Nomads: Power and Famine in Kazakhstan*, 87.

as an integral part of assessing the impact of the ideological framework set during the de-Baization stage.

Class, Compliance, and Cultural Persistence

Contrary to utopian ideals of molding Kazakh pastoralist society into a class-driven hierarchy, the state failed to sustain local compliance and fidelity to imposed tripartite identities, as these governmentally-codified personas bore little resemblance to the actual life of Kazakh aul. The lack of alignment between their reality and the social stratification that was being forced onto them prompted Kazakhs to continue practicing traditional customs, showcasing the limitations of Soviet attempts at social engineering. To be exact, the state pressure to abandon former clan/kinship-based networks for the sake of building regional socialism resulted in cultural persistence and the preservation of cultural identities. Despite the new social reality, people of Soviet Kazakhstan proceeded to embrace their indigenous individualities while simultaneously supporting the pre-existing nomadic social structure. At this point, strictly-defined class self-conceptions became counterproductive labels that failed at reconstructing the local Kazakh community under the conventions and directives of the de-Baization campaign.

One of the notable examples of the plasticity of class identities finds itself in the memoir of Mukhamet Shaiakhmetov. Born into a family of nomadic herdsmen in 1922, Shaiakhmetov provides in his memoirs a firsthand account of societal responses to Soviet policies of the 1930s. In the episode dedicated to his sister's secret wedding, Shaiakhmetov recalls that "...in 1929, our family had concluded just such an agreement concerning my sister Zhamba with a family from

the Karauzhasssyk clan who lived on the other side of the River Irtysh.”⁷⁸ Under the following agreement, Shaiakhmetov’s sister would have been abducted by the groom at night, according to the nomadic tradition of *alyp kašu* (bride kidnapping). The preparation and secrecy required to undertake this arranged marriage showcase Kazakhs’ adherence to indigenous social order. Devotion to the pastoralist sense of community is additionally evident by the temporal limits in which the wedding took place. To fit in traditional schedules of migration and agricultural works, the ceremony was scheduled for the autumn of 1930 before the sheep shearing⁷⁹. In this case, local Kazakhs did not simply strengthen interclan relations but also willingly chose to manage their social environment according to folk principles and values rather than imposed socialist ideals and class identities.

The inefficiency of class identities was further manifested in the behavior of Shaiakhmetov’s family members when confronted by the representatives of Soviet power. Once his father was imprisoned as a *bai*, the whole family became subject to state interrogations and confiscations. During one of the trials the judge convicted Shaiakhmetov’s mother of illegally accepting the bride money, “...but she kept insisting that she had never made such an agreement with anyone and no matchmaking had taken place.”⁸⁰ The following excerpt exemplifies a rapid shift of one’s self-determination depending on the circumstances. At this point, local Kazakhs profoundly endorsed the former clan-based social structure in their family lives while denying any relation with folk traditions in the eyes of the Soviet administration. Instead of becoming a genuine part of Kazakh identities, the state-promoted class categorizations turned into nominal and peripheral roles that could be easily disregarded. The futility of imposed class personas is

⁷⁸ Shaiakhmetov, Mukhamet. *The Silent Steppe: The Story of a Kazakh Nomad under Stalin*, ed. by A. Gardner. Trans. by Jan Butler. (London: Stacey International, 2006), 28.

⁷⁹ Shaiakhmetov. *The Silent Steppe*, 28.

⁸⁰ Shaiakhmetov. *The Silent Steppe*, 60.

reinforced by the very fact that Kazakh subordinates continued to practice customs that were clearly incompatible with Soviet ideology (such as bride kidnapping). As a result, strictly defined class identities functioned less as facilitators of social transformation than as convenient tools to secretly preserve and reinforce traditional community building grounded in clan and kinship ties.

Manipulation of class consciousness went beyond the matter of preserving traditional customs and national self-determination, turning into a form of social capital with tangible benefits. Internalization of labels as ‘the poor’ and ‘the wealthy’ placed individuals in opposing factions in regulating confiscations, dispossession, and redistribution of goods. The traits and conventions of each class identity served as arguments in favor of certain groups. On its behalf, the Soviet administration actively legitimized and recognized the following arguments as valid and authoritative, which led to the informal institutionalization of class plasticity. For instance, in 1926 a conflict arose between the self-proclaimed rich and the poor over the distribution of hayfields in the village of Serafimovka (Akmola province)⁸¹. The so-called *bais* advocated for dividing the hayfields by the amount of livestock, while the poor insisted on assigning land per capita. In this dispute, the Soviet regional authorities supported the poor, ordering the division of hayfields based on individual allotment. In this case, the state validated the destitute’s claim to ownership of critical sources, sublimating the question of land redistribution into an elevated class warfare. One’s association with the indigent population carried intrinsic value in the sense that it allowed people to mobilize their position in social stratification to claim material rewards. Soviet favoritism towards the poor proves the idea that class identities were not merely abstract social constructs but acted as enforceable instruments for resource allocation.

⁸¹ Nenasheva, Olga. “Iz informsvodki № 3 informotdela OGPU o zemleustrojstve nacional’nyh vostočnyh respublik i avtonomnyh oblastej na 25 oktjabrja 1926 g. 1 nojabrja 1926 g.” In *Sovetskaja derevnja glazami VČK—OGPU—NKVD*, fond 478, opis’ 1, delo 1967, (Rossijskij gosudarstvennyj arhiv èkonomiki, 2019), 466.

The degree to which class categorizations were institutionalized and politicized by the Soviet power led to more complex schemes to benefit from one's social status. In other words, the greater the official endorsement the poor received based on their social standing, the more sophisticated impoverished pastoralists became in exploiting the resources they received under the de-Baization campaign. It is worth noting that the elaborated tactics aimed at one's enrichment often contradicted the Soviet doctrine, involving unauthorized trade and private economic initiative. By October-November of 1933, 5,200 heads of livestock redistributed among collective farmers were slaughtered for commercial purposes in 27 districts across the Alma Ata, West Kazakhstan, Aktobe, and Karaganda regions⁸². Among these incidents are the cases of 18 out of 30 sheep butchered for meat in the village of N.-Palestinovka of the Atbasar region; 13 out of 48 heads of cattle processed in the Molotov agricultural cooperation (TOZ) in the Kounrad district within ten days after their allocation; and 2 goats culled for consumption by the member of the collective farm in Chuy⁸³. Similar occurrences were reported in the Telmanovsky, Dzhambeytinsky, and Batbakkarinsky regions⁸⁴. Through the manipulation of their class identity, poor nomads did not simply consolidate their right to receive tangible advantages but also illegally realized them as private wealth assets. At this point, the livestock that was intentionally distributed to develop collective and subsistence farming turned out to be a mere instrument of strengthening one's material well-being. Instead of promoting social uniformity and equality, Soviet favoritism towards the lower strata of the Kazakh population laid the groundwork for the advancement of the regional black market, thereby contradicting the

⁸² Bobrov, Vadim. "Specsoobšenie PP OGPU po Kazahstanu «Ob uboe i razbazarivanii skota, rozdannogo v individual'noe pol'zovanie kolhoznikov». 28 dekabnja 1933 g." In *Tragedija sovetsoj derevni. Kollektivizacija i raskulačivanie. 1927—1939, fond 3, opis' 1, delo 60*, (Central'nyj arhiv FSB Rossii, 2019), 827.

⁸³ "Specsoobšenie PP OGPU po Kazahstanu «Ob uboe i razbazarivanii skota, rozdannogo v individual'noe pol'zovanie kolhoznikov». 28 dekabnja 1933 g.", 827.

⁸⁴ "Specsoobšenie PP OGPU po Kazahstanu «Ob uboe i razbazarivanii skota, rozdannogo v individual'noe pol'zovanie kolhoznikov». 28 dekabnja 1933 g.", 827.

ideological objectives of de-Baization. Paradoxically, the only ideologically meaningful change derived from livestock redistribution at this point was the emergence of the “Soviet bai”- an archetype of a pastoralist nomad who accumulated personal wealth under conventions of state initiatives while embracing nascent capitalist behavior. Within the broader theoretical framework proposed by Stephen and Ethel Dunn, representatives of the following archetype displayed attitudes that contravene Soviet moral standards, despite their characters and social standings having been conditioned by the Soviet doctrinal measures⁸⁵. Contrary to the pre-revolutionary segment of wealthy Kazakhs, the new “Soviet bais” emerged as a byproduct of the state policy actions. In light of these circumstances, it is fair to claim that de-Baization did not simply fail to liquidate the ‘capitalist’ mentality among Kazakh subordinates but inadvertently engendered a new ideological threat to its very ideals.

In addition, the example with illegal trade derived from the plasticity of class identities showcases another vital principle of Soviet control. Throughout the implementation of the de-Baization policy, disobedience and defiant behavior of the poor were not perceived as a sign for the campaign's failure. On the contrary, any breaches of Soviet regulations were comprehended as indicators of the existence of bourgeois elements that promote anti-socialist narratives. The following attitude resulted in the systematic denunciation of the rich for all administrative and ideological deficiencies of the de-Baization campaign. Speaking specifically, the emergence of unauthorized trade of meat by 1934 was explained by OGPU (Joint State Political Directorate) as the result of the counterrevolutionary factions spreading provocative rumors about the upcoming famine. The responsibility for the organization of the black market was placed upon figures like Džubalaev (a bai from the Enbekshilder district), who reportedly

⁸⁵ Dunn, Stephen P., & Ethel Dunn. *Soviet Regime and Native Culture in Central Asia and Kazakhstan: The Major Peoples*. Current Anthropology 8, no. 3 (Illinois: The University of Chicago Press, 1967), 181.

stated that “Сегодня вам дали скот, а завтра его отберут в заготовку.”⁸⁶ Another bai accused by the OGPU was Medeusov (Četskij district), to whom the political directorate ascribed the authorship of the slogan “Если бедняк зарежет полученный от государства скот, ему все равно ничего не будет. Закон от 7 августа применять к беднякам нельзя.”⁸⁷ These quotes were presented at the beginning of the official report, thereby framing them as a central explanation for the alienation of the poor from Soviet ideals. Such rhetoric enabled party members to distance themselves from the realization of the irrelevance of de-Baization in transforming the Kazakh pastoralist community into an exemplary socialist society. In this instance, mass condemnation of upper segments of social stratification was prioritized in preference to sustaining a culturally specific approach to adapt the Kazakh population to the Soviet expectations.

With that being said, it is evident that the instrumentality of class identities was also exploited by the rich as a means to escape arrest, dispossession, and other regulatory measures of de-Baization. Guided by the aim to preserve their wealth and influence, bais strived to adapt to new social conditions using behavioral mimicry. In this case, behavioral mimicry encompasses the deliberate masking and strategic concealment of one’s true identity by embracing the class consciousness of the lower social strata. Behavioral mimicry allowed the rich to conceal existing tribal networks beneath the righteous ambitions of serving the Soviet doctrine and strengthening local kolkhozes. In other words, by manipulating and embracing class consciousness, Kazakh bais managed to reinterpret their actual social standing in terms of Soviet ideological categories. According to Albina Zhanbossinova, “Documents dating from 1933-1934 suggest that both the

⁸⁶ “Specsoobšenie PP OGPU po Kazahstanu «Ob uboe i razbazarivanii skota, rozdannogo v individual’noe pol’zovanie kolhoznikov». 28 dekabrja 1933 g.”, 827.

⁸⁷ “Specsoobšenie PP OGPU po Kazahstanu «Ob uboe i razbazarivanii skota, rozdannogo v individual’noe pol’zovanie kolhoznikov». 28 dekabrja 1933 g.”, 827.

bais and their descendants and relatives used every opportunity to obtain administrative status.”⁸⁸

The following enthusiasm for administrative positions was not rooted in one’s compliance with Soviet ideals but rather in the urgent need to disguise private property as a collective unit. With the help of the behavioral mimicry, the wealthy effectively redefined their land assets as kolkhozes and presented their subordinates as farm members. In a greater sense, this shift did not result in any significant social or ideological changes inside Soviet Kazakhstan. Under this layout, Kazakh bais continued to practice their authority and legitimize kinship-based ties on the Soviet administrative level, thus effectively avoiding dispossession.

The claim that traditional social stratification was maintained during the years of de-Baization finds its confirmation beyond secondary sources. 1931 OGPU report on the political state of Kazakhstan reveals that “В колхозе «Интыфац» Туркестанского района объединено до 60 хозяйств одного рода. Председатель колхоза Айрбаев — влиятельный в роду — распоряжается колхозниками как хан. В колхозе имеется 10 баев, которые колхозами всячески укрываются.”⁸⁹ This excerpt exemplifies the phenomenon of tribalism, which was a defining feature of Kazakh conformism under Soviet initiatives⁹⁰. To be exact, the creation of collective farms operating on clan-hierarchical principles lay at the core of tribal traditionalism, which flourished as a social response to Soviet attempts to eradicate them. The rise of tribalism under conventions of de-Baization fits into the broader argument of David Lane, who claimed that successful sovietization of Kazakh aul was a fictional idea that masked the

⁸⁸ Zhanbossinova, A. S. "Kazahskie kočevniki: Put' v socializm", no. 1 (134), (Astana: Gumilyov Journal of History, 2021), 55.

⁸⁹ Nenasheva, Olga. “Spravka INFO OGPU o političeskom sostojanii Kazahstana na 10 janvarja 1931 g. 12 janvarja 1931 g.” In *Sovetskaja derevnja glazami VČK—OGPU—NKVD*, fond 2, opis' 9, delo 695, (Central'nyj arhiv FSB Rossii, 2019), 558.

⁹⁰ Zhanbossinova, A. S. "Kazahskie kočevniki: Put' v socializm", 50.

persistence of traditional kin-based social structures within the formal Soviet apparatus⁹¹. At this point, the resilience of indigenous social structures defines Soviet modernization efforts as perfunctory and unsuccessful, as they failed to achieve genuine socialist conversion of the Kazakh population. In this manner, state-driven class categorization was not simply manipulated by the locals but also served as a shield facilitating the continuation of cultural practices in secrecy.

State Neglect, Terror, and Forced Compliance

The inability to accumulate genuine compliance with the imposed class consciousness among Kazakh masses urged Soviet authorities to employ violence as a primary means of socio-political influence. Aimed at forcibly sustaining local adherence to the regime's ideological directives, Soviet violence had various manifestations, ranging from institutional to physical and psychological coercion.

The administrative inability to fund and facilitate an adequate liquidation procedure of the persecuted bourgeois elements constituted a profound manifestation of institutionalized neglect toward human suffering on the part of the Soviet state. At this point, inadequate execution of the resettlement did not merely reflect the bureaucratic failure of the Soviet administration but also the systemic indifference to the social consequences of its policies. The lack of sufficient logistical and financial organization subverted the underlying civilizing mission of Soviet modernization, as the application of the de-Baization policy resulted in extensive social devastation instead of the intended ideological transformation. In other words, the developmental

⁹¹ Lane, David. *Ethnic and Class Stratification in Soviet Kazakhstan, 1917-39*. Comparative Studies in Society and History 17, no. 2 (Cambridge: University of Cambridge, 1975), 175.

ambitions of the campaign were eroded by the absence of material infrastructure required to carry out the relocation of condemned bays and to maintain their sustenance in the collective settlements (barracks). Party resolutions officially framed barracks as sites of isolation, labor mobilization, and ideological formation designed to re-educate dispossessed bays and reintegrate them as productive members of the socialist order over time⁹². In this way, relocating people to collective settlements was intended to function as a method of building the communist mentality among the pastoralist nomads through forced transformation.

Despite its asserted reformatory purpose, the housing plan ultimately failed because of the fundamental incapacity of Soviet authorities to foresee the actual influx of resettled population and properly accommodate them. It is worth clarifying that the ‘accommodation’ in this context refers to basic living conditions, including fully constructed buildings, a stable food supply, and essential utilities such as water and electricity. For instance, the directorate of the Novlubitrest state farm was completely unprepared to receive expropriated settlers, as only a total of 226,791 rubles was designated for subsistence and shelter provisions⁹³. Following the arrival of bays in 1931, the urgent need for the additional construction of 2 residential buildings, 5 barracks, and 11 apartments arose but could not be fulfilled as the allocated funds had already been exhausted⁹⁴. Securing or obtaining further financial resources proved unfeasible, as the regional funds were already depleted before 1931. In October of 1928, the Chair of the Council of People’s Commissars of the Kazakh ASSR, Nygmet Nurmakov, admitted that “...наш бюджет настолько

⁹² “Rezoljucija soveščanija Karagandinskogo gorodskogo partaktiva o zadačah politiko vospitatel’noj raboty v specpereselenčeskikh poselkah” In *Iz istorii deportacij. Kazahstan 1930-1935 gg*, no. 221 (Almaty: LEM, 2012), 492.

⁹³ “Specsvodka PP OGPU po KASSR I. K. Danilovskogo sekretarju Kazkrajcoma VKP (b) F. I. Gološekinu o rabote sredi specpereselencev” In *Iz istorii deportacij. Kazahstan 1930-1935 gg*, no. 191 (Almaty: LEM, 1931), 398.

⁹⁴ “Specsvodka PP OGPU po KASSR I. K. Danilovskogo sekretarju Kazkrajcoma VKP (b) F. I. Gološekinu o rabote sredi specpereselencev”, 398.

беден, что едва ли мы сможем какую-нибудь ощутимую сумму выделить, мы не сумеем.”⁹⁵

The budgetary failure worsened to the point that the developmental goals of the barracks were discarded. Instead of the re-educational environment, people were exposed to hazardous settings where the overcrowding was so extreme that each person barely had 0,5 meters of sleeping space and 1 liter of water per day (half the biological norm)⁹⁶. As a result, unsanitary conditions combined with malnutrition resulted in widespread outbreaks of typhus, smallpox, scarlet fever, and gastrointestinal diseases, turning collective units into sites of high mortality. To illustrate, in the Karatalstroy region, the mortality rate peaked at 507 deaths in a single month, with an overall population of 9000 residents⁹⁷.

The horrors and tragedies that happened inside barracks fit into the greater narrative of the Soviet policy of mass extermination proposed by Pianciola. Within this framework, the social disruption derived from the implementation of Soviet campaigns was not an intended outcome but rather a calculated price the authorities were willing to pay to acquire political and economic control over the Kazakh ASSR⁹⁸. In this conceptualization, the repressed population is reduced to a form of human resource mobilized to fulfill greater regional objectives of the state. Being stripped of their principal sources of wealth and labor output, dispossessed peasants came to be perceived by the Soviet administration as ‘unproductive subjects,’ whose survival no longer aligned with its economic objectives and priorities⁹⁹. This logic of marginalization explains the institutional and dehumanizing abandonment of individuals sentenced to suffer in collective

⁹⁵ “Stenogramma zasedanija bjuro Kazkrajкома VKP(b) po obsuždeniju doklada komissii CK VKP(b) o narušenijah revoljucionnoj zakonnosti v period provedenija hlebozagotovitel’noj i nalogovoj kampanij v Semipalatinskoj gubernii”, 352.

⁹⁶ “Kratkaja dokladnaja zapiska sanvrača v Kyzyl-Ordinskij gorsovet o sanitarnom sostojanii konclagerja pri pos. Aral’skoe more” In *Iz istorii deportacij. Kazahstan 1930-1935 gg*, no. 111 (Almaty: LEM, 2012), 239.

⁹⁷ “Informacija PP OGPU po KASSR V. A. Karuckogo sekretarju Kazkrajкома VKP (b) F. I. Gološekinu ob ustrojstve specpereselencev” In *Iz istorii deportacij. Kazahstan 1930-1935 gg*, no. 216 (Almaty: LEM, 2012), 470.

⁹⁸ Piancola & Finnel, *Famine in the Steppe*, 190.

⁹⁹ Piancola & Finnel, *Famine in the Steppe*, 190.

settlements. A particularly illustrative case for this is the reply of the secretary of the VKP(b) cell, Yuznienko, to the complaints of the expropriated settler Nurakanov: “Денег нет, подыхайте.”¹⁰⁰ The systematic neglect of both the settlers and the intended civilizing mission of the barracks illustrates how bureaucratic bankruptcy paired with ideological hostility turned the de-Baization campaign into the mechanism of social devastation, rather than socialist transformation.

It is important to mention that the societal destruction caused by the practical application of the de-Baization policy was not only embodied in the state’s passivity and administrative neglect. On the contrary, it additionally found its manifestation in forms of active violence used by Soviet authorities against targeted Kazakh subjects. Such measures generally encompassed acts of physical assault, contributing to the systematic violation of basic morality and human rights on the part of the Soviet administration. By this stage, the state sought to attain ideological transformation and modernization of the Kazakh aul through violent coercion, as it failed to secure it through genuine local compliance. The reliance on violence as the primary instrument of party influence rapidly escalated into mass administrative terror, which affected not only the wealthy class but also the middle and lower layers of social stratification. A personal letter from Trofim Rjadnin, a collective farm worker at the Presnogorkovsky district, provides firsthand testimony of physical torture and public humiliation to which impoverished villagers¹⁰¹ were subjected. According to Rjadnin, the state agents employed what he described as ‘Kolchak-style violence’ to enforce compliance with grain and livestock quotas by stripping people naked, dragging them through snow, blinding victims with flashlights, and inflicting brutal

¹⁰⁰ “Dokladnaja zapiska PP OGPU po KASSR predsedatelju KazkrajKK – narkomu RKI Ja. G. Egorovu o položenii v specposelke № 13 Karuglja” In *Iz istorii deportacij. Kazahstan 1930-1935 gg.*, no. 284 (Almaty: LEM, 2012), 644.

¹⁰¹ Among the individuals Rjadnin mentions, the 'wealthiest' person had no more than 21 rubles, which were subsequently extorted by the Soviet authorities.

interrogations upon them¹⁰². Later in his letter, Rjadnin reflected on the unjustified efforts with which he fought in 1919, which resulted in a disrupted sowing campaign, street violence, and prostitution in the village instead of achieving peace¹⁰³. A similar concern is revealed in a formal complaint lodged by Mikhailovskii, a veteran of the First World War and a former Red Army soldier. Starting from November of 1928, Mikhailovskii's middle-peasant farm (средняцкое хозяйство) was pressured by compulsory grain procurement and consequent confiscation of livestock as a penalty for his inability to meet the quotas¹⁰⁴. Although the 1930 decree of the Central Committee of VKP(b) exempted households of Red Army soldiers from property confiscation and expulsion¹⁰⁵, Mikhailovskii was nevertheless arrested and exiled to the Kustanai district in 1931, losing the ability to support his family of 9 (including 6 adopted children of a deceased Red Army soldier)¹⁰⁶. Despite not being members of the Kazakh ethnic community and thus presumably lacking integration in traditional kinship/clan ties, the accounts provided by Rjadnin and Mikhailovskii still offer valuable representation of the omnipresent nature of de-Baization. In other words, these narratives showcase how the campaign gradually started to target all elements of aul regardless of their affiliation to structures that de-Baization was intended to cease (lineage and clan connections). Moreover, the image of Kazakh societies presented by both authors appears as a complete opposite of the class liberation and modernization the de-Baization campaign sought to achieve. Besides administrative terror and profound misery, the letters showcase the paradox of loyalty to the Soviet government. Speaking specifically, Rjadnin and Mikhailovskii actively participated in armed conflicts to secure the

¹⁰² "Iz pis'ma kolhoznika Trofima Rjadina neizvestnomu ob izdevatel'stvah nad krest'janami" In *Iz istorii deportacij. Kazahstan 1930-1935 gg*, no. 78 (Almaty: LEM, 2012), 168.

¹⁰³ "Iz pis'ma kolhoznika Trofima Rjadina neizvestnomu ob izdevatel'stvah nad krest'janami", 169

¹⁰⁴ "Žaloba graždanina S. M. Mihajlovskogo v CK VKP (b) s pros'boj o pomoši" In *Iz istorii deportacij. Kazahstan 1930-1935 gg*, no. 232 (Almaty: LEM, 2012), 509.

¹⁰⁵ "Postanovlenie Politbjuro CK VKP (b)", 56.

¹⁰⁶ "Žaloba graždanina S. M. Mihajlovskogo v CK VKP (b) s pros'boj o pomoši", 509.

state that subsequently would subject them to dispossessions, internal deportations, and complete poverty. In this case, the middle and lower classes whose sacrifices legitimized Soviet power were redefined as anti-socialist elements and treated with corresponding coercive action under de-Baization.

Alongside physical violence, Soviet agents systematically subjected the female population to sexual assault during confiscation and grain requisitioning campaigns. The brutality of attacks experienced by women underscored their extreme ruthlessness and amorality, as seen in the recorded incident of a pregnant woman giving birth prematurely after being abused inside institutional headquarters in Southern Kazakhstan¹⁰⁷. At this point, sexual violence was an indispensable part of the administrative terror in Kazakh ASSR, the severity of which violated basic norms of morality and fundamental human rights. In light of their obligation to fulfill state-imposed quotas, representatives of Soviet power could sexually harass local women with institutional impunity. To illustrate, in the course of her brother's interrogation, Maria Borodina was raped by Yakushev and Stenikov, who were appointed to collect seed grain from the residents of the village Belovskoe¹⁰⁸. Despite the presence of an eyewitness, Maria Borodina's case was overlooked and recorded in official documentation as another administrative breach committed by state functionaries¹⁰⁹. It is important to note that some offenders sought to justify their predatory behavior and committed sexual crimes against women using the socialist concept of communal property. For example, Bogachev, a party member from the Alma-Ata district, explained his attempted rape of a female kolkhoz worker as an acceptable act on the collective

¹⁰⁷ Abylhožin. *Očerki Social'no-Èkonomičeskoj Istorii Kazahstana XX Vek*, 110.

¹⁰⁸ "Specsvodka INFO Petropavlovskogo okrotдела OGPU v INFO PP OGPU po KASSR o peregibah pri provedenii meroprijatij po raskulačivaniju i vyseleniju, sbore semfonda" In *Iz istorii deportacij. Kazahstan 1930-1935 gg*, no. 72 (Almaty: LEM, 2012), 156.

¹⁰⁹ "Specsvodka INFO Petropavlovskogo okrotдела OGPU v INFO PP OGPU po KASSR o peregibah pri provedenii meroprijatij po raskulačivaniju i vyseleniju, sbore semfonda", 156.

farm, arguing that everything and everyone were meant for the common use¹¹⁰. Such defenses offered normalization and ideological justification for the sexual harassment, reducing women to objects belonging to the collective. The resulting commodification of the female population did not only overlook their agency but also directly undermined the liberating and civilizing spirit of the de-Baization policy.

Speaking of other ideological contradictions, Soviet functionaries distorted archaic patriarchal customs of traditional Kazakh aul to facilitate sexual abuse of local women. In this case, cultural practices that the de-Baization campaign deemed backward and sought to liquidate were manipulated by representatives of the Soviet power to legitimize sexual harassment. By subverting the notion of Kazakh hospitality, Soviet functionaries pressured local households into providing them with young girls for the night during grain procurement visits¹¹¹. The following practice was referred to by officials themselves as ‘contractation,’ which gradually became a widespread form of sexualized administrative terror. Refusal to comply with the demands of Soviet agents was met with threats of state repression, positioning young women as bargaining assets needed to secure the household property¹¹². Instead of sustaining regional modernization and abandoning traditions jeopardizing the female population, the same customs were intensified and weaponized by the state agents. Another cultural paradigm systematically exploited by Soviet officials was kalym, indigenous marital exchange of a bride for monetary resources. In the Malasar district of the Alma-Ata region, the plenipotentiary offered a poor man to falsify his fulfillment of the quota in exchange for handing over his daughter to marry the official’s son in

¹¹⁰ “Svodka PP OGPU po KASSR v Kazkraj KK–Narkomatu RKI o rabote i nastroenii prislannyh v Kazahstan «25-tysjačnikov»” In *Iz istorii deportacij. Kazahstan 1930-1935 gg*, no. 112 (Almaty: LEM, 2012), 240.

¹¹¹ Abylhožin, *Očerki Social'no-Ėkonomičeskoj Istorii Kazahstana XX Vek*, 110.

¹¹² Abylhožin, *Očerki Social'no-Ėkonomičeskoj Istorii Kazahstana XX Vek*, 110.

lieu of a kalym¹¹³. Despite the fact that kalym was forbidden by the conventions of the de-Baization campaign, its implementers and enforcers continued to capitalize on it for personal gain. It is interesting to observe the inconsistency behind the Soviet attitude toward adherence to Kazakh traditional customs. To be specific, locals (like the family of Mukhamet Shaiakhmetov) were punished and interrogated for performing cultural rituals, while state agents routinely distorted banned social practices and used them as mechanisms for sexual intimidation.

The systemic use of violence by the state agents additionally generated profound psychological distress, cultivating widespread panic, anxiety, and paranoia among the Kazakhs. In other words, administrative terror was not simply an instrument of physical coercion but also served as a functional tool that strengthened people's psychological dependence on the state. At this point, mental anguish experienced by Kazakh subordinates was not a mere byproduct of mass violence employed by Soviet authorities. On the contrary, it was a crucial element of social engineering, which subtly reinforced the patterns of compliance and subordination among the local population. This mechanism of psychological coercion is particularly evident in the 1928 collective appeal of citizens of Semipalatinsk province to Joseph Stalin regarding the administrative abuse they endured. In their statement, residents of Semipalatinsk complained about losing faith in the future, as the state agents systematically exploited their power and authority during the confiscation procedures¹¹⁴. The collective ambition to intensify agricultural production gradually extinguished, leaving local workers in an unending cycle of "suffering and deprivation."¹¹⁵ The letter showcases the patterns of how psychological devastation, as a result of

¹¹³ Ohayon, Isabelle. *The Soviet State and Lineage Societies: Doctrine, Local Interactions, and Political Hybridization in Kazakhstan and Kirghizia During the 1920s and 1930s*. (Washington: University of Washington, 2016), 26.

¹¹⁴ "Telegramma gruppy graždan Semipalatinskoj gubernii v CK VKP(b) I. Stalinu o nezakonyh dejstvijah mestnyh vlastej" In *Ašaršylyk. Golod. 1 Tom. 1928-1934*, no. 52 (Almaty: Atamūra, 2021), 233.

¹¹⁵ "Telegramma gruppy graždan Semipalatinskoj gubernii v CK VKP(b) I. Stalinu o nezakonyh dejstvijah mestnyh vlastej", 233.

administrative terror, turned Kazakh workers into passive socio-political subjects, eroding their aspirations and agency. The progression of mass distress is further revealed in the 1929 public complaint of inhabitants of Rubtsovsky and Belagachsky districts, who claimed that the fear of violent punitive measures imposed by Soviet representatives was so intense that they felt like prey: “Мы все, крестьяне, находимся, как коза около волка, и вся кровь застыла в наших жилах...”¹¹⁶. The general trend reflected in these documents suggests that pervasive anxiety progressively exhausted rural communities of the Kazakh ASSR, suppressing any mental capacity to assert their rights or contest the authority of Soviet directives. The state of absolute passivity and lack of psychological autonomy was effectively summarized by anonymous writer from Lubenka village of the Chingirlau district in 1932:

“Хотя будь середняк или даже бедняк, не понравился в чем-либо ты партийцу или сельсовету, или просто какому-либо активисту, то тебя сразу с копыта делают кулаком и выгоняют из поселка...раз сельсовет тебя сделал кулаком, значит, ты и должен быть кулаком.”¹¹⁷

It appears clear that the unconditional obedience to state mandates demonstrated in the excerpt above derived from psychological despair dictated by persistent stress and violence rather than sincere adherence to class consciousness. In the context of the de-Baization campaign, mass compliance stemmed less from the genuine internalization of Soviet class rhetoric or ideological transformation than from collective mental anguish and the basic necessity of survival.

Complementing this, with the progression of the de-Baization campaign, the state-imposed class stratification turned into a convenient label to systematically categorize and

¹¹⁶ “Из информации Info PP OGPU по KASSR «Vozzvanie ot sel i poselkov Rubcovskogo i Bel’agačskogo rajonov k tovarišam rabočim g. Semipalatinska»” In *Ašaršylyk. Golod. 1 Tom. 1928-1934*, no. 202 (Almaty: Atamūra, 2021), 731.

¹¹⁷ “Анонимная жалоба жителя Чингилауского r-на в СК ВКП (б) на администрирование в бор’бе с кулачеством” In *Из истории депортаций. Казахстан 1930-1935 гг.*, no. 234 (Almaty: LEM, 2012), 511.

penalize criminal elements. In this context, the social stratification, initially employed by the Party as a vehicle of ideological transformation, was further deployed as an overarching framework under which all forms of social unrest were tied to traditional kinship ties, clans, or patriarchal customs. It is worth noting that the following practice was utilized by Soviet authorities prior to the implementation of the de-Baization policy, indicating that it intensified pre-existing ideological manipulation. For instance, the uprisings of 1920-1921 demonstrate the early pattern of instrumentalization of class rhetoric to label social unrest as ideologically deviant activities. In the period between the summer of 1920 and the winter of 1921, large-scale demonstrations against war communism took place in the Semipalatinsk region, Pavlodar district, and other regions of Northern Kazakhstan with a total of 30,000 participants¹¹⁸. The state on its part violently suppressed civil protests, which led to high casualties. In Kokshetau alone, 232 participants of the 1921 demonstrations were executed by Soviet authorities¹¹⁹. In the course of upheavals, protesters demanded economic autonomy as a response to the increasing hunger and administrative terror of the era. More importantly, mass revolts were rooted in a specifically peasant social base and were driven less by ideological motives than by infringement of the market interests of rural producers¹²⁰. Nevertheless, these protests were officially recognized by the Soviet authorities as counter-revolutionary upheavals instigated by kulak-bai elements¹²¹. Although uprisings of 1920-1921 were not inherently driven by class-based motives, they were still reframed in official documentation and tied to the regime's class rhetoric. With that being said, the case of demonstrations against war communism was not an isolated example of Soviet powers systematically exploiting their class ideology as an expedient penalizing concept.

¹¹⁸ Abylhožin, *Očerki Social'no-Èkonomičeskoj Istorii Kazahstana XX Vek*, 11.

¹¹⁹ "Spisok lic rasstreljannyh za aktivnoe učastie vo vremja vosstanija 1921 g." In *Materialy Gosudarstvennoj komissii po polnoj rehabilitacii žertv političeskijh repressij (20-50 gody HH veka)*, (Astana, 2022), 24..

¹²⁰ Abylhožin, *Očerki Social'no-Èkonomičeskoj Istorii Kazahstana XX Vek*, 12.

¹²¹ Abylhožin, *Očerki Social'no-Èkonomičeskoj Istorii Kazahstana XX Vek*, 11.

The following phenomenon can be further demonstrated by the 1929 investigative materials of OGPU in Kazakhstan on an organized crime group led by Kurmaš Košanov. Based in the Adai district, Košanov's band was formed in 1921 and comprised at most 41 members, 26 of whom were identified as bandits (including Košanov)¹²². The armament of the group consisted of 29 rifles, 3 Nagant revolvers, and 2,500 rounds of ammunition partially supplied by the non-criminal supporters of the band¹²³. The gang began its operation in 1922, with January 1925 being the first time Košanov was subjected to criminal prosecution and accused of armed raiding and banditry, expressed in the robbing of the peaceful population in the Uil area of the Adai district¹²⁴. Prior to de-Baization, the major activities of the group included theft, kidnapping, violent assault, homicide, and intimidation of citizens, which persisted following implementation of the campaign¹²⁵. It would be analytically misleading to overlook the fact that approximately 15-20 bais, affected by the confiscation of large-scale holdings, joined the criminal group in the course of the autumn of 1928¹²⁶. Even though some dispossessed bais became members of the gang, it is important to specify that the activity of Košanov's band was never framed as an instance of anti-Soviet resistance to state-imposed class stratification before the institutionalization of the de-Baization policy. However, with the imposition of the campaign, the 1929 official reports started to define "...продолжение целой цепи патриархально-родовых пережитков и дореволюционного прошлого казахской нации"¹²⁷ as the leading characteristic and the main reason behind the formation of Košanov's gang. Despite the fact that the criminal activity predated the imposition of de-Baization, convicted individuals were nonetheless

¹²² "Dokladnaja zapiska o bandšajke Košanova Kurmaša" In *Materialy Gosudarstvennoj komissii po polnoj rehabilitacii žertv političeskikh repressij (20-50 gody HH veka)*, (Astana, 2022), 152.

¹²³ "Delo №140 razvitie banditizma v Adaevskom okruge za 1929 god" In *Materialy Gosudarstvennoj komissii po polnoj rehabilitacii žertv političeskikh repressij (20-50 gody HH veka)*, (Astana, 2022), 147..

¹²⁴ "Dokladnaja zapiska o bandšajke Košanova Kurmaša", 151.

¹²⁵ "Dokladnaja zapiska o bandšajke Košanova Kurmaša", 153.

¹²⁶ "Dokladnaja zapiska o bandšajke Košanova Kurmaša", 152.

¹²⁷ "Dokladnaja zapiska o bandšajke Košanova Kurmaša", 151.

presented in state records as opponents of the policy, allegedly forestalling the advancement of class struggle and consequent modernization of Kazakh aul. At this point, the notion of class rhetoric and kulak-bai elements turned into an umbrella term, which could be used to categorize and label any activity the regime perceived inappropriate as ideologically deviant. As a result, acts of infringement were not treated as individual cases of illegal behavior but were instead considered as parts of a broader anti-Soviet movement, irrespective of their prior criminal records and temporal precedence. Such generalization overlooks the socio-cultural complexity behind the organization and operation of the group, conveniently unifying various crimes committed by Košanov's followers under a single accusation of perpetuating traditional pre-revolutionary remnants. In this way, the Soviet powers routinely resorted to class rhetoric to label any criminal and/or social disturbances as ideologically deviant movements, thereby obscuring the more realistic motives behind these subversive activities. The strategic reliance on the conventions of the de-Baization campaign to explain and address various forms of unrest reflects the state's instrumental approach to its own ideology. Instead of facilitating genuine ideological transformation, the discourse of class warfare was deprived of its reconstructive function and relegated to a convenient administrative framework.

Conclusion

The issue of class politics was never simple in Soviet Kazakhstan. Major state decisions directed at aligning the nomadic community to socialist ideology had always been accompanied by debate within party and academia, marking a contested space for evaluating their implementation and consequences. With the de-Baization campaign being the central medium of state-imposed class warfare, Soviet modernization efforts deeply affected the political, economic,

and social foundation of the Kazakh aul. Although the policy was intended to foster class consciousness and consequently lead to the rise of the regional proletariat, de-Baization failed to cultivate genuine local compliance with Soviet ideology. Instead of internalizing the state-imposed class identities, Kazakh masses engaged in cultural persistence and continued reproducing traditional institutions. For instance, nomadic customary practices, entrenched in kinship ties, such as bride kidnapping and kalym, remained present despite Soviet intervention. Moreover, all layers of Kazakh society exhibited a tendency to use assigned class identities in their favor. The poor households were inclined to capitalize on their social standing by exploiting the tangible benefits they received from the state. Meantime, the wealthy demonstrated a propensity to embrace attributes of a lower strata to escape confiscation, dispossession, and other punitive measures. The following aspects indicate limited success of the de-Baization campaign, since the imposed class identities were used by locals as tools to achieve their personal goals, rather than instruments of genuine modernization and ideological conversion of the Kazakh masses.

The transformation of the traditional Kazakh aul into a socialist unit was characterized not only by the lack of genuine local compliance with class rhetoric but also systematic coercion on the part of Soviet agents. At this point, the regime resorted to violent measures to compensate for the failure of de-Baization to accumulate ideological conformity and adherence among Kazakh subordinates. The violence employed by Soviet authorities had numerous manifestations, including administrative neglect, physical assault, sexual abuse, and psychological pressuring. All of the mentioned actions were directed to forcefully obtaining local compliance, which could not be acquired without compulsion. It is important to note that suffering derived from the

violent measures was perceived by the state as a permissible and acceptable sacrifice, rather than an indication of the underlying issue of the de-Baization policy.

The limited internalization of class consciousness as well as the regime's violent response to it could be connected to the inherent disconnect of de-Baization with the social reality of Soviet Kazakhstan. In other words, ideological conventions of the campaign, including tripartite class identities, were never derived from the specificities of the Kazakh community. On the contrary, they were taken from the state's previous projects of social engineering in Russian villages and were largely based on the subjective perception of the state. The systematic misalignment between the imposed class stratification and realities of nomadism foreshadowed the ideological failure of de-Baization. The broader inconsistency of class politics in the Kazakh ASSR becomes especially evident in the way it was manipulated and instrumentalized by the Soviet power itself. To be precise, class categories were utilized in official documentation to label any forms of social unrest or criminal activity as ideologically charged, presenting condemned individuals as kulak-bai elements. In this case, the Soviet authorities undermined the fundamental objective of class rhetoric to reshape Kazakh society by turning it into a convenient penalizing framework.

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