

**The Virgin Lands Campaign
in Kazakhstan:
A Social History, 1954 - 1964**

by

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SUMMARY

From today's perspective, the Virgin Lands Campaign (VLC), an initially agricultural intervention which unfolded in Soviet Kazakhstan in the decade between 1954 and 1964 and turned into a major social reform, appears like a mosaic made of pieces which, although fitting together seemingly well, were of a different nature, scale, importance and clarity. This dissertation is an attempt to deconstruct this phenomenon and, in so doing, to find how the VLC as a sequence of agricultural, social and ideological interventions, interplayed with larger developments associated with Khrushchev's leadership, in the specific setting of the Kazakh countryside. I seek to answer two questions: 1. How did the social and ideological settings of Soviet Kazakhstan change with the onset of the VLC and what implications did this have for the livelihood patterns and cultural identification of Kazakhs? 2. What kind of development was triggered by the VLC in the Kazakh countryside and beyond, and what was the role of other, larger processes characteristic of the Soviet Union as a whole, in this transformation? I answer these research questions in five chapters, which mirror the dimensions of the Virgin Lands Campaign, known also as the Tselina Campaign. The first chapter proffers a lens of construction and planning to show how the VLC, on the one hand, laid the foundation for the radical improvement of the standard of rural living in Soviet Kazakhstan and, on the other, contributed to the preservation of customary means of existence in the Kazakh steppe. The second chapter, which looks into a drive to boost livestock production in the Virgin Lands from 1957 onwards, introduces the earlier obscure players of the Tselina Campaign, that is, stockbreeders and animals. The third chapter explores the Virgin Lands as an arena for social engineering efforts to build the internationalist society. The fourth chapter takes a closer look at one of the cultural identifiers, the Kazakh language. The fifth chapter considers the role of another cultural identifier, Kazakh literature, in creating the imaginary tselina and legitimizing the VLC in the public eye. At last, the conclusion summarizes the arguments and connects them to the existing historiography and some of the current trends.

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INTRODUCTION

The Virgin Lands Campaign at Glance

In his quest for achieving self-sufficiency in Soviet food production, Nikita Khrushchev, the new chief of Soviet communists (1953 - 1964), shifted the burden of grain growing from the traditional crop areas in Russia and Ukraine to the eastern frontier of the Soviet Union. The Kazakh SSR and in particular, its northern stretches became the heartland of this expansion.

The logic behind this Khrushchev-inspired decision was to make the traditional grain-growing areas available for the production of high-quality fodder crops while putting virgin and idle lands in the Soviet East under plough for generating cheap grain. A total of 13 million hectares planned for the entire VLC for the period of 1954 to 1955 was almost doubled into 25.5 million hectares by 1964 in Kazakhstan alone.¹ That constituted around nine percent of the territory of the entire republic. In December 1960, a new administrative unit named after the Virgin Lands Campaign (VLC), *Tselinnyi Krai*, embraced the five northern provinces (Akmola, Kokshetav, Kustanai, Pavlodar and Petropavlovsk regions) , or around a fifth of territory of all Kazakh Republic territory (the unit was dissolved in October 1965). By the end of the decade, the Kazakh share of ploughed virgin and idle lands equalled more than 60 percent of the total area assigned to the VLC in the Soviet Union as a whole.²

To make the launch of the Virgin Lands Campaign (VLC) happen, Khrushchev dismissed the Alma-Ata-based party leadership of the Kazakh Soviet Socialist Republic (SSR), who resisted Khrushchev's grandiose plan by defending much lower numbers for crop expansion. First Secretary Shaiakhmetov and Second Secretary Afonov were replaced by Moscow-appointed Ponomarenko and Brezhnev respectively; the latter was a protégé of Khrushchev himself. In four out of five northern provinces, regional party chiefs were relieved of their duties as well. A close

¹ McCauley, *Khrushchev and the Development of Soviet Agriculture*, 79-83.

² Ibid, 83.

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look into these regional party reshuffles shows that they were not something exceptional for Soviet Kazakhstan. Not all the former regional first party secretaries were initially local and not all the new-appointed ones were entirely new to the republic. For example, in *North Kazakhstan Oblast*, Bobrov, who had led the regional party organisation for 10 years, was replaced by Popad'ko, who for a similar period had headed the Agricultural Department of the Central Committee of the Communist Party of Kazakhstan (CPK). Earlier mentioned Afonov was transferred to Kazakhstan only in 1951 and after his dismissal as Second Secretary he was appointed to head the regional party organisation in *Pavlodar Oblast*. The only appointee who was completely unfamiliar with the Kazakh Republic was a Brezhnev's friend, Roginets, who for a short period was put in charge of the regional party organisation in *Kokchetav Oblast*. The former Kokchetav first secretary, Beisibaiev, who had headed the regional party cell for only two years, was promoted to Vice-Chairman of the Council of Ministers of the Kazakh SSR. Thus, such a reshuffle, with exception for Shaiakhmetov, who was in the republican party leadership for 15 years, was characteristic to the Kazakh Republic even in the pre-VLC period.

Land was the only abundant resource in the Soviet Union. This is why, while embarking on his agricultural program, Khrushchev identified huge tracts of cultivatable land in Kazakhstan and employed economies of scale. In his view, expected yield of 10 to 15 centners per hectare multiplied by a vast hectarage would solve the grain problem of the Soviet Union, specifically having enough grain for human consumption and at the same time providing enough of it to animal farming and industry, stocking up the reserves, as well as shipping it to Soviet allies.³ However, in reality it became an average of 7.4 centners per hectare.⁴ The most pitiful years in terms of yield were 1955 (2.9 centners per hectare), 1957 (4.6) and 1963 (4.4), the most rewarding being 1954 (9.2), 1956 (10.6), 1958 (9.4) and 1964 (9.8).⁵ The failures

³ Khrushchev, *Stroitel'stvo kommunizma v SSSR*, 1: 85-100; Dronin & Bellinger. *Climate dependence and food problems in Russia*, 173.

⁴ Dronin & Bellinger, *Climate dependence and food problems in Russia*, 195 (with reference to: *Narodnoe khoziaistvo RSFSR v 1965*, Moscow, 1966).

⁵ Ibid

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due to infamous shortages of resources (in this case — to harvest grain timeously), variability of local climate, and losses in transportation and from weed infestation, reduced the harvests even further.

Grain production in the tselina decade varied in the Kazakh virgin lands, between 4.8 million tonnes in 1955 which was the most disappointing in this regard and 23.8 million tonnes in 1956 which was the most successful in this sense.⁶ The state purchases of grain differed accordingly: the Kazakh share in state purchases of grain bounced between a slim 4.6 percent of total procurements in 1955 to the decade record of 29.8 percent in 1956.⁷ McCauley (1976), Dronin & Belliger (2005) and Saktaganova (2012) give a detailed account of the economic performances of this crop expansion program.

Crop expansion to the east was not a new tactic for the Soviets: for example, after World War Two, the annual expansion of sown area was between five and 10 percent: a total of around 6 million hectares in 1945 turned into 9.7 million hectares in 1953.⁸ Neither did the VLC become the last occasion of Soviet leaders resorting to it. An example of crop expansion taking place after Khrushchev's dismissal (1964) and the official discontinuation of the VLC is in the year 1969 when the sown area in Kazakhstan rose by another 2.5 million hectares.⁹ What was new and remains unique about the VLC is the ambitious scale of the campaign in terms of hectarage assigned, the speed it was pursued and the resources allocated to this crop expansion scheme.

Khrushchev's vision for the Kazakh steppe expanded as fast as the numbers grew in his speeches. What started as an agricultural intervention soon became a rural development scheme. As many historians rightly characterize the Khrushchev decade, it was the first time that the state turned its face to villagers and — in its own way — embraced the burdens of the countryside. Of all the political establishments in Moscow, Khrushchev was particularly familiar with them. As the First Secretary of

⁶ Ibid

⁷ McCauley, *Khrushchev and the Development of Soviet Agriculture*, 98.

⁸ Saktaganova, *Ekonomicheskaiia modernizatsiia Kazakhstana*, 125.

⁹ McCauley, *Khrushchev and the Development of Soviet Agriculture*, 212.

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the Central Committee of the Communist Party of Ukraine (1938 - 1949, excluding 10 months in 1947), he oversaw grain deliveries in Ukraine, a long-time Soviet breadbasket, even when Ukraine itself was struck by famine (1946). He was also in charge of the post-war restoration of Ukrainian industry and the Ukrainian countryside. With regards to the latter, he advocated for rural reconstruction beyond those villages destroyed by war, which later, when he became the party head of both Moscow Oblast and Moscow City (1949 - 1953), turned into the idea of agritowns. No surprise that in his plans for the Kazakh Virgin Lands a drive of agricultural assimilation was soon followed by overall development of the region.

Between 1954 and 1964, a large share of state investments was directed to developing northern Kazakhstan — economically and culturally. The size of additional budgets that Kazakhstan received for the VLC can be judged in comparison to investments in the preceding decade. While in the period of 1950 to 1953 the state invested in the Kazakh economy as a whole around 1.3 billion roubles annually on average,¹⁰ additional investments in the agricultural and rural development of the Kazakh tselina between 1954 and 1965, amounted to 8.5 billion roubles, or 0.7 billion roubles annually.¹¹ This increase was due not only to an inevitable rise in agricultural costs, but also because rural development became a feature of Soviet decision makers, with the Kazakh Virgin Lands being a testing site for this — and this all was mainly thanks to Khrushchev himself. Was it fair to the rest of Soviet rural areas and wouldn't development have been even more successful if these investments had been injected into the Soviet countryside more broadly and equitably? According to McCauley, it was unlikely that the state would have invested in agricultural or rural areas, if it had not been for Khrushchev and the VLC. Moreover, "the failure of the post-1958 period, especially the harvest of 1963, made it virtually certain that agriculture would receive more inputs" in the post-Khrushchev period.¹²

¹⁰ Saktaganova, *Ekonomicheskaiia modernizatsiia Kazakhstana*, 124.

¹¹ McCauley, *Khrushchev and the Development of Soviet Agriculture*, 149.

¹² McCauley, *Khrushchev and the Development of Soviet Agriculture*, 195.

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The success of Kazakhstan to grow and deliver so much grain in 1956 not only strengthened the political footing of Khrushchev, but also empowered the local elites to re-negotiate their standings. In light of rural development getting priority in Soviet internal politics and in the climate of the de-Stalinization drive, Kazakh elites could pursue their own economic and cultural interests. They did not have anything to add to Khrushchev's vision for the Kazakh countryside in the beginning; however later, when it came to the Second Tselina (Chapter Two), it is possible that they contributed to the alternative version of rural development, a version based predominantly on customary practices of Kazakhs (Chapter One). There naturally was costs to bear by Kazakhs for the elevated status of their republic. Whether cultural concessions were included in the price of development is discussed in detail in Chapters Three and Four.

However, the dissertation does not cover another, more obvious cost of the VLC. The scale and hastiness of the drive led to large-scale and severe land degradation. In the mid-1950s, a state-sanctioned deflection campaign sought to convince people that socialist practices could not destroy the land. This, of course, did not prevent poor planning and inappropriate tilling techniques from causing extensive wind erosion resulting in the loss of soil layers. In 1962, dust storms had damaged one third of the Kazakh Virgin Lands (seven of 20 million hectares), and in 1965 over five million hectares of the arable area in the former Tselinnyi Krai remained impaired. The agricultural and ecological aspects of the VLC are comprehensively researched by McCauley (1976), Dronin & Belliger (2005), and Elie (2015).

Labourers were a limited resource as well. The human dimension of the campaign is particularly intriguing since the local population, sparse and heterogeneous, was dramatically boosted by new settlers and workers: the number of newcomers, including temporary workers and those who settled down — is assessed to have been between 1.7 and four million.¹³ Social aspects of the VLC are well explored by M. Pohl (2004, 2007), O. Pohl (2008), and Ablazhei (2014). These studies are insightful and

¹³ Ablazhei, *Kazakhskii migratsionnyi maiatnik*, 137; Dronin & Bellinger, *Climate dependence and food problems in Russia*, 174 (with reference to: Bush, K.1964. "The Profitability of the Viiing Lands." *Radio Liberty Research*).

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focus mostly on newcomers and former special settlers. To this day, the place of Kazakhs in rural development schemes associated with the VLC has been obscure.

Semantics of the Tselina

It has become common terminology to refer to the massive expansion of wheat crops that took place in Soviet Kazakhstan in the decade between 1954 and 1964 and involved, among other things, putting natural pastures under plough and populating the New Lands with Slavs, as the Virgin Land(s) Campaign (VLC). The public and academic discourse in present-day Kazakhstan regard the VLC as something much broader than an agricultural endeavor and a resettlement scheme. In the public perception, it has been associated with the transformation that the Kazakh countryside and Kazakh society went through under Khrushchev's leadership, while in history textbooks it turned into an entire block in the periodization of Kazakhstan's Soviet history.¹⁴ Although the idea to scale up the grain production eastwards, to the Kazakh steppe, emerged as an agricultural intervention, the VLC eventually transformed into a major social reform that went beyond the campaign's initial scope, both geographically and conceptually. This decade, as well as the reform, has commonly – not only colloquially, but also in the formal sense – been referred to as the Tselina. I want to proceed with comprehensively unpacking the term “tselina.”

Prior to the VLC, the term “tselina”, a transliteration for Russian *целина*, referred unambiguously to “virgin land”, or *целинная земля* (*tselinnaiia zemlia*). In contemporary Russian, there is a difference in meaning between “virgin land” and “tselina”. Although the Great Soviet Encyclopedia (all three volumes) explains “tselina” only as virgin lands, or lands that have never been cultivated, and refers to their main reserve in the Soviet East,¹⁵ the Large Explanatory Dictionary of the Russian Language extends the notion of tselina to three definitions.¹⁶ First of all, it conveys its initial — agricultural — meaning, geographically tied to the Virgin Lands,

¹⁴ Olcott, *The Kazakhs*, 224-246; Abylkhozhyn, *Ocherki sotsial'no-ekonomicheskoi istorii*, 267-277.

¹⁵ *Bol'shaia Sovetskaya Entsiklopediia* (1934), 60: 387; *Bol'shaia Sovetskaia Entsiklopediia* (1957), 46: 487; *Bol'shaia Sovetskaia Entsiklopediia* (1978), 28: 474.

¹⁶ Kuznetsov, *Bol'shoi tolkovyi slovar'*, 1459.

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where the latter denotes — as far as the Kazakh Republic is concerned — mainly its northern provinces. Secondly, it implies an unexplored space, a place that no human has ever set foot on. Thirdly, “tselina” stands for something that remains untapped and unstudied. Press reports and archival documents from the period between 1954 and 1964 as well as memoirs, literary pieces and cinematic narratives of that time, suggest that these new understandings were attributed to this notion in the years of the VLC.

An analysis of the new semantic distinctions the word “tselina” acquired in the years of the campaign and afterwards, sheds some light on how far and deep the influence of this campaign spread. Originally an agricultural term, “tselina” began to designate the geographic region: northern Kazakhstan and its five provinces which the VLC initially and primarily targeted. While the areas targeted by the campaign outside the Virgin Lands region began to be referred to as the Little Tselina (*malaia tselina*). It also became an epithet to point to nature that should be put into use. For example, the Blue Tselina (*golubaia tselina*) or the Space Tselina (*kosmicheskaiia tselina*), where the former referred to making use of lakes and rivers for the development of poultry farming, and the latter implied Soviet achievement in space exploration. In the public perception, the world’s first spaceport for orbital and human launches, Baikonur, located in the Kazakh steppe southwards from the Virgin Lands region, extended the steppe upwards into the universe and linked these two expanses.¹⁷ “Tselina” was also used to designate an industry that should receive a fresh impetus. For example, the Milk Tselina (*molochnaia tselina*) or the Meat Tselina (*miasnaia tselina*), together known as the Second Tselina (*vtoraia tselina*), which referred to the increased importance of livestock farming in the Virgin Lands after Khrushchev’s 1957 call to outstrip the United States in per capita animal production, and the latter more specifically to milk production. The epithet “Second Tselina” implied that the VLC as a scheme for crop expansion was the First Tselina. More generally, the notion of tselina began to stand for the novelty and importance of a particular economic

¹⁷ Like in the 1964 poem, *Ia – Kazakh* (“I am a Kazakh”), by Zhuban Moldagaliyev: “The steppe has been breadth, now it is height, / since the ships have set off from it to the sky.” (“*Step’ byla tol’ko shyriiu, teper’ ona – vys’, / raz s neie korabli v nebesa podnialis’.*” Moldagaliyev, *Ya — Kazakh*, 380.

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activity and soon went beyond the geographical boundaries of the Virgin Lands. Hale-Dorrell who, in his research about the Soviet efforts to dramatically scale up the production of corn, draws the following quotation from an archival document of 1959: “Party, Komsomol, soviet, and economic organizations everywhere seek and find new reserves, new potential, and figuratively term them their ‘tselina’. For some, this is draining marshes, for others it is expanding cropland, and for still others it is designating corn their ‘tselina’.”¹⁸

For Moscow-based planners the Kazakh steppe was not only a resource but also a target for their development and modernization schemes. It was a place where “everything is being created anew”.¹⁹ Thus, in the Khrushchev decade, the term “tselina” also gained various meanings in the socio-cultural domain, reflecting an important place of the VLC in the overall development of Soviet Kazakhstan. By the early-1960s, the notion “tselina village” (*tselinnoe selo*) not only had a distinct geographic association, but also implied Soviet advancement in rural planning and rural construction. A drive to make rural dwellers in the Virgin Lands and beyond, more “cultured” by replacing their “backward” practices with new, Soviet rituals, was sometimes referred to as the Cultural Tselina (*kul’turnaia tselina*).²⁰ In the eyes of the Party, immature or unruly settlers who came to “open up” the Virgin Lands were tselina too: before becoming part of tselina collectives or “big tselina family”, they first needed to be raised or re-educated. The tselina became an experience that was believed to “temper” individuals ideologically (“The tselina is the sea and the North together”) and elevate them to heroes (“the word ‘tselinnik’ (*a tselina person*) became a synonym to the word ‘heroism’”).²¹ This educational function of the Tselina Campaign was an essential part of the plotline about the “attack on the steppe” in press, literature and cinema.

¹⁸ Hale-Dorrell, *Corn Crusade*, 113.

¹⁹ Movie *Pervyi Eshelon* (“The First Echelon”) produced by Mosfilm in 1955.

²⁰ Omarov, I. “Druzhba narodov — zavoevanie Velikogo Oktyabrya,” *Partiinaiia zhyzn' Kazakhstana* 3, 1959, 16-17.

²¹ Both quotes are from novel *Snega metel'nye* (Ivan Shegolikhin, 1960).

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Addressing the themes of Soviet modernity in Kazakh literature, which had gravitated towards historic topics, was, figuratively speaking, one more *tselina* to explore. While the Virgin Lands produced actual harvests, Kazakh writers were compelled to open up the “*tselina* theme” (*tselinnaia tema*) in their works. Just like in Soviet literature of the 1930s and 1940s,²² party ideologues expected authors to expose the “conflict between the old and the new” as well as to create a “modern hero”. This hero had to have a “*tselina* personality” (*tselinni kharakter*) which could supposedly be developed in the Virgin Lands. As one of the popular sayings of that time went, “People were bringing up *tselina*, and the *tselina* was bringing up people” (*Liudi podnimali tselinu, a tselina podnimala liudei*). In literary and cinematic narratives, “*tselina*” became synonymous to happiness and youthfulness (“This happiness was brought to me by the *tselina*. Here my soul grew younger again.”²³). They conveyed a promise of wealth, stability and a time when “the [old Kazakh] aul will become a museum.”²⁴ In Soviet mythology, the *tselina* forged the new type of human relationships and the new model of society. Half a century later, the *Tselina* Campaign, or the *Tselina* Epic (*tselinnaia epopeia*) as it is commonly labelled, still preserves its legacy as a modernizing mission, an act of Soviet patriotism and a melting pot where an internationalist society was forged.²⁵

Gaps in the Current Understanding of the VLC

From today’s perspective, the *Tselina* appears like a mosaic made of pieces which, although fitting together seemingly well, were of a different nature, scale, importance and clarity. This dissertation is an attempt to deconstruct this phenomenon and, in so doing, to find how the VLC as a sequence of agricultural, social and ideological interventions, interplayed with larger developments associated with Khrushchev’s leadership, in the specific setting of the Kazakh countryside.

²² Günther, “Totalitarnoe gosudarstvo kak sintez iskusstv.”

²³ *Tselina*, a play by Anov N. and Shtein Ia., 1955 in: *Sovetskii Kazakhstan* 1, 1955, 3–57.

²⁴ Azil’khan Nurshaikhov, *Portrety*, 76.

²⁵ Iuritsyn, “*Tselina* vykhodit na pensiiu.”

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Michaela Pohl was, perhaps, the first external observer who showed that the notion of tselina went beyond the VLC and began to define actual social reform into which this agricultural program ultimately transformed.²⁶ She looks at it as a socio-cultural occurrence. However, many ideological, social and cultural aspects of the Tselina Campaign remain unaddressed which is especially evident with respect to Kazakhs. As Michaela Pohl fairly concludes in her paper on the inter-ethnic relations in one of the tselina provinces, it has not been entirely clear why, according to public narratives, Kazakh culture in general and the Kazakh language in particular, suffered in the Virgin Lands, and to which extent this was connected to the VLC directly.²⁷ Published memoirs which could help to bring to light the Kazakh dimension of the VLC are scarce. Largely, the story of Kazakhs in the Virgin Lands and their place in the creation of the Tselina, has not been narrated yet.

As mentioned earlier, existing research on the social dimension of the VLC focus mostly on new arrivals rather than indigenous population. This dissertation seeks to close this gap.

My research questions

In this dissertation, I attempt to answer two research questions: 1. How did the social and ideological settings of the Kazakh countryside change with the onset of the VLC and what implications did this have for the livelihood patterns and cultural identification of Kazakhs? 2. What kind of development was triggered by the VLC in the Kazakh countryside and what was the role of other, larger processes characteristic of the Soviet Union as a whole, in this transformation? The framework within which I approach these questions is outlined by the semantic analysis presented earlier. This analysis provides me with entry points for examining the complexity of the Tselina Campaign as well as intricacies added to it, by two broader

²⁶ McCauley, *Khrushchev and the Development of Soviet Agriculture*; Zelenin, "Agrarnaia politika N. S. Khrushcheva"; Dronin and Bellinger, *Climate dependence and food problems in Russia*; Saktaganova, *Ekonomicheskaya modernizatsiya*; Elie, "The Soviet Dust Bowl and the Canadian erosion experience"; Pohl, "The 'planet of one hundred languages'".

²⁷ Pohl, "The 'planet of one hundred languages'," 256-257.

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socio-political domains which — to various extents of explicitness — defined the societal context in Soviet Kazakhstan, that is: nationalism and ideology.

What I have removed from my initial research questions is the subject of power relations in the Virgin Lands. My reasoning was twofold. First of all, this issue as part of the broader topic of politics and administration in Soviet Kazakhstan between 1955 and 1964 is covered thoroughly in J. W. Cleary's PhD dissertation of 1967.²⁸ I refer to his findings throughout my thesis. Secondly, I lacked sources to study the lower dynamic of power relations in the Virgin Lands and this narrowed the scope of my research. Along with Cleary, I argue that, compared to their ethnic ratio in the total population, Kazakhs remained over-represented in party and state institutions at all levels of state business, and the Virgin Lands were not an exception.

Structure and Methodology of the Dissertation

I answer these research questions in five chapters. Chapter One on Rural Development offers a lens of construction and planning to show how the VLC, on the one hand, laid the foundation for radical improvement of the standard of rural living in Soviet Kazakhstan and, on the other, contributed to the preservation of traditional means of existence in the Kazakh steppe. Chapter Two on the Second Tselina, or a drive to boost livestock production in the Virgin Lands from 1957 onwards, introduces the earlier obscure players of the Tselina Campaign, that is, stockbreeders and animals. If the success in crop expansion depended significantly on the regime's ability to provide the Kazakh countryside with a sufficient amount of agricultural machinery and workers who could be trained to operate such machinery, the Second Tselina relied heavily on the local workforce and their manual labor. Therefore, a closer look at this dimension of the VLC not only unveils the perspective of the local population, but also offers an alternative view of rural development in the Virgin Lands. Chapter Three on the Cultural Tselina explores the Virgin Lands as an arena for social engineering efforts to build the internationalist society. Here I use the prism of ideology and propaganda to show how the regime tried to accommodate Kazakhs

²⁸ Cleary, "Politics and Administration in Soviet Kazakhstan."

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in the New Society. Chapter Four on the Language Dilemma takes a closer look at one of the cultural identifiers, the Kazakh language. In particular, it investigates how the functional roles of the Kazakh language changed during the period in question compared to its status prior to the VLC. Chapter Five on the Literary Tselina considers the role of another cultural identifier, Kazakh literature, in creating the imaginary tselina and legitimizing the VLC in the public eye. Each chapter contains a concluding part where I attempt to answer my research questions. At last, in Conclusion I summarize my arguments and connect them to the existing historiography and some of the current trends.

This dissertation is based on archival and — to a lesser extent — oral history research in all the former tselina regions. I worked with historic records in a number of Kazakhstani archives in the former tselina regional centers: Kokshchetau (former Kokchetav), Kostanai (Kustanai), Nur-Sultan (Akmola and later Tselinograd), Pavlodar, and Petropavlovsk, as well as the Archive of the President of the Republic of Kazakhstan (the former party archive), the State Archive of the Republic of Kazakhstan in Almaty and the National Archive of the Republic of Kazakhstan in Nur-Sultan. In some of these archives, I depended on the local staff to locate relevant material — for various reasons — more than in others, and, thus, a couple of these archival trips did not yield much.

I also consulted a great number of periodicals. This range includes newspapers *Pravda*, *Kazakhstanskaia Pravda*, and *Uchitel' Kazakhstana* (“The Teacher of Kazakhstan”) as well as journals and magazines *Partiinaia Zhizn' Kazakhstana* (“The Party Life of Kazakhstan”), *Sel'skoe Khoziaistvo Kazakhstana* (“The Agriculture of Kazakhstan”), *Narodnoe khoziaistvo Kazakhstana* (“The Economy of Kazakhstan”), *Sovetskii Kazakhstan* (“Soviet Kazakhstan”, a literary magazine), *Qazaq adebiety* (“Kazakh Literature”), *Qazaqstan әйелдері* (“Women of Kazakhstan”), *Mădeniet zhăne Tŭrmys* (“Culture and Everyday Life”), as well as *Shmel'* and its Kazakh edition, *Ara* (“Bumblebee”, a satirical magazine). I also had the chance to use a number of other Soviet publications. They which helped me enormously, not only with citations, but also with grasping the ambiance that existed back at that time. This would not have been possible without the assistance and flexibility from the side of the National Library of

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the Republic of Kazakhstan (Almaty), the Science Library of Karaganda Oblast (Karaganda), the Science Library of Kostanai Oblast, the National Library of Belarus (Minsk) which holds an impressive collection of Soviet-time publications, and the National Russian Library (Moscow), as well as access to the East View Database which I obtained thanks to the Deutsche Forschungsgemeinschaft.

There is always a question as to what extent we can trust Soviet publications, such as periodicals and statistics. In this sense, Clearly and McCauley, who — based almost exclusively on Soviet materials — produced in 1967 and 1976 respectively, excellent research works that still serve as reference points for today's scholars of the Soviet phenomenon, provide some of the best evidence that the publications of Soviet origin are well worth perusal. In this regard, the renowned scholar of Soviet economic history, Alec Nove, wrote back in 1961: "the beliefs that Soviet statistics are confined to percentages of an unknown base-year, or that the figures are mere propagandist intentions, are now baseless legends".²⁹ Moreover, presumably distorted data, such as that on food consumption, or missing statistics, like the scarcity of data on the number of native-language schools that I deal with in Chapter Four, can also be regarded as part of the regime's efforts to craft an imagined reality.³⁰

Most of the archival and periodical materials I deal with in this dissertation were produced in Russian. All the interviews were conducted in Russian as well, although in one occasion the Kazakh language would have been more preferable for an interviewee. There were less sources in Kazakh, for which I resorted to the assistance of translators. All the literary pieces I analyze in Chapter Five were originally produced in Kazakh. However, I, an ethnic Kazakh born in the urban milieu of Soviet Kazakhstan and somewhat a product of the Soviet nation-building project, could read them only in Russian. Keeping in mind that literary pieces written in Kazakh were not translated but rather, based on the interlinear translation made by the authors themselves, re-written in Russian by "translators" who did not speak the Kazakh language and whose

²⁹ Nove, *The Soviet Economy*, 19.

³⁰ For a conclusion on the apparently distorted statistical data on Soviet food consumption: Dronin and Bellinger, *Climate dependence and food problems in Russia*, 14.

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task was also to enhance the ideological quality of pieces, it is possible that what I have read was not entirely identical to the original editions.³¹ In general, in Soviet Kazakhstan there was a prominent division among writers, journalists and publishers: Russian-speaking authors, who were in most cases ethnic Slavs, wrote for the Russian-speaking audience, while Kazakh-speaking authors, or authors of Kazakh ethnicity, did the same for Kazakh readers. In doing so, the authors covered topics and problems that were, in their opinion, interesting for, and supposedly intrinsic to, their respective audiences. For instance, some editors and writers viewed such topics as sheep breeding, atheistic propaganda against Muslim practices and criticism of “national cadres” (ethnic Kazakhs in various administrative and other state-paid jobs), as only — or mainly — for the attention of the Kazakh audience.³² Most non-Kazakh writers and journalists did not speak Kazakh, which did not allow them to learn and write about the life of Kazakh communities. Thus, they focused their literary endeavors rather on the experiences of the Russian-speaking population, assigning only episodic or minor roles to characters of Kazakh ethnicity. This language-audience divide explains, at least partly, why the narrative about Kazakhs in the Virgin Lands did not generate much reflection in the works of Russian-speaking authors.³³ This language-based division of writers and audiences remained largely unchanged until the end of Soviet rule, and, as writer Olzhas Suleimenov noted in 1985, the literary depiction of the Tselina gravitated towards representing it as a cluster of mono-ethnic communities, rather than an internationalist multi-cultural society.³⁴ Perhaps, due to this segregation, Kazakh culture, as observed by Pohl, remained invisible for new settlers in the Virgin Lands.³⁵

³¹ More on literary translation in Soviet Kazakhstan: Peter Doyle, *Iurii Dombrovskii* (Amsterdam, 2000), 20; “Stenogramma zasedaniia III s"ezda sovetskikh pisatelei Kazakhstana”, The Central State Archive of the Republic of Kazakhstan (TsGARK), f. 1778, op. 1, d. 737, l. 38; “K novomu pod"emu kazakhskoi sovetskoi literatury,” *Sovetskii Kazakhstan* 10, 1954, 106.

³² APRK, f. 708, op. 29, d. 360, ll. 32-33, 41.

³³ For example: Shchegolichin, *Snega metel'nye*; Morgun, *Dumy o tseline*; Shukhov, *Presnovskie stranitsy*.

³⁴ Suleimenov, “Osvoenie tseliny kak nemerknushchaia tema sovetskoi literatury.”

³⁵ Pohl, “The ‘planet of one hundred languages’,” 252.

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It might sound surprising for an outsider, but the contemporary Kazakhstani society is still largely divided on the basis of language. Roughly speaking, there are three distinct public spheres: the Russian-speaking Slavic population which is located mostly in the northern regions and in towns; the Kazakh-speaking Kazakh population which is concentrated mainly in the southern regions and in the countryside; and bilingual Kazakhs living in urban areas. The majority in the two former groups do not speak, or have a poor command of, the other language, while bilingual Kazakhs are engaged mostly with the Russian-speaking group and, as urbanites, rarely speak for their rural compatriots. The realms of these three groups sometimes overlap and occasionally clash, but more often co-exist without much contact, albeit loaded with much prejudice against each other. From today's perspective, the Tselina seems to Kazakhstanis as the most recent battle between the Kazakh language and the Russian language, in which the former was decisively defeated by the latter and whose supposed repercussions are evident in present-day Kazakhstan. The ambiguity of such a continuing legacy of the VLC in this regard still stirs up strong reactions in the Kazakhstani society. Thus, this question "how did the Tselina influence the native language of Kazakhs and Kazakh culture in general?" is one of the most intriguing for the broader public, while being, at the same time, one of the least covered aspects of scholarly inquiry into the Soviet past of Kazakhstan.

Thus, focusing on Kazakh authors and originally Kazakh content (not necessarily in Kazakh, but produced in Soviet Kazakhstan) brings us to the Kazakh dimension of the Tselina Campaign. This dimension adds new layers to the historical representation of the Tselina. The struggle of new settlers for bread and wealth, which was the dominant discourse in public and academic narratives about the Tselina Campaign, is expanded by the perspective of the local population who were involved with animal farming on the societal and geographical margins of the Virgin Lands. The co-existence of two extremes of rural living in the Virgin Lands — well-appointed tselina villages in sovkhos headquarters on the one hand, and, on the other, yurts, portable dwellings from the Kazakh nomadic past, on distant pastures — broadens our understanding of the Soviet approach to rural development. The dual role of Kazakh propagandists, including Kazakh intelligentsia, such as educators, writers and

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filmmakers, to preserve the Kazakh identity and to celebrate the tselina internationalism, illustrates the role of ideology in making the Kazakh countryside an efficient producer and part of Soviet modernity.

Finally, a note on terminology and metric units. All names, titles and specific terms in Russian and Kazakh are transliterated according to the Library of Congress standard. The only exceptions from this are the name of writer Ilyas Yessenberlin (rather than Il'ias Esenberlin), oblast (rather than oblast'), Mosfilm (rather than Mosfil'm) and Kazakhfilm (rather than Kazakhfil'm), since they have already been established in the first spellings. In order not to overload the text, I translate the titles of administrative divisions, institutions and legal documents into English, sometimes giving their transliterated versions. For the sake of relatability, metric units such as centners and hectares are sometimes expressed in kilograms/grams and square kilometers.

Chapter One.

Rural Development in the Virgin Lands: Overcoming Distances and Differences

In his study of the Soviet efforts to transform the Central Asian countryside, Artemy M. Kalinovsky reflects on resettlement as one of the post-Stalinist approaches to not only increase agricultural production but also to enhance rural welfare. In Soviet Tajikistan with its mountainous territory, local officials commonly resorted to resettling Tajik pastoralist communities from the highlands to the valleys in order to cater for the growing cotton production with laborers, as well as to make up for the failed attempts of the Soviet economy to bring mechanization to this industry. As Kalinovsky argues, such a scheme was “not just a way to solve a labor supply problem, but also (perhaps more importantly) a way to bring people into modernity and operate the welfare state most efficiently.” “[S]ince bringing schooling, medical care, electricity, and cultural institutions to these remote mountain villages was difficult, it made more sense to move the villages to where they could be integrated into an expanding network of educational, cultural, and welfare facilities” – is how the author explains the second rationale of Soviet Tajik executives for rural resettlement.¹

Compared to the Tajik experience, the regime's efforts to bring together modernity and people in Soviet Kazakhstan had both similarities and differences. The extensive agriculture of the Kazakh Republic and its two main competencies in this regard, large-scale wheat growing and sheep herding, required keeping the population scattered so that people could tend the crops and the animals across the vast (twenty times as large as the Tajik Republic) and predominantly plain territory. Although, throughout the Khrushchev decade, the regime greatly encouraged mass resettlement to northern Kazakhstan, a host of the Virgin Lands Campaign (VLC), and the primary source of the workforce was found, as I show in Chapter Three, outside the republic,² it also tried to retain local people in geographically and societally marginal areas by bringing modernity there. In order to retain and expand the workforce in remote farms and distant pastures as well as to make it modern and

¹ Kalinovsky, *Tractors, Power Lines, and the Welfare State*.

² See also: Pohl, “The ‘Planet of One Hundred Languages’.”

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more efficient, the Soviet welfare state attempted to extend itself beyond sovkhos headquarters and embrace rural hinterlands. The way it did so was specific to Kazakhstan for its huge and sparsely populated area, as well as to the post-Stalinist state and its ideology whose roles were increasing in rural affairs against the background of the unfolding VLC.

In the popular perception, mass construction of housing and welfare facilities in rural Kazakhstan, especially in its northern provinces, has been attributed to the tselina campaign, which is quite fair in a historical perspective as well. What is mostly obscure in history narratives about the tselina is that the VLC gave an impetus to the emergence of the construction industry in the Kazakh Republic, which, in turn, laid the foundation for radical improvement of the Soviet standard of living in the 1960s and 1970s. What has also not received much articulation in these narratives is that the VLC contributed to the appearance of rural development on the Soviet domestic agenda and pioneered rural planning in the Soviet Union. In this sense, the Virgin Lands case offers us another lens through which to study the Soviet Union's policies and practices towards rural areas.

By the early-1960s, the notion "tselina village" (*tselinnoe selo*) not only had a distinct geographic association, but also implied Soviet advancement in rural planning and rural construction. In contrast, sheep herding areas that stretched along the southern frontier of the Virgin Lands remained predominantly backward. The urge to populate the land-abundant and labor-hungry countryside with new laborers for crop expansion put a special emphasis of Soviet planning efforts on newcomers and new grain-growing sovkhoses. However, from 1957 onwards, the renewed importance of livestock production in the Virgin Lands, a development that I review in detail in Chapter Two, made the poor and primitive living conditions of Kazakh shepherds a new concern for propagandists and planners.

The aim of this chapter is threefold. Firstly, to provide a short overview of how the thinking about the countryside as living space transformed in the Soviet Union when the main proponent of the improvement of rural living, Khrushchev, was consolidating his power in the Communist Party. This part also reflects on the role of

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the VLC in Khrushchev's efforts to bring the welfare state to the Soviet countryside. Secondly, to look at how rural construction - in the time of the Soviet Union's boom in residential construction - gained momentum in the Kazakh tselina. Thirdly, to discuss how the post-Stalinist regime adjusted – for the sake of economic growth - its ideological premises and development practices to its remote and highly diverse population. Overall, this chapter explores how the basic premises and contours of rural development were defined in the Virgin Lands and to what extent Communist concepts accommodated various groups, including Kazakh shepherds.

Rural Development Thinking

By the time Khrushchev came to power as the First Secretary of the Central Committee of the Communist Party, Soviet planners and architects already had a conceptual understanding of how a modern rural settlement should look. In the late 1920s, the blueprints for early large grain-growing state farms (sovkhozes) included town-like functional zoning. The “public core” consisted of a range of public facilities (such as a school, club, canteen, public bath and bakery) lined around a central square. Residential quarters of two-apartment houses adjoined the “core”, and the production zone (a machine-tractor park, repair workshops and storage sheds) was located not far away from it too.³ By the late-1930s, the key principle for Soviet architects with regard to rural (kolkhoz and sovkhoz) planning was urbanization: the village had to resemble an urban area and such conveniences and amenities as electricity, water supply, paved streets, radio, a cinema theatre and greenery were to become part of rural living. The centrepiece had to be a club or a palace of culture, “a dominant architectural feature in the [modern] village as opposed to the old village with a church”. The “excessiveness” of earlier blueprints expressed in a large number of streets, squares and green spots had to be avoided in order to cut the maintenance costs.⁴ For Soviet communists, the urbanization of rural populations seemed a solution to the ideological struggle inherent in Marxism-Leninism, that is: resolving the differences between town and country and thus, emancipating society from class

³ Baranov, *Arkhitektura SSSR*, 142.

⁴ Soiuz sovetских arkhitektorov SSSR, *Planirovka i stroitel'stvo*, 11-19.

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distinctions.⁵ The outbreak of war put a halt to the development of rural planning thinking in the Soviet Union for at least five years.

The understanding of what to do with the countryside to make it modern and more efficient grew clearer and more practical in regard to the post-war reconstruction of villages in Belarus, Russia and Ukraine. The reconstruction of those areas allowed planners to not only rebuild a large number of villages from nothing,⁶ but also to start thinking “about radical [and] systematic reconstruction of the village”.⁷ First, all-union standards on village layouts and first-state norms on hygiene and fire prevention were established, and “[a]lthough most villages were rebuilt with little regard for these regulations, they nonetheless marked the earliest attempt to develop an all-union standard planning framework for rural settlements.”⁸ “The architectural outlook of the modern kolkhoz with its club, school, hospital, shops, kindergartens and nurseries, outbuildings and household buildings should reflect the greatness and strength of our socialist system” - went the editorial in the Committee for Architecture’s journal in 1948.⁹

Khrushchev was involved in the post-war recovery of the Ukrainian countryside as a top governmental and party official of the republic and advocated for rural reconstruction beyond destroyed villages. From 1950 to 1951, Khrushchev, the then First Secretary of the party committees of Moscow City and Moscow Oblast, proposed the creation of agro-towns (*agroroda*): “well-appointed urban-type dwellings with all modern facilities” to where collective farmers from “small, ill-appointed villages” could be resettled.¹⁰ For this bold proposition, he was accused (by Georgii Malenkov, one of the top party functionaries of the time) for ideological deviation, because the very idea of kolkhoz development was seen to be inconsistent

⁵ Ibid, 19. For a comprehensive account on Soviet leaning towards the urbanization of rural population, see: Melvin, *Soviet Power and the Countryside*.

⁶ Melvin, *Soviet Power and the Countryside*, 39.

⁷ *Arkitektura i stroitel'stvo* 7, 1948, 1–3.

⁸ Melvin, *Soviet Power and the Countryside*, 39.

⁹ *Arkitektura i stroitel'stvo* 7, 1948, 1–3.

¹⁰ *Pravda*, 25 April 1950, 2; *Pravda*, 4 March 1951, 2–3.

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with and even dangerous “for the entire cause of socialist construction”.¹¹ In the eyes of Soviet Marxists, sovkhozes, or state-owned farming enterprises, were a superior model for rural economy, although kolkhozes, or farms run collectively by villagers, were the main form of the organization of labour in the Soviet countryside. Avoiding the possibility of further attacks, Khrushchev did not venture to pursue the idea of improving the standard of living for kolkhoz people, the absolute majority in the Soviet countryside, until Stalin’s death. In September 1953, at a party plenum, Khrushchev presented his agricultural program for the Soviet Union. Rural development became part of this program where he linked an anticipated boost in agricultural production with the development of the countryside. (Crop expansion eastwards, which later became known as the tselina campaign, was outlined in this program as well.) His logic was as follows: after an increase in agricultural production, the income of kolkhoz people would rise and so would their “cultural and welfare needs” (*kul’turno-bytovye zaprosy*). In Khrushchev’s vision, extra income could be invested, firstly, in the construction of production facilities and, secondly, in welfare improvements (maternity hospitals and kindergartens in particular). Economically strong kolkhozes, Khrushchev explained at the plenum, could build clubs.¹² This plenum also yielded more tangible and immediate outcomes that brought some relief to the Soviet countryside: the state wrote off the debts of farmers against the compulsory deliveries of animal produce and untightened the delivery obligations for livestock owners.¹³

In 1955, while presenting a resolution on increasing livestock production to the Central Committee of the Communist Party, Khrushchev, already the First Secretary of the Central Committee, reaffirmed that collective farms could reinvest their funds

¹¹ Richter, “Plans to urbanize the countryside”, 41

¹² Khrushchev, *Stroitel'stvo kommunizma v SSSR*, 81-82.

¹³ O merakh po dal'neishemu razvitiu zhyvotnovodstva v strane i snizhenii norm obiazatel'nykh postavok produktov zhyvotnovodstva gosudarstvu khoziaistvami kolkhoznikov, rabochikh i sluzhashchikh. (On Measures for the Further Development of Animal Farming in the Country and Lowering of Compulsory Deliveries” approved by the USSR’s Council of Ministers and the Central Committee of the Communist Party of the Soviet Union in September 1953.) *Pravda*, 26 September 1953, 3.

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in housing as well as cultural and welfare facilities, but only as the second priority after the construction of barns. Khrushchev specifically stressed that in all construction activities, kolkhozes should rely on their own resources and the state would assist only in the production of building materials.¹⁴ At the 20th Congress of the Communist Party of the Soviet Union (February 1956), he shared his expanded vision for a wealthy rural settlement: in addition to maternity hospitals, kindergartens and clubs, it had to have bakeries, public baths and homes for the aged. The subordination of rural development to agricultural development, i.e. the construction of housing and welfare facilities being a lesser priority than the construction of production facilities, and the financial independency of kolkhozes in these matters, was emphasised once more.¹⁵ Therefore, by the mid-1950s, Soviet collective farms became generally entitled to improve their standard of living but the state, although having outlined limits to this development, generally held back from bringing any welfare improvements to kolkhozes.

Khrushchev consolidated even more power after the 20th Congress, at which he also denounced the cult of personality under Stalin (thus casting doubt on Stalin's legacy in general), and after the record 1956 harvest in the Virgin Lands. By that time, the VLC, his brainchild, ceased to be a purely agricultural intervention and began to transform into a project of social engineering. Therefore, the Kazakh tselina quite naturally became a testing ground for early Soviet ideas about rural development and offered Khrushchev a chance to shape them into a socially viable and ideologically coherent concept.

As mentioned earlier, the ideological bias of Soviet communists played against the possibility of comprehensive welfare reform in kolkhozes, where all means of production, at least *de jure*, belonged to kolkhoz members. Sovkhozes, being state-owned farming settlements, were seen as the only ideologically legitimate way to

¹⁴ Khrushchev's speech dated 25 January 1955, the resolution was adopted on 31 January 1955 by the Plenum of the Central Committee of the Communist Party of the Soviet Union. *Pravda*, 2 February 1955, 1-3. See also: Richter, "Plans to urbanize the countryside", 41-42.

¹⁵ *XX s'ezd Kommunisticheskoi partii Sovetskogo Soiuza*, 68-69.

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invest in the countryside. Based seemingly on another reasoning, Khrushchev, after his June 1954 trip to the Kazakh Republic, suggested that agricultural expansion in the Virgin Lands should be performed mostly by sovkhozes and that it was thus necessary to reorganize local kolkhozes into sovkhozes.¹⁶ Between 1955 and 1965, around 1,900 former collective farms throughout the Kazakh Republic were absorbed by the sovkhoz economy. The total kolkhoz population reduced by half while the total number of sovkhoz workers doubled. While in 1954 and 1955 only one fifth of the total rural workforce was concentrated in sovkhozes, the state employed almost four fifths a decade later.¹⁷ Crops and livestock formerly owned by kolkhozes were transferred (free of charge) to sovkhozes, which led to a “rapid rise” in the sovkhoz production output.¹⁸ Soviet propaganda celebrated the Virgin Lands and the Kazakh Republic as a whole for its “large-scale sovkhoz production” which supposedly proved the superiority of advanced socialist forms of agricultural production.¹⁹

The conversion of kolkhozes into sovkhozes did not become a universal recipe for agricultural and rural development in the Soviet Union. As Miller suggests, the state did not always want to assume the accompanying financial burden, while the wealthiest of kolkhozes did not want to change the status quo.²⁰ However, in the Virgin Lands, this practice was widespread and the state assumed not only the financial burden of agricultural development, but also the costs of bringing the welfare state, with all its benefits and shortcomings, to rural populations. Sovkhozes hired former kolkhoz members as wageworkers and the state undertook to settle the debts of former kolkhozes to their members and the state.²¹ In some cases, former

¹⁶ Khrushchev, *Stroitel'stvo kommunizma v SSSR*, 296-305.

¹⁷ Dutbaeva, “Vliianie osvoeniia tselinnykh i zalezhnykh zemel'”, 128-131.

¹⁸ Shlykova, “Preobrazovanie kolkhozov v sovkhozy”, 158-163.

¹⁹ *Kazakhstanskaia pravda*, 12 January 1956, 2.

²⁰ Miller, *One Hundred Thousand Tractors*, 320.

²¹ Resolution No. 459 “About the procedure of handover of kolkhoz possessions during the transformation of kolkhozy into sovkhozy” approved the Council of Ministers of the USSR and the Central Committee of the CPSU on 3 May 1957. Shlykova, “Preobrazovanie kolkhozov v sovkhozy”, 152–154; Gosudarstvennyi arkhiv Kostanaiskoi oblasti, *Osvoenie tselinnykh i zaleznykh zemel'*, 421-422.

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kolkhoz members had to be relocated in order to make way for newcomers.²² In the initial years of the VLC, the state clearly focused on investing in sovkhos headquarters (*usad'by*) while brigades doing fieldwork tens of kilometers away from headquarters had to live in wagonettes at best.²³ This imbalance was resolved by organizing sovkhos branches in former kolkhozes (Slav-populated villages and Kazakh-populated *auls*²⁴) taken over by the state. All in all, the state took over the means of production, secured new workers and established control over remote places, while former kolkhoz members upgraded their social status to the working class and became modern workers which also implied that they became entitled to social benefits, like pensions, from the state. Over and above that, the nationalization of the countryside provided, as Melvin puts it, “a backdoor means of increasing state investment into the countryside”.²⁵

The Soviet state reconciled its ideological prejudices towards kolkhoz development in the Seven-Year Term, or the Seven-Year Plan for the Economic Development of the Soviet Union (1959 - 1965).²⁶ The crucial role of kolkhozes in the recent achievements of Soviet agriculture was emphasised and the “blurring of the distinctions” between collective property and public property was anticipated to happen at some point in the Communist future. These distinctions were to fade away “not as result of the curtailment of collective property but by enhancing the level of its socialization to [the level of] public [property] with the help and assistance from the side of the

²² For example, in Karabalyk Raion (Kustanai Oblast) the residents of the former kolkhoz Berlik, one of four collective farms that were taken over in 1955 and 1956 by the state to establish a sovkhos (named Pobeda), had to move 30 kilometres southwards, to another former kolkhoz in order to vacate premises for the sovkhos's headquarters. Ref Similar resettlements seem to have been performed in other raions as well. Gosudarstvennyi arkhiv Kostanaiskoi oblasti, *Osvoenie tselinnykh i zaleznykh zemel'*, 71; APRK, f. 708, op. 27, d. 1611, l.

²³ *Kazakhstanskaia pravda*, 12 January 1956, 2.

²⁴ An aul was a type of rural settlement populated predominantly with Kazakhs and, on average, smaller in terms of the size of population than a Slav-populated village. Presently, this word is used as synonymous to “village” (*selo* or *posielok* in Russian).

²⁵ See also: Melvin, *Soviet Power and the Countryside*, 46, 208.

²⁶ *Kommunisticheskaia partiia Sovetskogo Soiuza v rezoliutsiakh*, 5: 296-412.

socialist state.”²⁷ In practice it meant that kolkhozes would pull resources together for the creation of inter-kolkhoz organisations to do construction, production and welfare works. This “new stage” in kolkhoz development, as well as the “growing role of sovkhoses in agricultural production” were seen by the Communists as two key ingredients for achieving an abundance of agricultural products, which, in turn, was “one of the most important preconditions for transition to Communism”.²⁸ A “radical improvement of the standard of living” became, at last, a prospect for the entire rural population. “In the future, the Party aims to transform the kolkhoz village into a well-organized urban-type settlement with all the achievements of modern communal, welfare and cultural services in place” - claimed Khrushchev at the 21st Party Congress (27 January – 5 February 1959) at which the Seven-Year Plan was adopted. The state committed to invest in kolkhoz production, welfare and infrastructure a third of the total planned investments.²⁹ In three years, kolkhoz development as a solution to overcoming differences between town and countryside became part of the twenty-year party program.³⁰ In July 1964, just before Khrushchev was ousted from power as the First Secretary of the Central Committee of the Communist Party, kolkhoz people became entitled to pensions and maternity and disability benefits.³¹ The Soviet Union, until its collapse, remained ideologically and economically committed to improving rural living.

The Virgin Lands prior to the VLC

Although the idea of building “socialism in agriculture” went back to the pre-war years, the actual policies towards the countryside did not uphold this vision. The particularly poor economic state of the Soviet kolkhoz, drained of people and resources for war and the post-war recovery, as well as overall socio-political apathy in the last few years under Stalin’s rule, had hindered rural areas from any

²⁷ Ibid, 311.

²⁸ Ibid, 357.

²⁹ Ibid, 368.

³⁰ See also: Richter, “Plans to urbanize the countryside.”

³¹ The Law of the USSR on pensions and benefits for kolkhoz members was adopted on 15 July 1964 and came into force on 1 January 1965. *Kazakhstanskaia pravda*, 17 July 1964, 2.

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development. Even sovkhozes, the regime's stronghold in the countryside, were short of workers, housing and such public facilities as schools and hospitals.³² As Kazakhstan historian Saktaganova puts it, "the 'post-war sacrifice syndrome' [*sindrom poslevoennoi zhertvennosti*] that had developed in society and the esoteric fear of Soviet people for the system and its punitive organs, led to a complete suppression of initiative, creativity and a lack of interest in the results of labor."³³

The post-war period preceding the VLC was not (or, at least, is not recalled as) particularly tough,³⁴ compared to the earlier tragic experiences that took place in the early 1930s and the first half of the 1940s. These collective traumas included forced collectivization of the peasantry associated with compulsory sedentarization of nomadic Kazakhs and the relocation of Slavic *kulaks* (wealthy peasants) to the Kazakh steppe, as well as the deportation of entire ethnic groups to the Kazakh Republic and the conscription of the local male population to the war. These hardships took many lives, destroyed established life patterns and made poverty the normality.³⁵

In 1951 and 1952, the average pay for a day of labor (*trudoden'*) in Kazakh kolkhozes was less than one ruble and (sometimes: or) less than one kilogram of grain, and working 120 days a year was compulsory for all adult kolkhoz residents.³⁶ Labor days was calculated throughout a year and the lump sum was paid once or twice a year after the state made advance or final payments to kolkhozes for their deliveries of agricultural produce, a compulsory practice in the Soviet Union. In 1951, an average kolkhoz household in the Kazakh Republic received a total of 500 rubles as its share

³² *Pravda*, 26 September 1953, 1-4.

³³ Saktaganova, *Ekonomicheskaiia modernizatsiia*, 140.

³⁴ The droughts of 1946, which turned into mass hunger in some regions of Russian and Ukraine, did not affect Kazakhstan. Kondrashin, *Golod 1946-1947 gg.*

³⁵ For a detailed historic account on the sedenterization and collectivization campaigns in Soviet Kazakhstan see, for example: Kindler, *Stalin's Nomads*. For an autobiographic account, see: Shaiakhmetov, *The Silent Steppe*.

³⁶ Shaiakhmetov, Zh. "Doklad 'O khode vypolneniia sentiabr'skogo Plenuma TsK KPSS 'O merakh dal'neishego razvitiia sel'skogo khoziaistva SSSR' na IX plenum TsK KP Kazakhstana." APRK, f. 708, op. 27, d. 33. See also: Abylkhozhyn, *Ocherki sotsial'no-ekonomicheskoi istorii*, 235-236; Saktaganova, *Ekonomicheskaiia modernizatsiia*, 115, 141.

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for the kolkhoz's deliveries to the state.³⁷ Although collective farmers had to pay in-kind taxes for every domestic animal and every hundred square meters of cropland owned privately,³⁸ they lived off their private plots and the sale of their produce (or rather its exchange for industrial goods) on the kolkhoz market.³⁹ For example, kolkhoz people could exchange the potatoes they grew for a piece of fabric: a deal in 1944 was 40 kilograms for one linear meter.⁴⁰ On top of that, the state collected insurance fees for crops and livestock and made farmers purchase lottery bonds (the latter was to finance the Soviet budgetary deficits).⁴¹ The situation in the early 1950s was like this: If a kolkhoz family wanted to save, for example, for a *Moskvich* (an automobile of Soviet production and the summit of Soviet consumer ambitions), they could only do so - provided that their earnings and the state prices of 1951 did not change – over a period of at least 18 years while living off their allotments.

The post-war Kazakh countryside, as any rural area in the Soviet Union, was represented mostly by old people, widowed women, children and veterans with war-related injuries and illnesses.⁴² As anywhere else in the Soviet Union, local kolkhoz people were not entitled to pension benefits and internal passports. If a kolkhoz resident had or wanted to leave the rural district, he or she had to receive a permit from the kolkhoz chairperson or the district council.⁴³ Most rural adults had only primary school education, if any.⁴⁴ Often, people in kolkhozes did not have any clothes to change and some children had neither shoes nor clothing to go to school.⁴⁵

³⁷ Saktaganova, *Ekonomicheskaiia modernizatsiia*, 141.

³⁸ Saktaganova, *Ekonomicheskaiia modernizatsiia*, 142.

³⁹ GAAO, f. 512, op. 6, d. 31, sv. 1, ll. 46-49.

⁴⁰ Orynbaeva, "Povsednevnaia zhizn' kazakhstanskogo sela."

⁴¹ Abylkhozhyn, *Ocherki sotsial'no-ekonomicheskoi istorii*, 236-237.

⁴² APRK, f. 708, op. 29, d. 188, ll. 118-121; Kozybaev, "Tyndagy kunder", 131-132; Abdigazy kyzy, *Aga amanaty*, 66-70; my interview with Anusa Abdigazy kyzy.

⁴³ Hanson, *The Rise and Fall of the Soviet Economy*, 66; Zelenin, "N. S. Khrushchev's Agrarian Policy," 58.

⁴⁴ For example, see the household record books for years 1951 to 1953 of Rozhdestvenka Village (Lazovskii Raion, Pavlodar Oblast). GAPO, f. 380, op. 2, d. 60, sv. 7.

⁴⁵ GAKO, f. 250, op. 1, d. 361, l.

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Rural schools were in need of writing utensils, textbooks, and writing paper, not to mention furniture: children had to use soot and bird feathers to write and reed mats to sit on the dirt floors.⁴⁶ Health care facilities could be located hundreds of kilometres away and were under-equipped.⁴⁷ For adequate medical care, people from remote areas had to go to the nearest town (a district or regional administrative center), which was almost impossible most of the year due to a lack of transport and the impassability of roads in autumn, winter and spring. Bathhouses were rare, especially in Kazakh-populated areas,⁴⁸ and diseases associated with poor hygiene (like typhus and typhoid) were a concern for central health care authorities.⁴⁹ Household record books show a considerable rate of child mortality;⁵⁰ however, more general data is absent.

Most of the rural population lived in overcrowded mud huts, made of adobe or sod and having no flooring, or yurts, and heated their dwellings with reed or dung.⁵¹ Most kolkhozes were not connected to the electric grid and used low-power diesel generators to satisfy kolkhoz families' needs for electricity to provide light in the mornings and evenings.⁵² Such essential commodities as matches, kerosene, salt and tea were scarce.⁵³ Horses were the main means of transportation.⁵⁴ This was the

⁴⁶ Zadorozhnyi, *Shkoly Kazakhstana*, 12; Akbasov, *Sud'ba stepniaka*, 26; Abdigazy kyzy, *Aga Amanaty*, 66-70. For a more detailed account on the situation with schooling before 1954, see Chapter Four.

⁴⁷ *Kostanaiskaia oblast': stranitsy istorii*, 267-271; GAAO, f. 622, op. 2, d. 34, l. 61 (283).

⁴⁸ GAAO, f. 622, op. 2, d. 34, l. 61 (283); f. 622, op. 1, d. 43, ll. 5-6.

⁴⁹ In 1949, there was a considerable reduction in both diseases which was attributed to the improvement of health care in rural areas, such as an increased number of hospital beds and vaccines. GAAO, f. 609, op. 1, d. 3, ll. 72, 75.

⁵⁰ For example, in the village of Berlik (Karabalyk Raion, Kustanai Oblast) which consisted of 95 households, 12 out of 105 children born between 1950 and 1956 died before they turned five. GAKO, f. R-1339, op.3, dd. 1a, 1b, 1v, 1g.

⁵¹ APRK, f. 708, op. 31, d. 1540, l. 236; Kozybaev, "Tyndagy kunder", 231-232; Abdigazy kyzy, *Aga Amanaty*, 66-70; my interview with Anusa Abdigazy kyzy, *Kostanaiskaia oblast': stranitsy istorii*, 279-281.

⁵² *Narodnoe khoziaistvo Kazakhstana* 5, 1960, 50; my interview with Nina Poukh.

⁵³ Orynbaeva, "Povsednevnaia zhyzn' kazakhstanskogo sela."

⁵⁴ Kozybaev, "Tyndagy kunder," 250.

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everyday reality in northern Kazakhstan before it became the arena for the VLC and various developments associated with it.

The VLC and Rural Construction

In order to create a living environment for new workers and resettle them in the Virgin Lands, housing and public facilities had to be built in a fast and cheap manner. This required not only a constant supply of large numbers of construction workers and huge amounts of building materials, but, foremost, the establishment of its own construction industry which, prior to the VLC, was close to absent in the Kazakh Republic. In practice, this meant setting up the local production of building materials and training of its own architects, engineers and construction workers. Locally produced building materials and, especially, reinforced concrete parts, were to make construction cheaper and faster. Architects and engineers were to localize centrally produced blueprints and development plans. In the meanwhile, the Virgin Lands had to rely on imported prefabricated building parts and non-local construction workers, both coming mostly from Russia. Making the Virgin Lands habitable depended so much on external resources that local party propagandists celebrated new settlers for building “exemplary villages” and bringing “advanced culture” to the Kazakh steppe.⁵⁵

After his May 1954 trip to the Kazakh Republic, Khrushchev pointed out that it was “necessary to create some kind of authoritative commission for construction or to establish a construction organization that would carry out construction”.⁵⁶ Later the same year, the Ministry of Urban and Rural Construction of the Kazakh Republic was established, having replaced the Ministry of Residential Construction and Civil Engineering.⁵⁷ (In comparison, the Ministry of Rural Construction in the Tajik Republic was only launched in 1965.⁵⁸) A board (*kollegiia*) on construction in the Virgin Lands

⁵⁵ Auezov, M. “Novaia vesna Kazakhstana.” *Pravda*, 30 April 1955, 2.

⁵⁶ Khrushchev, *Stroitel'stvo kommunizma v SSSR*, 301-302.

⁵⁷ Ukaz Presidiuma Verkhovnogo Soveta Kazakhskoi SSR ob obrazovanii Ministerstva gorodskogo i sel'skogo stoitel'stva Kazakhskoi SSR. *Kazakhstanskaia pravda*, 7 October 1954, 1.

⁵⁸ Kalinovskiy, *Tractors, Power Lines, and the Welfare State*, 586.

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was established in Moscow, at the Ministry of Urban and Rural Construction of the USSR, which was also a new entity.⁵⁹ Although later construction affairs in the Virgin Lands were handled by multiple institutions,⁶⁰ the creation of such authorities in Moscow and Alma-Ata clearly signaled that the Soviet state had committed to rural construction and, more generally, to rural development and that it was placed in the state's priority ranking as high as urban development.

The new industry faced an immediate and ambitious task. Already in 1956, the republic had to have the capacity to undertake 80 to 90 percent of all construction with the use of locally produced building materials.⁶¹ The Soviet boom in housing construction, which was put into motion by the 1957 Resolution on the Development of Residential Construction in the Soviet Union, increased the pressure. In a three-year period, the state committed to building 15 million square meters of residential floorage in the Kazakh SSR, equaling twice the size of that in the four other Central Asian republics combined.⁶²

This presented a serious challenge for the local production of building materials that was small-scale and primitive (*kustarnyi*) and gave out mostly adobe bricks. Villagers tempered adobe with the help of bulls or tractors, moulded bricks manually and dried them in the sun.⁶³ Until around 1960, construction in the Virgin Lands relied heavily on imported prefabricated parts and structures such as prefabricated wooden homes.⁶⁴ While the amount of these prefabricated homes was insufficient to fully meet demand, they also proved to be unsuitable for the windy and cold winters.⁶⁵ Huge distances posed another obstacle, making transportation costs for building

⁵⁹ Melvin, *Soviet Power and the Countryside*, 218.

⁶⁰ *Sel'skoe stroitel'stvo v Tselinnom krae*, 73-74.

⁶¹ *Respublikanskoe soveshchanie po stroitel'stvu*, 83; *Kazakhstanskaia pravda*, 2 March 1956, 3.

⁶² TsGARK, f. 1683, op. 1, d. 87, sv. 12, ll. 59-62.

⁶³ My interview with Nina Poukh.

⁶⁴ "O sozdanii material'no-tekhnicheskoi bazy stroitel'stva v Tselinnom krae", *Ekonomika stroitel'stva* 5, 1961, 22-28.

⁶⁵ *Respublikanskoe soveshchanie po stroitel'stvu*, 68-69, 81; Makushyn, *Stroitel'stvo v tselinnykh sovkhkhakh*. 9-10.

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materials high - the cost of prefabricated wooden homes doubled and the cost, for instance, of such initially cheap building material as rubble stone (*butovyi kamen'*) increased by eight to ten times.⁶⁶ To minimize construction costs, the use of the locally abundant reed was encouraged, but the industrialization of its production did not progress as quickly as desired.⁶⁷

The period until around 1960 was especially turbulent and “construction outpaced planning” in the Virgin Lands.⁶⁸ Besides building materials, the emerging construction industry was short of mechanisms, permanent workers and standard blueprints, which all made construction slow and costly.⁶⁹ Resources invested in the construction of production facilities, rural infrastructure and housing were scattered across a multitude of construction sites. Because of the poor living and working conditions, as well as a long winter season, a dead time in the construction industry, many non-local construction workers, on which the Virgin Lands still depended, would opt to leave.⁷⁰ The turnover of human resources in some construction trusts was almost 100 percent.⁷¹

The Kazakh Republic did not yet prepare its own engineers and architects while blueprints offered by developers from Russia, Ukraine and Belarus were, as a rule, not tailored to the use of local materials and not localized to the climatic and geographical conditions of the Kazakh countryside.⁷² In some cases, construction workers had to adjust such designs right on the construction site, which inevitably affected the quality of construction.⁷³ Numerous construction projects were carried

⁶⁶ *Respublikanskoe soveshchanie po stroitel'stvu*, 72-73.

⁶⁷ *Kazakhstanskaia pravda*, 17 May 1956, 2; Makushyn, *Stroitel'stvo v tselinnykh sovkhovakh*, 9-10.

⁶⁸ *Praktika planirovki i zastroiki sel'skikh naselennykh mest v Kazakhskoi SSR*, 2-4.

⁶⁹ *Kazakhstanskaia pravda*, 21 April 1956, 2-3; *Kazakhstanskaia pravda*, 27 January 1958, 3.

⁷⁰ *Kazakhstanskaia pravda*, 5 September 1956, 1; *Kommunisticheskaia partiia Kazakhstana v bor'be za osvoinie tselinnykh i zaleznykh zemel'*, 445.

⁷¹ Beletchenko, *Severo-Kazakhstanskaia oblast'*, 309.

⁷² “O planirovke i zastroike gorodov,” *Narodnoe khoziaistvo Kazakhstana* 8, 1960, 80-84; *Pravlenie Soiuzu arkhitektorov Kazakhskoi SSR, Otchetnyi doklad*, 11.

⁷³ *Respublikanskoe soveshchanie po stroitel'stvu*, 67.

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out spontaneously and many of them were protracted to the next year.⁷⁴ This all resulted in high costs of construction and a rapid deterioration of structures, to the extent that some of the new sovkhoses looked neglected only four to five years after they were set up. Perhaps one of the most serious consequences was that many of them did not have stable access to clean water: by 1960, a third of them had to transport drinking water from 50 kilometers away or collect snow-melted water.⁷⁵

In the tselina sovkhoses, the actual floorage per person was four square meters, or half of that in urban areas. The shortage of housing was the main reason for the high turnover of employees and conflicts in the Virgin Lands.⁷⁶ To overcome the shortage of construction workers, school graduates and women, drawn from among local homemakers and newly resettled recruits, would be encouraged to go into this poorly mechanized industry.⁷⁷

In the early 1960s, the republic's manufacture of building materials began to ascend to industrial scales and the use of standard building parts made of reinforced concrete as well as skeleton-type construction grew common.⁷⁸ Central planning institutions of the Soviet Union (*Gossel'sroi*, *Giprosel'khoz* and *Mosoblproekt*) developed a series of standard blueprints for all types of construction (housing, production facilities and public facilities) tailored specifically to the Virgin Lands Region, or, as it was officially named in December 1960, *Tselinnyi Krai*.⁷⁹ The large construction directorate, *Glavtselinastroii*, replaced a great number of smaller construction organizations in the region, and the coordination of construction works

⁷⁴ GAAO, f. 512, op. 6, d. 102, sv. 4, ll. 148-149; *Respublikanskoe soveshchanie po stroitel'stvu*, 68-69.

⁷⁵ *Praktika planirovki i zastroiki sel'skikh naselennykh mest v Kazakhskoi SSR*, 2-4.

⁷⁶ "Polnee ispol'zovat' bogatstva osvoennoi tseliny," *Narodnoe khoziaistvo Kazakhstana* 5, 1960, 44-49; Kozlov, *Massovye besporiadki v SSSR pri Khrushcheve i Brezhneve*, 113-124.

⁷⁷ TSARK, f. 1683, op. 1, d. 86, sv. 12, ll. 1-7, 44-45; *Respublikanskoe soveshchanie po stroitel'stvu*, 68, 75; *Kommunisticheskaia partiia Kazakhstana v rezoliutsiakh*, 4: 281-282; Pravlenie Soiuza arkhitektorov Kazakhskoi SSR, *Otchetnyi doklad*, 1; GAPO, f. 646, op. 5, d. 166, ll. 5, 22-28; Pohl, "Women and Girls in the Virgin Lands," 58.

⁷⁸ Makushyn, *Stroitel'stvo v tselinnykh sovkhosakh*, 24.

⁷⁹ *Sel'skoe stroitel'stvo v Tselinnom krae*, 9-19.

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in the Virgin Lands improved considerably. The transformation of Akmola, a district-level administrative centre consisting of mostly single-storey buildings of wood, into Tselinograd, the capital of the *Tselinnyi Krai* and a modern Soviet city, with five-storey houses, large hospitals, schools and colleges, paved streets, a wide-screen cinema, department stores, restaurants and a concert hall named the Palace of Tselina People (*Dvorets tselinnikov*), began. It was, mainly, a shock-construction project implemented under Moscow's patronage and by construction workers from Moscow, Leningrad and Alma-Ata.⁸⁰ The centralized water supply, municipal sewage lines and centralized heating grew as new attributes of urban living in the Kazakh Republic.⁸¹ This was the time when Tselinograd residents would say that communism had already arrived there.⁸²

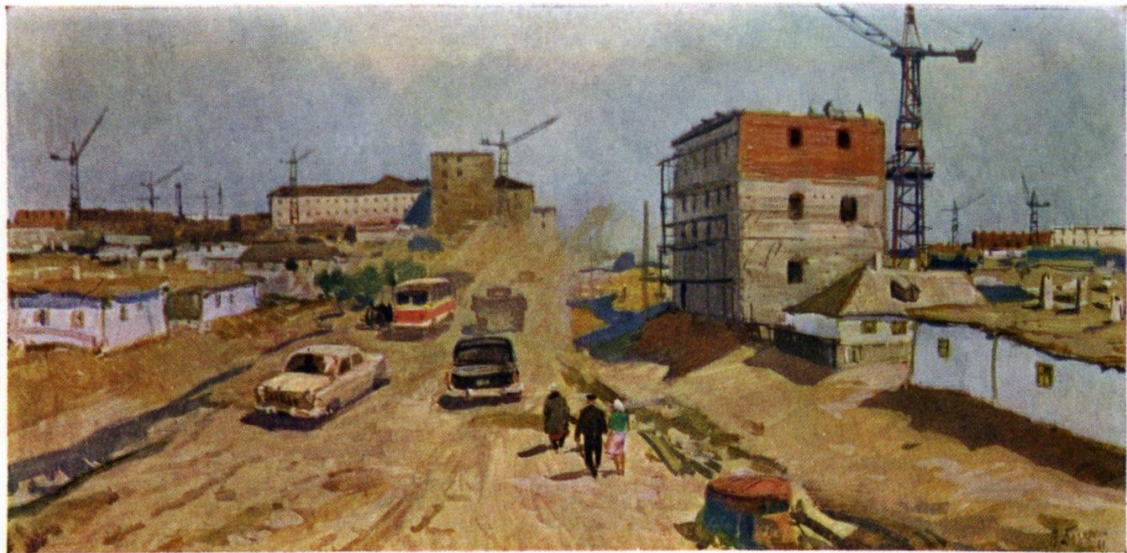


Figure 1. "Tselinograd stroitsia" (Tselinograd is being built), a painting by Bogatkin V.V., 1961. Source: *Kazakhstan - tselinnyi krai*.

The urbanization of rural life was a long-cherished dream of Soviet planners and, with the onset of the VLC, the emergence of town-like sovkhozes in the Kazakh steppe was anticipated. However, the Virgin Lands, with the exception of regional and industrial

⁸⁰ Mussagaliyeva, "Tselinograd as Soviet Project", 178-180; Dosanov, *Tselinograd*, 55-56.

⁸¹ *Kostanaiskaya oblast': stranitsy istorii*, 358-359.

⁸² Pohl, "The 'planet of one hundred languages'," 255.

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centres, did not grow under Khrushchev into a truly urbanized landscape. Such engineering improvements as water supply, heating and street infrastructure did not become part of rural living at least until the second half of the 1970s when many of the tselina sovkhozes were reconstructed into modern and more efficient production units.⁸³ Even more inconsistent with the ideological premises of Soviet communists was the fact that the privately owned livestock remained a subsidiary livelihood in sovkhozes, not to mention kolkhozes,⁸⁴ which, in the eyes of propagandists, damaged “socialist production”, eroded labour discipline and corrupted the “mentality of people”.⁸⁵ In other words, individualist patterns of agricultural production dominated over the socialist economy in the Kazakh countryside.

On the other hand, electricity, full schooling (from grade one to grade seven as the minimum and to grade ten as the maximum), more accessible health care, two- to three-room apartments with separate kitchens (a toilet cabin remained an outside convenience), cinema showings and summer camps for children, were increasingly seen as the new tselina normality.⁸⁶ Because of the priority allocation of housing and housing construction loans,⁸⁷ schoolteachers and medical staff settled down in rural areas more willingly. For instance, between 1950 and 1965, the availability of medical doctors per 10,000 persons doubled in the Kazakh Republic: from 9.5 to 19.⁸⁸ Although the official statistic did not provide data on how much of these were available for the rural population, the provision of health care must have improved considerably in the Kazakh countryside. It was becoming more lively and attractive

⁸³ My interview with Vladimir Maksimenko; Tselinogradskii sel'skokhoziaistvennyi institut, *Osobennosti sotsial'no-ekonomicheskogo razvitiia sela*, 18-19.

⁸⁴ In 1966, the numbers of cows and pigs privately owned by workers and kolkhoz people in the republic was only a third less than the sovkhoz herds. *Kazakhstan za 50 let: Statisticheskii sbornik*, 84-85.

⁸⁵ *Partiinaiia zhyzn' Kazakhstana* 12, 1960, 3-9.

⁸⁶ Dvoskin, Sidorov, *Tselinnyi krai*, 47-48; Makushyn, *Stroitel'stvo v tselinnykh sovkhozakh*, 20-21.

⁸⁷ Reinforced by the Council of Ministers of the Kazakh SSR in spring 1957, this norm had been introduced on the all-Union level earlier, in the late 1940s. *Uchitel' Kazakhstana*, 25 April 1957, 2.

⁸⁸ *Kazakhstan za 50 let: Statisticheskii sbornik*, 143.

for workers, including health care specialists, thanks to, among other things, with the improvement of the housing situation.

The development of kolkhozes progressed at a slower pace because of their limited resources and capacities. The state encouraged kolkhozes to improve their welfare status by giving them construction loans, organizing training courses (although they proved to be unpopular among kolkhoz people) and producing manuals on construction as well as promoting the idea of “cultural construction” in the countryside.⁸⁹ For example, the Communist Party of Kazakhstan picked up an initiative of the kolkhozes of Taran Raion (Kustanai Oblast) to build a range of public facilities (schools, clubs, libraries) at the expense of the kolkhozes, and elevated it to a republic-wide campaign. State loans were meant for building houses and, starting from 1958, large, inter-kolkhoz schools.⁹⁰ The state prioritized the granting of 10-year housing construction loans to those who arrived within resettlement schemes; however later on, local kolkhoz people could obtain such loans too and move from their huts to three-room frame houses.⁹¹ Crediting the tselina campaign for the radical improvement of the housing situation (“we all slept on the floor before, whereas now we sleep in beds”), was widespread among senior residents of Kazakh North in the post-independence period.⁹²

From around 1960 onwards, the state shifted to a more systematic approach in providing more lasting, durable structures to the region. Development planning for rural areas in the form of development plans for sovkhozes and kolkhozes (*general'nye plany zastroiki*) and planning designs for entire agricultural districts (*proekty raionnoi planirovki dlia sel'skokhoziaistvennykh raionov*) began to appear in

⁸⁹ “Spravochnoe posobie dlia kolkhoznykh stroitelei,” *Sel'skoe khoziaistvo Kazakhstana* 6, 1957, 56–57.

⁹⁰ *Kazakhstanskaia pravda*, 16 October 1954, 1; 27 May 1960, 1; TsGARK, f. 1683, op. 1, d. 86, sv. 12, l. 28; APRK, f. 708, op. 34, d. 1690 (a note from the Vice-Chairperson of the State Planning Committee, Omarov).

⁹¹ GAPO, f. 646, op. 5, d. 186, “L'goty po pereseleniiu”; my interview with Nina Poukh.

⁹² Pohl, “Women and Girls in the Virgin Lands,” 72.

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the Kazakh Republic.⁹³ While for the regime this helped to gain greater social, ideological and cultural influence over its more dispersed and less educated population, for rural dwellers it was a promise of wealth, stability and a time when “the [old Kazakh] aul will become a museum.”⁹⁴ Kazakh writer Ivan Shchegolikhin captured the thrill of anticipation of the new life in the Virgin Lands in his 1961 novel:

“By the spring, we are going to have a laundry facility with machine washing. In the morning, the car will go around the village and collect the laundry to be washed, and in the evening deliver the washed and ironed [clothes]. There is already a nursery, and there will be a kindergarten.... [...] By the autumn, we are going to open a large canteen [whose] foundation has already been laid according to a standard blueprint. The price of lunch will be three or four rubles. You can order [food] to your home.... I talk about the future all the time, but, after all, we have been living in the tselina for only two years, and in the old, advanced sovkhoses, all this has long been established, it is easier to live there.”

As he later shared in his memoirs, Moscow propagandists tried to convince him to show the broader significance of the tselina.⁹⁵ Although these powerful images might not have been locally produced, they nevertheless became part of the Soviet utopia many people in the Kazakh Republic of the 1960s wanted to believe.

Alternative Model for Rural Development

In the initial years of the VLC, the Party’s efforts with regard to developing the Kazakh countryside clearly focused on newcomers and sovkhos headquarters.⁹⁶ Remote farms and distant herding areas initially fell outside of development considerations. However, after Khrushchev drew the Soviet Union into the meat race with the United States and, as I discussed in the next chapter, Kazakh shepherds began to move to the forefront of the “labor struggle for communism”, their welfare became the

⁹³ *Praktika planirovki i zastroiki sel'skikh naselennykh mest v Kazakhskoi SSR*, 2-4.

⁹⁴ Nurshaikhov, *Portrety*, 76.

⁹⁵ Shchegolichin, *Mir vam, trevogi proshlykh let*, 63-64.

⁹⁶ *Kommunisticheskaia partiia Kazakhstana v rezoliutsiiakh*, 5: 73-80.

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Party's concern too. Planners and propagandists embarked on the task to make Kazakh herders part of Soviet modernity too.

Distant herding (*otgonnoe zhyvotnovodstvo*) was long associated with nomadic existence and thus, was doomed by Soviet communists as primitive and backward. The yurt, a dismountable round-shaped carcass dwelling traditionally used by steppe nomads, fell prey to the same attitude. Distant herding as a practice of Kazakh nomads, was brutally discontinued by collectivization and officially reintroduced in Soviet Kazakhstan during World War Two. The regime did not hide its reasons for deciding to resume this practice: male laborers who used to stock hay were mostly conscripted to the front while the republic had to provide animal produce for the army, other rearward regions and the industry.⁹⁷

Communists claimed, however, that keeping the livestock on distant pastures “did not come from a mere repetition of the pre-revolutionary practice”, but had been applied with “fundamental changes”.⁹⁸ These “changes” lay primarily in the fact that planners supposedly did not let things “drift”: there was a plan according to which distant herding, as any economic activity in the Soviet Union, was supposed to take place. As before collectivization, the animals grazed on distant pastures in summer, while in winter – in contrast to the nomadic herding practice – they were supposed to be kept in barns and fed with stocked hay. In 1945, almost half (46 percent, or 4.4 million animals) of all the livestock population was kept on distant pastures.⁹⁹

The heavy losses in the republic's animal husbandry in the early 1950s (more on this is in Chapter Two) stirred up criticism of “backward forms” of livestock production.¹⁰⁰

⁹⁷ According to the then First Secretary, Zhumabai Shaiakhmetov, during the five war years, Kazakh kolkhozes delivered more meat, milk and wool than in the five preceding years. Shaiakhmetov, *Otchetnyi doklad o rabote TsK KP(b)K na IV s"ezde Kommunisticheskoi partii (bol'shevikov) Kazakhstana*, 29-30.

⁹⁸ Shaiakhmetov, *Otchetnyi doklad o rabote TsK KP(b)K na IV s"ezde Kommunisticheskoi partii (bol'shevikov) Kazakhstana*, 34.

⁹⁹ Balakaev, *Kolkhoznoe krest'ianstvo Kazakhstana*, 164-165.

¹⁰⁰ APRK, f. 708, op. 27, d. 33, ll. 15-16.

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Nevertheless, at the onset of the VLC, grazing and herding were widely practiced in the Kazakh Republic and generally tolerated by the Party. In the Virgin Lands, large herding areas remained on marginal lands in the southern counties of Kustanai, Akmola and Pavlodar provinces. For example, in the winter of 1956/57, in the Turgai Region, the southern part of Kustanai Oblast, 220 shepherds accompanied with their family members resided on distant pastures where they kept 125,000 animals, mostly sheep. These pastures were located in the Karakum desert, a few hundred kilometers south of the district administrations.

Shepherds' families would spend winters in distant pastures where they would dwell in mud huts. In the spring, they would move to yurts and, together with their flocks, head northwards in search of fresh pastures, closer to their kolkhozes. Although this sector of animal production relied entirely on nomadic, long-time herding practices, for the regime Kazakh shepherds were kolkhoz members grazing kolkhoz-owned flocks to be delivered to the state for meat, wool and skin. In some cases, a sort of primary school arrangement (teachers moving along with the shepherds) was evident in herding areas, while in other cases there were no schooling.¹⁰¹ Many shepherds had to crowd two to three families in one worn-out yurt or a hut with broken doors and fragmented glass in window openings. They did not have such necessities as tea, flour and warm clothing.¹⁰² The visits of physicians and veterinarians were a rare occasion in distant pastures.¹⁰³ Another problem was that in many cases, health care and veterinary workers could talk to shepherds only with the help of an interpreter (for a more detailed account on the language issues in the Virgin Lands, see Chapter Four). Because of these and some other issues, sheep breeding did not look attractive

¹⁰¹ GAKO, f. P-268, op. 1, d. 1430, sv. 206, ll. 15-16; GAPO, f. 646, op. 5, d. 695, sv. 155, ll. 22-23; *Uchitel' Kazakhstana*, 27 June 1957, 1.

¹⁰² Kozybaev, "Tyndagy kunder," 268. *Kazakhstanskaia pravda*, 29 January 1956, 3; APRK, f. 708, op. 31, d. 1540, l. 236.

¹⁰³ GAAO, f. 622, op. 2, d. 34, sv. 8, l. 61 (283); GAPO, f. 646, op. 5, d. 695, sv. 155, ll. 22-23.

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to young people and the shortage of the workforce in this sector, in the eyes of Soviet planners, limited its development.¹⁰⁴

Exercising ideological and cultural control over this dispersed population was a long-time concern and challenge for Soviet communists. Agitprop used so-called red yurts, an equivalent of village clubs, for the “provision of cultural services” (*kul'turnoe obsluzhyvanie*) to shepherds. Being under the supervision of the Ministry of Culture of the Kazakh Republic, they were supposed to give lectures and read newspapers to their majorly illiterate audience, as well as arrange radio listening and cinema showings. The latter as a highly modern form of entertainment was particularly popular among shepherds. Yet, the attitude of local communists to this form of propaganda was ambivalent: they could neither justify the use of red yurts, nor could they reject them completely for the reasons I discuss below.

The idea of organizing the red yurts outreach in the Kazakh steppe goes back to the pre-collectivization time. Soviet communists used red yurts expeditions, stationed in actual yurts equipped with medical workers, literacy instructors and legal experts, as an agitation tool to modernize the Kazakh nomads and, in particular, emancipate the women.¹⁰⁵ During collectivization, party ideologues disfavored the use of yurts in general and red yurts in particular as something associated with nomadic existence and, thus, a threat to the Soviet order. In the years of the Great Fatherland War,¹⁰⁶ red yurts were re-established as a form of ideological work to mobilize Kazakh herders to provide for the front. After the war, local propagandists again relegated the use of the red yurt as “outdated” and “inappropriate”.¹⁰⁷ Nevertheless, in the early 1950s, this specific form of agitprop continued to exist in remote pastures. Their coverage was, however, very limited: because of the shortage of actual yurts, the

¹⁰⁴ Khrushchev, *Stroitel'stvo kommunizma v SSSR*, 304; APRK, f. 708, op. 28, d. 1509, sv. 416, ll. 6-7; *Kazakhstanskaia pravda*, 16 November 1957, 2.

¹⁰⁵ Michaels, *Curative Powers*, 155-163.

¹⁰⁶ As the Second World War was referred to in the Soviet Union and, although this term carries a lot of ideological baggage, it defines the actual time frame of Soviet involvement in the war, that is 1941 to 1945.

¹⁰⁷ Turlybekova, “Deiatel'nost' seti kul'turno-prosvetitel'nykh uchrezhdenii Kazakhstana.”

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production of which had not become part of the Soviet planned economy, and the low performance of the red yurts workers, “thousands of kolkhoz herders” were left out of their reach.¹⁰⁸

Bringing remote pastures and their dwellers under political control regained importance in the second half of the 1950s. To turn into modern producers in the specific ideological settings of the Soviet Union, shepherds had to become not only economically efficient, but also politically loyal. A mass outreach campaign was put into motion by a special resolution of the Central Committee of the Communist Party of Kazakhstan, adopted in November 1957. Besides “strengthening mass political work” with shepherds, it aimed - for the first time in the history of the relationship between Soviet communists and Kazakh shepherds – at improving their welfare.¹⁰⁹ Although the measures proposed in this resolution were vague and became limited in practice, some crucial improvements were evident and, for the sake of a boost in livestock production, Kazakh shepherds were elevated as the new heroes of Soviet modernity. I discuss this in greater detail in the subsequent chapter.

In 1960, the policy towards the welfare of shepherds received more regulatory scrutiny and weight, specifically in a joint resolution of the Central Committee of the Communist Party and the Council of Ministers of the Kazakh SSR.¹¹⁰ Similar to the red yurts of the 1920s, so-called complex mobile brigades or auto-clubs (small teams of respective specialists moving in equipped buses) were to bring the shepherds the “usual” attributes of Soviet modernity: health care, books, radio, cinema, consumer goods and post. (In practice, the performance of these travelling clubs was poor because of the lack of spare parts for buses and local mismanagement issues.¹¹¹) Besides that, the resolution required the start of the manufacture of the very accessories that not long before had been associated with underdevelopment and treated as incompatible with the Soviet lifestyle. Yurts, special types of nomadic

¹⁰⁸ TsGARK, f. 1890, op. 1, d. 212, ll. 85-90; Turlybekova, “Deiatel'nost' seti kul'turno-prosvetitel'nykh uchrezhdenii Kazakhstana.”

¹⁰⁹ *Postanovlenie VII plenuma Tsentral'nogo Komiteta Kommunisticheskoi partii Kazakhstana*, 41-48.

¹¹⁰ *Kazakhstanskaia pravda*, 27 May 1960, 1.

¹¹¹ GAKO, f. 1113, op. 13, 109, sv. 18, ll. 79-81.

clothing (*saptama*, long leather-made boots with felt-made stockings, and *tymak* or *malakhai*, fur-made hats with four flaps covering the ears, nape of the neck and the forehead) and *dombra* (a Kazakh traditional musical instrument) were to make their way to distant pastures.¹¹² Some scholars assign this “revival” of Kazakh culture or Kazakh ethnic consciousness either to the influence of nationalistically-minded Kazakh writers, or to the historic “curiosity” which suddenly emerged in Kazakhs.¹¹³ However, as my analysis shows, it was – at least to some extent – socially engineered.

The production of yurts remained piecemeal between 1957 and 1960, and their lack in distant pastures was even ridiculed in a local satire.¹¹⁴ In 1960, the manufacture of portable dwellings for shepherds was, at last, put on an industrial scale.¹¹⁵ Curiously, the ideological debates about whether the use of yurts meant that Kazakhs had not broken free from the nomadic existence or was purely the result of economic need, were still there. The Ministry of Culture was particularly opposed to their usage for agitprop outreach and proposed to replace them with auto-clubs.¹¹⁶ As portrayed in a 1960 feature movie produced by *Kazakhfilm*, the “antediluvian worn-out yurt” was part of the “grandfathers’ romance” while a “real Kazakh” should aspire to high-tech.¹¹⁷ According to Nurymbet Dzhandil’din, the Secretary on Ideology in the years of the VLC, the yurt was still in use merely because no better replacement had been found and, since it bore the “imprint of an era when the level of production and technical thought was low”, no “idealization” of the yurt should be tolerated. “When the problem of providing herders with more convenient, specialized housing of a modern design is solved, the need for the further existence of the yurt, presumably,

¹¹² “O proizvodstve natsional'nykh tovarov,” *Narodnoe khoziaistvo Kazakhstana* 4, 1959, 85-87.

¹¹³ Kudaibergenova, *Rewriting the Nation in Modern Kazakh Literature*, 79; Akiner, “Melting Pot, Salad Bowl - Cauldron,” 384.

¹¹⁴ GAPO, f. 646, op. 5, d. 166, sv. 33, l. 89; TsGARK, f. 1682, op. 1, d. 31, ll. 55-59; *Partiinaia zhyzn' Kazakhstana* 12, 1960, 24-27.

¹¹⁵ APRK, f. 708, op. 34, d. 1690, a note from Omarov.

¹¹⁶ APRK, f. 708, op. 30, d. 303 (declassified), l. 3; Shmanov, A. “Raznye byvaiut traditsii,” *Partiinaia zhyzn' Kazakhstana* 2, 1959, 74-78.

¹¹⁷ Aimanov, Sh. *V odnom raione*. Kazakhfilm, 1960.

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will disappear by itself and painlessly” - he wrote in 1971.¹¹⁸ Although planners considered other types of dwelling for Kazakh shepherds, such as movable wooden houses and yurt-like plastic constructions, no better alternatives emerged.¹¹⁹

By the 1970s, the use of yurts spread into both private and public domains: it became a “personal badge of ethnic identity” and “acquired a ceremonial status as the settings for banquets and other such formal events”.¹²⁰ According to the Central Statistical Department, supplying shepherd yurts with gas for lighting, heating and cooking purposes became a widespread feature by 1970.¹²¹ Red yurts remained in distant pastures too.¹²²



Figure 2. [Caption:]

- They brought our shepherd new yurt, boots, raincoat and books.

¹¹⁸ Dzhandil'din, *Priroda natsional'noi psikhologii*, 281-282.

¹¹⁹ *Kazakhstanskaia pravda*, 2 March 1956, 4; *Sel'skoe khoziaistvo Kazakhstana* 9, 1961, 68–69.

¹²⁰ Akiner, “Melting Pot, Salad Bowl – Cauldron,” 384-385.

¹²¹ *Kazakhstan za 50 let*, 142.

¹²² GAAO, f. 903, op. 1, d. 37, sv. 3, ll. 1-4, 9.

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- This is only for the shoot.

Source: *Shmel'* 5, 1958, 10. The same cartoon appeared in its Kazakh edition.

Another implication of the regime's modernizing efforts among Kazakh herders was the improved schooling opportunities for their children. First of all, the process of shutting down small primary schools in herding areas, a trend which, as I discuss in Chapter Four, was connected with the growing number of Russian-medium schools for newcomers, was reversed: educational authorities re-opened them again.¹²³ The preservation of primary schools in sparsely populated rural settlements was secured by the new education law adopted in 1958 by the Supreme Council of the USSR, and it might well be that the Kazakh situation was one of the reasons for the appearance of this norm in Soviet legislation.¹²⁴ However, it was expensive to maintain small schools in terms of costs per pupil and problematic to staff because the workload of teachers would not warrant a decent salary. Large boarding schools became an alternative solution and a chance of obtaining full secondary education not only for children from herders' families, but also for orphans, children from single-parent families (which, in the Soviet case, were almost universally single-mother families), children of handicapped parents and children from large families.

Boarding schools were a novel concept of the new education law. Before that, in order to address the problem of including shepherds' children in secondary education, regional authorities encouraged kolkhozes and sovkhoses to organize boarding facilities at existing schools.¹²⁵ Boarding schools were meant not only for the Kazakh Republic, but this new type of schooling was established there, specifically with shepherds' children and girls from Kazakh families in mind.¹²⁶ Thus, the regime

¹²³ GAAO, f. 629, o. 3, ed.kh. 6, sv. 2, ll. 176-177; GAKO, f. 250, op. 1, d. 681, ll. 2-3.

¹²⁴ *Kazakhstanskaia pravda*, 29 March 1959, 2, 4.

¹²⁵ *Uchitel' Kazakhstana*, 21 July 1955, 2.

¹²⁶ Postanovlenie TsK KP Kazakhstana i Soveta Ministrov Kazakhskoi SSR 'Ob uluchshenii kul'turno-bytovykh uslovii zhyvotnovodov na uchastkakh otgona'. *Kazakhstanskaia pravda*, 27 May 1960, 1; Zakon 'Ob ukreplenii svyazi shkoly s zhyzn'iu i o dal'neishem razvitii sistemy narodnogo obrazovaniia v Kazakhskoi SSR', *Vedomosti Verkhovnogo Soveta i Pravitel'stva Kazakhskoi SSR* 10, 1959, 69–87.

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employed them not only as a welfare measure but also as a way to control the population in order to overcome the older forms of social life. (For the renewed efforts of the Communists in the period under research, to overcome “feudal remnants” regarding women, see also Chapter Three.)

The promise of social mobility for shepherds’ children found its expression in fictional literature and feature movies. They increasingly portrayed shepherds as supporters of higher education for their children. In his political fiction about the tselina period, prominent Kazakh writer, Ilyas Yessenberlin, assigns the following words to a Kazakh shepherd: “Is it possible that we all are fated to do only this: tend sheep? What if my children want to become engineers, pilots, doctors? The doors now are open to everybody, but from here, from a distant pasture, they are too far away.”¹²⁷ Boarding schools did not prove, at least in the short-run, to be popular among shepherds, both in the Virgin Lands and in the Kazakh Republic as a whole: in 1964, shepherds’ children made up less than ten percent of the pupils in all boarding schools throughout the republic.¹²⁸ Whatever the reason was behind this initial resistance (a lack of trust or the attempt to maintain their labor capacity on the side of shepherds, or the inability of the state to communicate its intentions effectively), boarding schools nevertheless grew in the Kazakh Republic as the new schooling and social mobility opportunity for rural children and as part of the rural welfare strategy.¹²⁹

Conclusion

Despite the turbulent beginning and against all the odds, the Tselina Campaign was a concerted effort to make the Kazakh countryside a modern producer and to bring a welfare state to this culturally heterogeneous and economically backward borderland. Because of its centrality for Khrushchev's views on rural development, the basic premises of, and contours for, a scheme to transform the Kazakh steppe and modernize its dwellers, were largely defined by Moscow planners. If in the

¹²⁷ Yessenberlin, *Lodka, pereplyvaiushchaia okean*. Initially written in 1975, this novel was not allowed for publication by Soviet censors due to its political content, and was first published only in 2001.

¹²⁸ GAKO, f. 269, op. 1, d. 1773, l. 89; *Uchitel' Kazakhstana*, 27 July 1964, 2.

¹²⁹ Zadorozhnyi, *Shkoly Kazakhstana*, 68-69; Ablazhei, *Kazakhskii migratsionnyi maiatnik*, 201.

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Stalinist state, order and production in this Soviet backwater, which had long served as a place of exile for political prisoners and “punished peoples”, was achieved by force and fear, uninterrupted production in Khrushchev's less violent mode of totalitarianism was secured by means of a less violent, but equally pervasive, approach. By turning the VLC into a rural development scheme, the regime sought to exercise greater political control over this potentially conflict-prone region and thus ensure the security of, and the stable production in, its eastern periphery. Figuratively speaking, scattered and diverse population in the Virgin Lands became for the Soviet Union's rural development efforts the another tselina to be tamed.

There was, at least until the mid-1960s, no local agency for formulating rural policies. However, the local economic, social and environmental settings considerably altered the initial strategy when planners, by trial and error, ploughed around for viable options. Whereas the Kazakh elites in Alma-Ata could not make many decisions in regard to agricultural and rural development in their northern territories, the relative success in crop production and the economic prospects of extensively managed sheep, allowed them to renegotiate with the centre some critical socio-cultural aspects, which is addressed in Chapter Three too. The economic necessity to keep the rural subjects diverse and scattered led to geographically differentiated approaches towards rural areas.

In the decade under review, the Soviet state was set to bring lasting structures and changes to its eastern perimeter. For the state, they signified improved possibilities to exercise ideological and economic control. For rural subjects, they brought about an improved welfare status and the possibility to re-actualize themselves, socially and culturally. Once again, the Virgin Land Campaign, as a lens into larger development processes, demonstrates the comparative flexibility of Soviet ideology and the comparative adjustability of Soviet planners to local settings in pursuing economic ambitions. The new social contract did not always bring the desired levels of productivity, nor the promised standard of living. However, the promise of a better life was well received and fuelled further economic development in the region.

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As Kalinovsky concludes in his analysis of the Soviet Tajik experience of orchestrating resettlement for the purposes of both cotton production and rural welfare: “What is fascinating about the Soviet case is the dynamic that developed as officials tried to reconcile utopian visions, economic imperatives, and the demands created by local conditions.”¹³⁰ This applies to the Virgin Lands case too: grain and meat demands alone cannot explain development interventions and local responses. The VLC as a rural development model would not have been feasible if the relationship between the state and rural producers had not been renewed. Khrushchev’s vision for the countryside, applied to the complex social mosaic of northern Kazakhstan as well as the regime’s improved capacity to deal with failure, together made the Tselina a viable and lasting rural development experience.

¹³⁰ Kalinovsky, *Tractors, Power Lines, and the Welfare State*, 589.

Chapter Two. The Virgin Lands Campaign and the Second Tselina

The Virgin Lands Campaign (VLC) opened up one more arena where the Soviet Union could prove the viability of its recipe for a welfare state in front of the capitalist world and - no less importantly - its own nation. Massive investments in expansion and mechanization of agriculture were to make the countryside an efficient producer, and the long-promised abundance of foodstuffs was eagerly anticipated. As early as January 1955, after the first harvest in the Virgin Lands, Nikita Khrushchev claimed that the Soviet Union had already surpassed the USA, not only in gross wheat production, but also in its production per capita.¹ However, in the Cold War world not only this was an indication of the wealth and strength of a state, it was also, as Smith noted, the ability of a state to produce enough meat and milk.² After the 1956 record harvest in the Virgin Lands and with the strong belief that the crop production, as a decisive precondition for success in livestock farming, would keep growing, the Soviet leader was confident enough to announce the new phase of the food race: the Soviet Union set to compete with the USA in per capita production of animal protein and fat. The program to intensify animal husbandry, which did not exclude the Virgin Lands but, on the contrary, should have capitalized on the improved capacity of the countryside, was known in the Kazakh Republic as the Second Tselina.

The Second Tselina has received surprisingly little attention in historical narratives about the VLC. In my opinion, this is so mainly because the campaign, as an agricultural intervention, was primarily presented as a “struggle for bread”, or growing wheat for human consumption, and approached in history scholarship as such. Yet, the Second Tselina was an integral part of the VLC in three ways. Firstly, the improved mechanization level of villages as well as the abundance of fodder resources, which was closely associated with the planned expansion of croplands, were to become a cornerstone for a boost in livestock production in the Virgin Lands. Animal farming, including sheep and horse breeding, which in the initial years of the campaign was pushed aside by the conversion of pastures and natural hayfields into

¹ Khrushchev, *Stroitel'stvo kommunizma v SSSR*, 428-429.

² Smith, *Works in Progress*, 155.

ploughlands, soon made its comeback in the Virgin Lands as part of the new turn in the economy of grain sovkhozes, an attempt to shift to highly diversified farming (*mnogootraslevoe khoziaistvo*).

Secondly, the Kazakh tselina, which, as I discuss in detail in Chapter One and Chapter Three, was supposed to become a Soviet showcase for overcoming social and cultural differences, also had to feed its residents in an exemplary way. Besides this largely ideological reason, there was a very practical consideration: trained and skilled workers in which sparsely-populated northern Kazakhstan was originally extremely deficient, had to be retained in the rapidly developing region which was emerging not only as an agricultural super-producer, but also as an industrial and urban cluster. Although in the early years hunger was a rather common experience among the new settlers, by 1960 the food situation in the Virgin Lands did stabilize.³

Thirdly, to make up for its incapacity to mechanize animal agriculture at a desirable pace, the regime had to move a substantial workforce to the Virgin Lands. In order to introduce generally unfamiliar but - for the Kazakh countryside - promising activities, such as poultry keeping and pig breeding, the Party had to rely particularly on the Slavic population and Russian Germans who had much more experience with these domestic animals and, most importantly, had no prejudice against pork.⁴ Thus, the mass resettlement closely associated with the VLC as well as the retention of Russian Germans in the Kazakh Republic, who might otherwise have been allowed to return to the places where they had lived before deportation,⁵ worked for this goal too.

This chapter looks into the status of stockbreeders and animals, the obscure and marginalized players of the tselina campaign, in the socio-economic development of the Soviet periphery. It offers a lens into the perspective of the local residents and contributes to a better understanding of the social and technological changes in the

³ Pohl, *Women and Girls in the Virgin Lands*, 59-61.

⁴ As of February 1956, more than 12 percent of the total adult population of Russian Germans residing in Kustanai Oblast (or around 4,800 out of 38,200) were engaged in livestock breeding. APRK, f. 708, op. 29, d. 497, ll. 138-141.

⁵ Pohl, "The Loss, Retention, and Reacquisition," 212-213.

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Kazakh countryside under Khrushchev's leadership. I argue that the local perspective of the VLC has remained blurred because the livestock production where the majority of the local population was concentrated has fallen from the attention of researchers. This case study also adds to our understanding of the history of rural development by taking into account the role of animals.

The socio-economic history of the Second Tselina presents us with an alternative perspective on the VLC, which also adds to the complexity of the agricultural and rural development of the Kazakh countryside in the 1950s and 1960s. Although stockbreeders are almost invisible in historic narratives about the campaign, they did not actually disappear from the Virgin Lands. They remained in animal farms, which, as I explain in Chapter One, were taken over - as parts of kolkhozes - by the sovkhos economy, a stronghold of the VLC in the Kazakh Republic. In these state-appropriated farms, yesteryear's kolkhoz members kept toiling under poor conditions of hard and low-paid manual labor. This chapter shows how this new group of waged workers and their presumably re-established relationship with farm animals contributed to bringing about the prosperity, long promised to the Soviet people, and thus, elevating the position of the USSR in the international arena. It also looks into how these Moscow-imposed plans were translated and put into practice at the local level.

Prior to the VLC and especially in the years of the Great Fatherland War, the republic served a reserve of animal produce for the entire Union.⁶ However, in the early 1950s, Kazakh animal agriculture suffered from massive losses. In the course of three years (1950 to 1952) more than ten million large domestic animals (predominantly sheep), or 40 percent of the entire herd,⁷ perished due to severe winters as well as the inability of local kolkhozes to stock up on sufficient amounts of fodder and provide

⁶ According to the then First Secretary, Shaiakhmetov, in the five war years Kazakh kolkhozes delivered to the state more meat, milk and wool than in the five preceding years. Shaiakhmetov, *Otchetnyi doklad o rabote TsK KP(b)K na IV s'ezde Kommunisticheskoi partii (bol'shevikov) Kazakhstana*, 29-30.

⁷ The total number of bovine animals, cows, pigs, sheep and goats in 1951 was around 24 million. *Kazakhstan za 40 let*, 158-161.

the animals with adequate care.⁸ Although the construction of accommodation for livestock concerned the state more than that for human dwellers of kolkhozes, the Kazakh countryside was extremely short of barns, which were especially critical for “over-wintering” (*zimovka*). Poor maintenance also resulted in inferior reproductive performance in ewes and heifers, which, together with their low proportions in herds, significantly slowed the reproduction of sheep and bovine animals.⁹ Such a critical situation in the republic’s animal agriculture became, besides the opposition to the VLC, another reason for the dismissal of the former Party leadership in the Kazakh Republic on the onset of the VLC.¹⁰

Making animal farming “cultured”

Animal farming was not merely an issue of economic relevance for the Communist Party. “Traditional” livestock practices concerned the Soviet communists ideologically as well. Distant herding, although still widely practiced, was – in the eyes of party propagandists – closely associated with nomadic existence, tribal norms and backwardness. The tselina campaign renewed the ideological attack on the “traditional” ways of livestock breeding. The heavy reliance of Kazakh animal agriculture on the natural environment was deemed not only economically unsound, but also old-fashioned and primitive.¹¹ This found its reflection in fictional literature too. A novel published by the literary journal *Sovetskii Kazakhstan* in 1957 linked distant herding with the supposed attempts of “bourgeois nationalists” to preserve the pre-revolutionary norms in Soviet Kazakhstan.¹² The VLC was to introduce a “cultured way of farming” (*kul’turnoe vedenie khoziaistva*). This primarily meant stall-

⁸ *Kazakhstanskaia pravda*, 13 October 1954, 2; Seksenbaev, *Stroitel'stvo sovkhovov v Kazakhstane*, 17-18.

⁹ In 1954, cows made up only a fifth of the total bovine population. By 1959, the proportion slightly improved, having reached a quarter. *Kazakhstan za 40 let*, 158-159.

¹⁰ Olcott, *The Kazakhs*, 226.

¹¹ *Kazakhstanskaia pravda*, 20 October 1954, 1; Brezhnev, L. I. “Otchetnyi doklad Tsentral'nogo Komiteta KP Kazakhstana VIII s'ezdu Kommunisticheskoi partii Kazakhstana.” *Kazakhstanskaia pravda*, 26 January 1956, 3.

¹² *Sovetskii Kazakhstan* 2, 1957, 56-57.

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feeding for animals in winter, the most critical time for Kazakh stockbreeders because of low temperatures and abundant snowfalls of long duration, which, in turn, required building barns and stocking up on forage.¹³

The VLC, as it was planned, intended to address these challenges in a few ways. Contrary to the strong association of the VLC with “bread”, this intervention was initially thought of as a source of forage for animal farming rather than grain for human consumption. As Nikita Khrushchev, a mastermind behind the VLC, envisioned in January 1954, almost a half of the harvest should be directed to feeding the livestock whereas only a third should go towards human consumption.¹⁴ The introduction of corn, the most productive animal forage at the time, was unfamiliar in many regions of the USSR,¹⁵ including the Kazakh countryside. It would, as Khrushchev, inspired by the American experience of intensive livestock production, saw it, play the key role in upscaling animal production.¹⁶ The anticipated improvement of technology levels in animal farming was to ensure – against the background of the massive loss of natural hayfields to wheat production – that fodder crops and wheat crop residues (straw and chaff) would be used for feeding. Mass resettlement to the Kazakh steppe was designed to ensure that there was a large enough workforce to provide maintenance for not only expanding crops, but also growing herds.

In its first year, the VLC and the mobilization campaign associated with it ran under the slogan “Bread for the People”. There was silence on the side of the Kazakh government with regard to whether the Virgin Lands should keep their livestock,

¹³ For example: “Kul'turno vesti khoziaistvo na tseline,” *Partiinaia zhyzn' Kazakhstana* 3, 1961, 14–17.

¹⁴ Khrushchev, *Stroitel'stvo kommunizma v SSSR*, 92.

¹⁵ Hale-Dorrell, *Corn Crusade*.

¹⁶ According to the CPSS's resolution on increasing animal production (31 January 1955), corn, as forage for pigs and poultry (in the form of ensilaged corn ears) as well as for dairy cows (ensilaged corn stalks), was to replace all low-yield cereal and fodder crops, as well as low-producing hayfields and pastures. *Pravda*, 2 February 1955, 1–4.

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especially sheep, or, in the case of new sovkhozes, engage in animal farming at all.¹⁷ After all, for a long time, the latter had been seen as a subsidiary activity in the sovkhoz economy. The matter was cleared by the CPSS's resolution on increasing animal production (31 January 1955). It specified the role of state farms, and especially those in the Virgin Lands, in bringing about an abundance of animal produce. Besides, the resolution recognized that the "situation is especially bad in livestock-breeding sovkhozes of the Kazakh SSR where, despite favorable conditions, the number of livestock grows extremely slowly, livestock productivity is low and sovkhozes give very little meat, milk and wool to the state."¹⁸ Khrushchev pointed to the new direction during his visit to Kustanai Oblast, the largest province in the Virgin Lands, in summer 1955: "It is wrong to believe that tselina sovkhozes can limit themselves only to the production of bread. You will not be full with bread alone; we need milk, meat, vegetables, fruits ... It is very important that tselina sovkhozes become diversified, highly-productive farms."¹⁹ Therefore, intensive animal farming was to be introduced in the Virgin Lands and to become one of the key beneficiaries of the VLC itself.

However, sovkhozes were reluctant for another couple of years. At a party meeting in 1957, one of the secretaries of the Central Committee, Karibzhanov, instructed local party and executive offices to keep an eye on sovkhozes so that they would not "squander the livestock under various pretexts" and, "if for some reason the harvest fails", tselina sovkhozes would produce at least something marketable to be able to pay salaries and purchase equipment.²⁰ Another rationale behind the idea of diversified farming was to make sovkhozes self-sufficient in terms of food production, which made a lot of sense in light of high transportation costs and the lack of refrigeration capacity.

¹⁷ "Polnee ispol'zovat' rezervy razvitiia zhyvotnovodstva v zone osvoeniia novykh zemel'," *Kazakhstanskaia pravda*, 9 December 1954, 3; "Razvivat' zhyvonovodstvo v novykh sovkhozakh", *Kazakhstanskaia pravda*, 9 January 1955, 3.

¹⁸ *Pravda*, 2 February 1955, 1–4.

¹⁹ *Partiinaia zhyzn' Kazakhstana* 10, 1959, 74.

²⁰ APRK, f. 708, op. 30, d. 350, ll. 5, 28.

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This new turn meant that every single farm, besides growing grain, was compelled to raise all kinds of livestock: dairy cows, pigs, poultry and sheep, as well as to grow vegetables, both as animal forage and for human consumption.²¹ This required growing massive amounts of fodder crops and, despite great distances, making them available to the livestock, establishing large mechanized animal farms, introducing advanced breeding techniques (like artificial insemination) and training their workforces. Since the mechanization component largely failed, in the core of the intensification drive in the animal farming of the Virgin Lands and beyond, there were comparatively benign natural conditions and poorly educated villagers performing basic, low-tech procedures and assisted occasionally by scientific institutions.²²

Swine breeding and poultry keeping which had been practiced only by the Slavic population and only on a small-scale or as subsidiary production were to become major activities of local farms.²³ Fine-wool sheep were to occupy marginal lands that had been deemed unsuitable for crop cultivation. Corn, mostly unfamiliar in the Kazakh countryside,²⁴ was to become a main ingredient of the livestock feed ration. In the Virgin Lands, kolkhozes were - together with their land, livestock, production premises and equipment - to be taken over by sovkhoses. This was to boost the animal population in sovkhoses and, to some extent, solve the shortage of workers

²¹ "K reshytel'nomu pod'emu sovkhoznogo proizvodstva," *Kazakhstanskaia pravda*, 7 February 1956, 1.

²² Smith identified these three pillars (human capital, basic, low-tech procedures and scientific management) as characteristic to the post-war situation in Soviet animal farming in general. Smith, *Works in Progress*, 127.

²³ As of 1 October 1954, pigs made up only three percent of the livestock population of the Kazakh Republic. (APRK, f. 708, op. 28, d. 1445, sv. 399, ll. 8-9.) With regard to poultry keeping, my interviewee, Nina Poukh, recalled that her family, from a predominantly Slav-populated village (Rozhdestvenka, Pavlodar Oblast) would take chicken eggs to the kolkhoz market in a primarily Kazakh settlement (Tavolzhan, same province) because people in the latter did not keep poultry. (My interview with Nina Poukh.)

²⁴ In 1954, it occupied only 16,500 hectares. APRK, f. 708, op. 28, d. 1445, sv. 399, ll. 17-19.

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in state-owned animal farming.²⁵ It took place, as had done many times in Soviet history before, at the expense of villagers.

In 1955, Moscow's expectations with regard to the improved availability of fodder resources were high for a seemingly good reason: the 1954 harvest was bountiful and the sown areas in northern Kazakhstan were set to double in size and hayfields were still to be found in the Virgin Lands.²⁶ A good harvest of hay and straw was anticipated. However, the year 1955 turned out to be unfavorable, not only for crop cultivation,²⁷ but also for livestock keeping. The drought affected hay yields on available grasslands and many farms failed to stock up enough hay for "over-wintering". However, the extreme weather conditions of that summer were not the only reason for this failure.

Since the VLC was to "civilize" Kazakh livestock farming, starting from 1954, animal farms were increasingly pushed to switch to straw and silage in order to sustain their livestock. Neither straw harvesting nor silage making had been practiced to any considerable extent in the Kazakh countryside before.²⁸ Stocking up enough fodder for the "over-wintering" of livestock would ease the burden of stockbreeders but collective farms did not have the resources to transport it. Besides the fact that silage making and straw harvesting were an insignificant part of the rural routine even before, the growing pressure on the countryside in terms of grain production

²⁵ In spring 1955, sovkhozes in the Virgin Lands had less than 60 percent of the workforce they required in order to meet the planned targets for livestock production; of a total number of around 10 thousand vacant places, the shortage of milkmaids (*doiarki*) accounted for half of the demand followed by cowherds (*skotniki*), calf caretakers (*teliatnitsy*) and shepherds (*chabany*). APRK, f. 708, op. 28, d. 1509, sv. 416, ll. 6-7.

²⁶ 13.5 million hectares in 1955 versus 6.4 million hectares in 1954. (McCauley, *Khrushchev and the Development of Soviet Agriculture*, 87.) According to the Gosplan (Planning Commission) of the Kazakh SSR, in order to provide the growing herd with enough roughage fodder (hay and straw) it had to be harvested from an area of 40 million hectares. Saktaganova, *Ekonomicheskaiia modernizatsiia Kazakhstan*, 210.

²⁷ See also: McCauley, *Khrushchev and the Development of Soviet Agriculture*, 90-91.

²⁸ "Uspeshnoe provedenie zimovki skota - vazhneishee uslovie dal'neishego razvitiia zhyvotnovodstva", *Kazakhstanskaia pravda*, 13 October 1954, 2; APRK, f. 708, op. 28, d. 13, l. 72.

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consumed most of its resources and the harvest campaign was barely complete before the rainfall season, and sometimes ended with the first snowfall. Over and above that, the challenge of overlapping stages of grain production, forage production and livestock production played against the latter two: if such overlaps occurred, the priority - against the background of the shortage of laborers and machinery - went to operations in grain production.²⁹ For instance, the sowing and threshing of wheat tended to postpone sowing and harvesting of corn and also divert labor from animal farming, which resulted in extremely low yields of corn and high losses of newborn lambs.³⁰

Prior to the VLC, villagers would – mostly by hand - harvest, stack and keep the hay in fields, moving it in parts and with the help of draft animals to the places where the livestock was kept in winter. After the massive expansion of crops, the availability of meadows decreased dramatically in the northern regions of the republic.³¹ Putting pastures and grasslands under plough from 1954 to 1956 complicated livestock feeding to the extent that kolkhozes and sovkhoses had to get rid of many animals.³² They transferred them either to new sovkhoses that had taken over the land, or to southern areas that had not been involved in crop expansion yet,³³ or delivered them for meat to the state.³⁴ Press reports celebrated the latter as “overfulfilment of the

²⁹ Saktaganova, *Ekonomicheskaiia modernizatsiia*, 194.

³⁰ Roginets, M. “Kazakhstan - respublika krupnogo sovkhosnogo proizvodstva,” *Kazakhstanskaia pravda*, 12 January 1956, 2; Morgun, *Dumy o tseline*, 148; GAPO, f. 646, op. 4, d. 1247, ll. 272-273.

³¹ In her memoirs, Anusa Abdigazy kyzy recalls how her widowed mother together with a distant female relative worked at an over-wintering station (*zimovka*) in the south of Kustanai Oblast in the winter of 1950/1951. Every day the women would drive their oxen to a lake located 15 to 20 kilometers away from the station and return with some hay to feed the cows. This routine took them at least seven hours a day. Abdigazy kyzy, *Aga amanaty*, 66-70; My interview with Anusa Abdigazy kyzy.

³² In these three years, sown areas in the Virgin Lands increased by 3.5 times: from 5.1 million hectares in 1953 to 18.2 million in 1956. (McCauley, *Khrushchev and the Development of Soviet Agriculture*, 87.) If in 1954 pastures and hayfields occupied 80 percent of agricultural land in the Kazakh Republic, by the end of 1955 they remained only on a half of the agricultural land reserve. (Dronin, Bellinger, *Climate dependence and food problems*, 186.)

³³ APRK, f. 708, op. 27, d. 322, ll. 118-119.

³⁴ APRK, f. 708, op. 28, d. 13, l. 47; Zhurin, *Trudnye i schastlivye gody*, 212-213.

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plan".³⁵ In order to save some of the herds, kolkhozes - under pressure from Alma-Ata and Moscow - transferred them, over a distance of tens to hundreds of kilometers, to the remaining pastures on the southern frontier of the Virgin Lands. However, many animals were already so weak that they perished on the way to the pastures, or upon arrival.³⁶ The sown area expanded once more in 1962, which must have exacerbated the feeding issue even more.³⁷

To some extent, the problem of feeding the livestock in winter was solved by introducing corn. Although the Kazakh countryside managed to dramatically increase the area under corn (by 1960, it expanded almost by 50 times compared to that of 1953) and the corn gave most of the silage (10.5 out of 12 million tons),³⁸ it did not enjoy good yields. Farmers did not favour this crop due to the complexity of its cultivation, the acute shortage of special equipment such as corn sowing machines and silage harvesters, and, as Khrushchev himself admitted later, unfavourable climatic conditions for the crop in northern Kazakhstan ("low precipitation, short summer").³⁹ There were years when corn crops simply perished under early snowfall.⁴⁰ On average, corn yielded in the Kazakh steppe 0.83 kilograms – against an anticipated three to six kilograms - per square metre.⁴¹ Expensive and insufficient

³⁵ *Kazakhstanskaia pravda*, 29 January 1956, 3.

³⁶ APRK, f. 708, op. 29, d. 497, ll.7-18.

³⁷ In 1962, sown areas in the Virgin Lands grew from 18.3 million to 20.2 million hectares. McCauley, *Khrushchev and the Development of Soviet Agriculture*, 87.

³⁸ Smagulov, *Puti uvelicheniia produktov zhivotnovodstva*, 29.

³⁹ "Respublikanskoe soveshchanie direktorov sovkhozov", *Kazakhstanskaia pravda*, 15 January 1956, 2; Roginets, M. "Kazakhstan - respublika krupnogo sovkhoznogo proizvodstva," *Kazakhstanskaia pravda*, 12 January 1956, 2; GAPO, f. 646, op. 5, d. 175, ll. 59-62; "Razvivat' zhivotnovodstvo na tseline", *Partiinaia zhyzn' Kazakhstana* 12, 1959, 27-30; "Chem ozabocheny kommunisty tselinnogo sovkhoza", *Partiinaia zhyzn' Kazakhstana* 12, 1960, 15-20; "Grabli i vily - ne tekhnika na tseline", *Sel'skoe khoziaistvo Kazakhstana* 11, 1961, 61-65; *Kazakhstanskaia pravda*, 16 August 1964, 2.

⁴⁰ *Sel'skoe khoziaistvo Kazakhstana* 1, 1959, 7.

⁴¹ Saktaganova, *Ekonomicheskaiia modernizatsiia*, 204.

forage production led to increased prices of meat, more than the state was prepared to pay for meat delivered by sovkhozes and kolkhozes.⁴²

To elevate the importance of animal farming, mobilize the villages and precipitate the Soviet aspirations for long-promised prosperity, Khrushchev pronounced in May 1957, for the first time ever, his slogan: “Catch up with the USA in the per capita production of meat, milk and butter”. This slogan for him, in his capacity as leader of the USSR, was meant to prove the viability (and superiority) of the Communist recipe for a welfare state and, in Khrushchev’s words, “to launch the most powerful torpedo towards the capitalist foundations”.⁴³ Now tselina sovkhozes and kolkhozes were instructed to radically increase both their animal and crop production. According to the new indicators of agricultural efficiency, each hectare of land was expected to bring the state around 44 liters of milk annually, six kilograms of meat on hoof and 170 grams of wool, every hectare of ploughland had to turn into four kilograms of pork and every hectare sown for cereal crops had to make 22 eggs.⁴⁴ Actual deliveries were far behind: in 1957, kolkhozes and sovkhozes gave the state only seven liters of milk, 2.6 kilograms of meat, one kilogram of pork and two eggs from each hectare. Only in sheep wool, whose “yield” was 340 grams per hectare, was the target exceeded.⁴⁵ Even for old and advanced sovkhozes some of these indicators were too high.⁴⁶

The importance of animal production for the Kazakh Republic was to be signified by labelling it the Second Tselina. The Second Tselina was about increasing milk and

⁴² APRK, f. 708, op. 30, d. 350, l. 5.

⁴³ Khrushchev, *Stroitel'stvo kommunizma v SSSR*, 2: 441–461.

⁴⁴ Roginets, M. “Kazakhstan - respublika krupnogo sovkhoznogo proizvodstva”, *Kazakhstanskaia pravda*, 12 January 1956, 2.

⁴⁵ The numbers are given on kolkhozes and sovkhozes together, which, perhaps, means that the performance of sovkhozes in terms of livestock production was even lower. “Ob itogakh vypolneniia Gosudarstvennogo plana razvitiia narodnogo khoziaistva Kazakhskoi SSR v 1957 godu”, *Kazakhstanskaia pravda*, 11 February 1958, 2–3.

⁴⁶ For example, Kustanaiskii sovkhov which was close in meat (5.8 kilograms) and very successful in egg production (37 eggs) lagged behind in milk (35 liters) and pork (2.3 kilograms). GAKR, f. 21, op. 2n, d. 33, sv. 29, l. 2.

meat production not only in the Virgin Lands. However, this region – because of its recently improved capacity in grain production – was confronted with higher expectations by Moscow.

Animals in the Virgin Lands

In 1956, the republic found itself in a “dangerous situation” in regard to the fulfillment of plans for meat: the production of meat dropped by 15 percent and the state procurement of meat by 25 percent.⁴⁷ Farms delivered even heifers and ewes for meat,⁴⁸ putting the reproduction capacity of the herds under risk.⁴⁹ To spare cows and sheep which were more valuable for other kinds of products (milk and wool), the Kazakh countryside had to engage in pig farming and poultry keeping. The rationale behind these Moscow-imposed choices was that domestic birds and pigs did not require pasture space of which the Virgin Lands were already short, and could thrive on crop residues. Besides, these animals were also considered most rewarding in terms of speed and quantity of meat (re)production. Meanwhile, more than 1,200 kolkhozes and sovkhozes, or a third of all farms in the republic, did not deal with pigs, which was, most likely, out of religious considerations.⁵⁰ Leonid Brezhnev, then the Second Secretary of the Central Committee of the Communist Party of Kazakhstan, characterized the state of pig breeding in the republic as “neglected”.⁵¹

Pig breeding was seen as a potential reserve of cheap and fast meat and thus, it was hoped, would remedy the meat situation. At the time, pork made up only 15 percent of the total meat production and 4.5 percent of the state procurement of meat in the Kazakh Republic. The special, off-the-record resolution “About the Unsatisfactory

⁴⁷ GAPO, f. 646, op. 5, d. 371, sv. 90, ll. 257-260.

⁴⁸ Kolkhozes would also replace their obligations to sell the state milk and eggs by delivering sheep. *Kazakhstanskaia pravda*, 28 January 1956, 2.

⁴⁹ *Sel'skoe khoziaistvo Kazakhstana* 6, 1957, 2.

⁵⁰ At the end of 1955, the total number of kolkhozes and sovkhozes in the Kazakh Republic was 3,450, or 2,819 and 631 respectively. *Kazakhstan za 40 let: Statisticheskii sbornik*, 202-203, 206-207.

⁵¹ Brezhnev, L. I. “Otchetnyi doklad Tsentral'nogo Komiteta KP Kazakhstana VIII s'ezdu Kommunisticheskoi partii Kazakhstana”, *Kazakhstanskaia pravda*, 26 January 1956, 3-4.

Development of Pig Breeding in the Kazakh SSR” (13 March 1957) called on kolkhozes and sovkhoses to triple their swine herds in the course of one year and deliver to the state 80 thousand tonnes of pork.⁵² The situation with pig breeding did improve in the course of a few following years, albeit not as much as desired: although pork production increased in kolkhozes and sovkhoses in comparison to the preceding year, it was still at least four times behind the state’s expectations.⁵³ The particular blame was put on kolkhozes who – although having much more pigs than the sovkhos sector did - preferred to consume or sell pigs on the kolkhoz market rather than sell them to the state.⁵⁴ Another reason was the religious prejudice of Muslims against pork, which I discuss in detail in Chapter Three.

Nevertheless, the swine population did triple by 1963 (2,267 thousand compared to 730 thousand in 1957), although the number dropped again the next year.⁵⁵ It is doubtless that this continued – although not always stable – growth was a result, for a major part, of the resettlement of the Slavic population to the Kazakh steppe. The pork production grew accordingly: from 20 thousand tons, or 13 percent of all meat produced, in 1957 to 64 thousand tons, or less than 16 percent of all meat produced, in 1965.⁵⁶ The share of pork in the total meat production did not meet the CP’s expectations of 40 to 50 percent, and beef and mutton remained much more common in the meagre grocery assortment.⁵⁷

Poultry farming was another activity imposed on the Kazakh countryside to improve meat production and preserve cows and sheep. Ducks seemed to planners especially promising due to their lower maintenance requirements. According to the republic’s chief expert on poultry, Alexey Pak, all the rivers and lakes in the Virgin Lands could

⁵² GAPO, f. 646, op. 5, d. 371, sv. 90, ll. 257-260.

⁵³ *Kazakhstan za 40 let*, 80-81.

⁵⁴ “O khode vypolneniia priniatykh kolkhozami i sovkhozami respubliki obiazatel'stv po dal'neishemu ravitiu zhyvotnovodstva i merakh po uspeshnomu provedeniiu zimovki skota”, *Kazakhstanskaia pravda*, 16 November 1957, 2.

⁵⁵ *Kazakhstan za 50 let*, 82.

⁵⁶ *Kazakhstan za 40 let*, 39; *Kazakhstan za 50 let*, 58.

⁵⁷ *Ibid*

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maintain 50 million ducks without much human effort. Contrary to chickens, ducks would require care only in winter in the phase of egg incubation, and then, in spring and summer, would fatten in the wild and be delivered for meat in autumn.⁵⁸ Nevertheless, sovkhoses and kolkhozes struggled to arrange proper incubation for ducklings, as well as for chicks, and poultry made up less than two percent (as of 1965) of the total meat production in the republic's sovkhoses and kolkhozes.⁵⁹ In order to fulfil meat delivery obligations, some sovkhoses would buy ducks in grocery stores and deliver them to the state at the fixed price which was almost half as much as farmers had paid for them.⁶⁰

Poultry keeping remained a subsistence livelihood activity for rural dwellers: individual households produced five times as much poultry meat and 8.5 times as much eggs as farms (kolkhozes and sovkhoses together) did.⁶¹ However, poultry did not become a staple for urbanites, at least not through grocery stores: its share in the state procurement of meat was insignificant (1.5 percent in 1960).⁶² This poultry drive was not a complete flop: the comparative success in large-scale poultry production in one of the tselina provinces, Kustanai Oblast served to promote a sovkhos director and former Korean deportee, Alexey Pak, to the post of Vice-Minister of Agriculture of the Kazakh Republic.⁶³

The Kazakh countryside kept struggling to sustain the livestock throughout the tselina decade. By 1957, all large tracts which happened to be the "best hayfields and pastures" in the Virgin Lands, had been already cultivated.⁶⁴ After 1957, the expansion of crops continued, now at the expense of available smaller plots.⁶⁵

⁵⁸ Pak, A. "Osvoim i golubuiu tselinu," *Partiinaiia zhyzn' Kazakhstana* 6, 1961, 52–54.

⁵⁹ "Tak li dolzhen rabotat' sel'khoz obkoma," *Partiinaiia zhyzn' Kazakhstana* 2, 1961, 36-42; GAPO, f. 646, op. 5, d. 175; *Kazakhstan za 50 let*, 58.

⁶⁰ "Tak li dolzhen rabotat' sel'khoz obkoma," *Partiinaiia zhyzn' Kazakhstana* 2, 1961, 36-42.

⁶¹ *Kazakhstan za 40 let*, 80-83.

⁶² Pak, A. "Neischislimy bogatstva 'goluboi tseliny'," *Sel'skoe khoziaistvo Kazakhstana* 4, 1961, 18–19.

⁶³ GAKO, f. 1116, op. 3, ed.kh. 487, l. 132; f. 116, op. 3, ed. Kh. 487, l. 128.

⁶⁴ APRK, f. 708, op. 30, d. 350, l. 5.

⁶⁵ GAKO, f. 1414, op. 2, d. 7, ll. 144-145.

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Although there was some progress in the mechanization of haymaking, most of the forage making and livestock maintenance operations remained manual and livestock was often either fed grain or kept on the remaining remote pastures. The use of machinery was limited by, primarily, the insufficient supply of electric energy and the lack of adequate barns where such machinery could be effectively and safely used.⁶⁶ Even “exemplary” farms made hay and straw with the use of “rakes and pitch forks”.⁶⁷ Leaving stacked hay in the field became less common but was still practiced meaning that in the meantime, the livestock had to be fed alternative fodder such as grain. The reliance of livestock farming on grain in the Khrushchev decade was so heavy that, as Dronin and Bellinger suggest, it impeded the progress of Soviet crop production and contributed greatly to the failure of VLC.⁶⁸

For planners and experts it was clear that a rapid increase in livestock production was impossible without the construction of mechanized animal farms.⁶⁹ However, until the early 1960s, industrialization in livestock farming was painfully slow due to mainly these three factors: the rudimentary state of the construction industry,⁷⁰ the tendency of the Soviet heavy industry and machine-and-tractor stations to serve crop production rather than animal production, and the low level of electrification of the Kazakh countryside. Thus, such processes as forage-making, feeding, watering, milking, barn cleaning and shearing remained largely manual for most of the period in question.⁷¹ Even when, in around 1960 and onwards, heavy industry caught up with the demand, the local inability to build adequate barns where new equipment

⁶⁶ *Narodnoe khoziaistvo Kazakhstana* 5, 1960, 50-53; *Partiinaia zhyzn' Kazakhstana* 3, 1961, 14-17; GAPO, f. 646, op. 4, d. 1247, ll. 335-339.

⁶⁷ *Sel'skoe khoziaistvo Kazakhstana* 11, 1961, 61-65.

⁶⁸ Dronin, Bellinger, *Climate dependence and food problems*, 178, 210-211.

⁶⁹ *Sel'skoe khoziaistvo Kazakhstana* 8, 1955, 1-5.

⁷⁰ For a detailed account on the emergence of the Kazakh construction industry in the years of the VLC, see the previous chapter.

⁷¹ As of 1 January 1958, the total capacity of the power plants available for Kazakh agriculture was 180,000 kilowatt, or 20 percent of the actual needs of the republic's agricultural production for electric energy. *Kopii prikazov Ministerstva sel'skogo khoziaistva KazSSR, TsGARK*, f. 1683, op. 1, d. 87, sv. 12, l. 130.

(automatic drinking bowls, milking machines, conveyor belts for feeding and cleaning) could be installed and used, hampered the efforts to make livestock production efficient. Most of the equipment, in some cases 90 percent and more, was becoming rusty and damaged in the open air.⁷²

To find a temporary solution for the lack of technological change in the Kazakh countryside, livestock experts advised ways to avoid keeping animals over winter. Winter lambing and calving, duck keeping and pig breeding would allow the fattening of animals in the open (in the case of pigs it would be “camping sites” near the farm) and deliver them for meat in autumn.⁷³ However, winter lambing/calving was hard to achieve because of the problem with artificial insemination which I describe below.

The failure to provide animal farming with a sufficient number of barns, mechanisms and forage made the planners retreat to what not long ago was considered backward, that is keeping livestock on pastures. Starting from 1959, a number of livestock-fattening sovkhozes (*otkormsovkhozy*) and sheep-breeding sovkhozes appeared in the Virgin Lands and other regions of the republic. This clearly signaled that the state was losing its enthusiasm for the universality of grain. It was also growing concerned about soil erosion resulting from inadequate farming techniques used for crop expansion in the Kazakh semi-arid steppe.⁷⁴

Large-scale grain production had not become a cornerstone for the highly diversified farming in the Virgin Lands, and the Ministry of Sovkhozes began to think about a more focused approach.⁷⁵ As Figure 3 shows, by the early 1960s, areas of specialisation had formed in the Virgin Lands: there were two large zones designated

⁷² GAPO, f. 646, op. 4, d. 1247, ll. 335-339; f. 646, op. 5, d. 175, ll. 59-62.

⁷³ *Sel'skoe khoziaistvo Kazakhstana* 2, 1959, 35; 2, 1961, 31-33; 6, 1961, 28-31; Smagulov, *Puti uvelicheniia produktov zhyvotnovodstva*, 19.

⁷⁴ For a comprehensive account on the Soviet experience in dealing with soil erosion in the Virgin Lands, see: Elie, “The Soviet Dust Bowl.”

⁷⁵ Sokolov, N. “Polnee ispol'zovat' bogatstva osvoennoi tseliny”, *Narodnoe khoziaistvo Kazakhstana* 5, 1960, 44-49.

to both crop and livestock production, and two smaller zones where crop production was only a subsidiary activity.

As much as 45 percent of all sovkhoses established in the republic between 1959 and 1966 were sheep-breeding sovkhoses.⁷⁶ Horse breeding made its comeback, too. It was a solution to two problems at the same time: not only contribute to the variety of animal produce with horsemeat and mare milk, items demanded by Kazakh urbanites, but also make up for the shortage of transport vehicles in the countryside.⁷⁷ On paper, the emphasis was, of course, still on the requirement to stock up enough hay at over-wintering stations (the “safety stock”) and to use mechanisms to maintain the livestock, but in practice, the livestock production continued to rely largely on the natural environment and manual labor.⁷⁸ In these circumstances, sheep breeding - as an activity requiring low maintenance and also more ecologically suitable for semi-dry steppes – became more prominent, again.

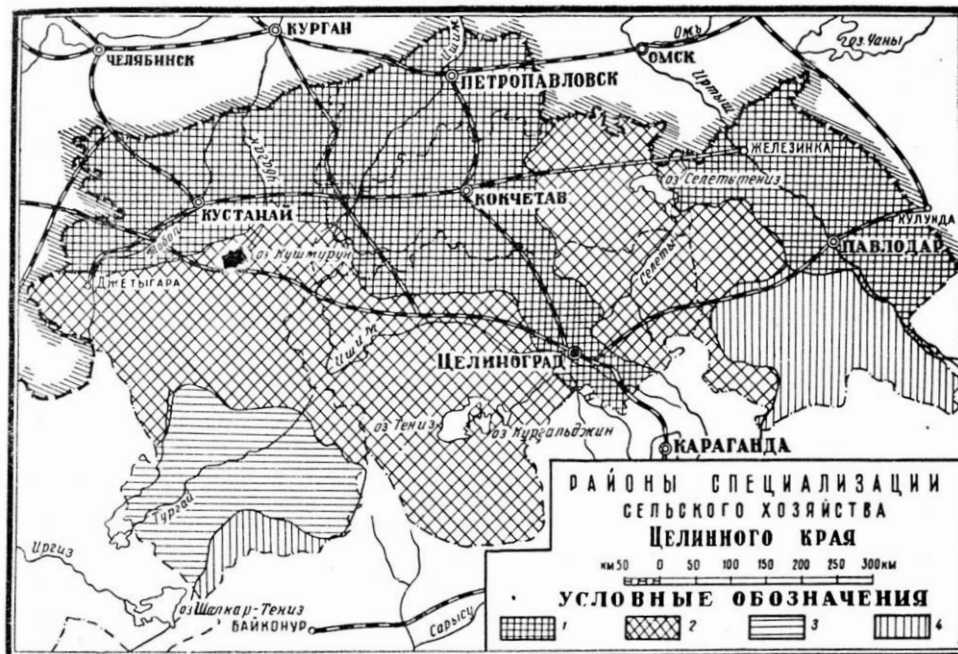
⁷⁶ Gosudarstvennyi komitet Soveta Ministrov Kazakhskoi SSR po delam stroitel'stva, Sel'skoe stroitel'stvo v Kaz.SSR, 1.

⁷⁷ The Resolution on Measures to Overcome Existing Shortages in and Further the Development of Horse Breeding in Kolkhozes and Sovkhoses of the Kazakh SSR adopted by the Council of Ministers of the Kazakh SSR on 4 May 1958. GAPO, f. 646, op. 5, d. 175, ll. 3-5.

⁷⁸ GAKR, f. R-37, op. 1L, d. 4, sv. 2, l. 9.

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Figure 3. Areas of agricultural specialization in the Virgin Lands formed by the early 1960s



1. Zone of grain production, milk-and-meat farming, pig breeding and fine-wool sheep breeding.
2. Zone of wheat-and-millet cultivation, meat-and-milk farming, fine-wool sheep breeding and pork farming.
3. Zone of meat-and-wool sheep breeding with subsidiary crop farming;
4. Zone of semi-fine-wool and, partially, meat-and-tallow sheep breeding, horse breeding and subsidiary crop farming.

Source: Pal'gov, *Tselinnyi kraj*, 127.

Sheep proved to be the most productive type of livestock in the Kazakh Republic even prior to the VLC. Between 1941 and 1951, its entire sheep population, despite high losses in winter, almost doubled: from around seven million to more than 15 million strong. Compared to other domestic animals whose numbers grew considerably less (for example, the herd of bovine animals, including cows, grew by less than 30 percent and the swine herd even decreased), sheep were the most prolific.⁷⁹ In 1956,

⁷⁹ *Kazakhstan za 40 let*, 158-159.

almost 30 percent of all meat produced in the republic came from sheep breeding.⁸⁰ Mutton remained the second most produced (after beef) and thus, the most consumed meat in the republic, well rooted in local culinary practices. It remained a staple food not only for rural dwellers, but also for Kazakhstani urbanites because it made up almost half of the meat deliveries to the state.⁸¹ To upscale this success, the 1957 resolution on sheep breeding called for the doubling of the sheep herd by 1960 and the tripling by 1965.⁸² The term Second Tselina began to be used specifically to refer to improving sheep breeding.⁸³ This notion also embraced the task of the assimilation of desert and semi-desert pastures for the development of sheep breeding, or – more specifically - the Pasture Tselina (*pastbishchnaia tselina*) as it was referred to in the press.⁸⁴



Figure 4. Poster dated not later than 1961: “Last year, the shepherd of Atbasarkii sheep-breeding sovkhos [Akmola Oblast], Askar Amzin produced 110 lambs per every 100 ewes and achieved 7.6 kilograms of wool sheared from a sheep. Shepherds! Follow the suit of the best shepherd.” Source: GAGN, f. 136, op. 5, d. 95, l. 2.

⁸⁰ Ibid, 80-81.

⁸¹ GAPO, f. 646, op. 5, d. 175, ll. 3-5.

⁸² Saktaganova, *Ekonomicheskaiia modernizatsiia*, 209; *Kazakhstan za 40 let*, 158-159.

⁸³ “Shyroko razvivat' zhyvotnovodstvo i osobenno ovtsevodstvo v kolkhozakh i sovkhozakh,” *Sel'skoe khoziaistvo Kazakhstana* 2, 1957, 1–6.

⁸⁴ *Narodnoe khoziaistvo Kazakhstana* 9, 1959, 46–48.

Sheep was valued as a source of diverse animal products. Besides meat and tallow, it was brought for wool and sheepskin. Karakul, a pelt of a newborn lamb of the Karakul sheep breed, was especially important: it was highly fashionable in the Soviet Union where only top officials and their spouses could afford to acquire hats, collars and other clothing items made of Karakul. Besides its high domestic marketability, there was also a high demand for Karakul on the international market. Karakul sheep made up only 15 percent of the total sheep flock and were bred predominantly in the southern provinces.⁸⁵ While the Virgin Lands, all the four zones formed by the early 1960s, were qualified for wool sheep breeding, and two of them – specifically for fine-wool sheep (Figure 3).

The success of sheep breeding was not only because of the supposed predisposition of Kazakhs towards this domestic animal and its low maintenance requirements for which the harsh natural conditions of the Kazakh steppe and desert worked satisfactorily, but also the success of the introduction of artificial insemination. Artificial insemination was seen as another potential measure to increase livestock production since inferior reproduction performance in cows and ewes was one of the main reasons for the poor herd growth. Artificial insemination was practiced mostly in sheep breeding, which was, perhaps, connected to the shorter pregnancy in sheep and thus, the time when it could be performed was generally colder (December if lambs were born in May) than that in cows (some time in summer if calves were born in spring).⁸⁶ The main obstacle to the introduction of artificial insemination was a technological problem: how to maintain zero degree Celsius temperatures to store and transport the semen in summer. To solve this problem, livestock experts recommended that ice and snow be stockpiled in winter to use in summer.⁸⁷ However, icehouses did not solve the problem because it was impossible to keep the

⁸⁵ "Nash karakul' na mirovom rynke," *Kazakhstanskaia pravda*, 2 February 1958, 4; *Sel'skoe khoziaistvo Kazakhstana* 2, 1959, 36-38.

⁸⁶ Subbotin, V. "Nauka i praktika zhyvotnovodstva," *Partiinaia zhyzn' Kazakhstana* 1, 1961, 28-32.

⁸⁷ Golodnov, A. "Polnost'iu likvidiruem ialovost' korov i ovtsematok," *Sel'skoe khoziaistvo Kazakhstana* 2, 1959 29-32.

semen cold enough while transporting it, sometimes by horse, on long distances. Therefore, while artificial insemination was successful in sheep breeding, free mating in bovine animals was still widely practiced and, thus, a considerable number of heifers and cows remained unproductive.⁸⁸

The newly-assumed importance of meat production and in particular, sheep breeding, brought forward pastoral areas which were initially left aside in the tselina rush. "Each aul knows well the call to catch up to America in the per-capita production of meat, butter and milk" – a regional newspaper wrote in 1957 about Amangel'dinskii Raion, a sheep-breeding area in Kustanai Oblast.⁸⁹ In 1960, the biggest pastoral region in northern Kazakhstan, Turgai, officially joined the VLC.⁹⁰

Located in the southern part of the Kustanai province, the Turgai region (or the Turgai Tselina as the press started to refer to it) was initially deemed untillable, with the exception of some 1.4 thousand square kilometers along its northern frontier.⁹¹ A number of circumstances played against the incorporation of this region into the VLC: the area comprised mostly semi-deserts and deserts; there was no railway connecting Turgai with the rest of the republic; the close proximity of the spaceport Baikonur which was being constructed in a neighboring province in an atmosphere of absolute secrecy; a low density of population (less than two persons per square kilometer); and an underdeveloped irrigation system. By 1960, the situation had changed. Baikonur, which had successfully launched the first artificial satellite, was already a household name all over the world. No less importantly, great reserves of raw minerals (magnetites, asbestos, bauxites) were discovered in this region, which resulted in the construction of a railway. Over and above that, Turgai had a large population of sheep and horses, the largest in the Virgin Lands, as well as great tracts

⁸⁸ GAKO, f. R-268, op. 1, d. 1430, sv. 206, l. 4; GAPO, f. 646, op. 5, d. 175, l. 62; f. 646, op. 5, d. 695, sv. 155, ll. 20-21; GAKR, f. R-37, op. 1L, d. 6, sv. 3, l. 368; *Sel'skoe khoziaistvo Kazakhstana* 2, 1959, 29-32.

⁸⁹ "Krai rodnoi", *Leninskii put'*, 18 October 1957, 2.

⁹⁰ Turgai is an historic name of the southern region of Kustanai Oblast embracing a few districts, including the Amangel'dinskii Raion.

⁹¹ GAKO, f. 1414, op. 2, d. 7, l. 50; Kozybaev, O. "Turgai raskryvaet svoi bogatstva," *Partiinaiia zhyzn'* *Kazakhstana* 5, 1960, 8-10; *Kazakhstanskaia pravda*, 30 January 1964, 2.

of natural hayfields that were seen as “untapped tselina” for meat and grain production.⁹²

Stockbreeders as part of Soviet modernity

The regained importance of livestock breeding in the Virgin Lands and the rapidly growing demand for animal products in the region brought forward new “heroes of Soviet modernity”: laborers on animal farms such as milkmaids, pig tenderers, poultry caretakers, shepherds and stockbreeders alike.⁹³ As propaganda presented, it was their “patriotic duty” to follow the procession of grain-growers and contribute to the common cause of building communism.⁹⁴ In order to supervise the performance of this “duty” the Party and the Komsomol, the Youth League of the Communist Party, dispatched their members to the countryside.⁹⁵ Many such assignments remained only on paper while those who eventually arrived on animal farms (reportedly, more than 50 thousand Komsomol members were engaged in animal farming in 1961), did not necessarily have the knowledge and/or skills suitable for this field.⁹⁶

Not out of patriotic feelings, but because it was one of the few occupations available to the poorly educated and mainly female rural workforce, local adults did engage in livestock farming. Many, including Kazakhs, took jobs in livestock farming because for them, raising animals was also a familiar activity that mirrored their subsistence patterns. The engagement of many Kazakh families in livestock breeding and food processing industries, as Bhavna Dave notes, was a replication of their customary livelihoods as former nomads.⁹⁷ There was a strong gender division too: while the

⁹² “Razvivat' zhyvotnovodstvo na tseline,” *Partiinaia zhyzn' Kazakhstana* 12, 1959, 27–30; Kozybaev, O. “Turgai raskryvaet svoi bogatstva,” *Partiinaia zhyzn' Kazakhstana* 5, 1960, 8–10.

⁹³ *Sovetskii Kazakhstan* 5, 1959, 107; *Partiinaia zhyzn' Kazakhstana* 12, 1959, 27–30.

⁹⁴ *Kazakhstanskaia pravda*, 25 April 1956, 1; *Partiinaia zhyzn' Kazakhstana* 8, 1960, 10–15.

⁹⁵ *Kazakhstanskaia pravda*, 27 January 1956, 2; 31 January 1956, 2; 19 February 1956, 3.

⁹⁶ “Dal slovo - sderzhy ego!” *Kazakhstanskaia pravda*, 20 March 1956, 3; “Sorok let Kazakhskoi SSR i Kompartii Kazakhstana,” *Sel'skoe khoziaistvo Kazakhstana* 6, 1961 8–12; “Rech' tov. Dykhnova N.V.” *Kazakhstanskaia pravda*, 31 January 1956, 2.

⁹⁷ Dave, *Kazakhstan. Ethnicity, language and power*, 78.

male population was engaged in crop production and other technologically advanced occupations, their wives, mothers, sisters and daughters worked on animal farms.⁹⁸ The Communist Party organized recruitment campaigns targeting specifically young women from Russia, Ukraine and Belarus to resettle them to the Virgin Lands, and with their “caring hands” to kick-start poultry, pork and milk production.⁹⁹ As reported in one of the tselina provinces in 1958, women made up 80 percent of all laborers in animal farming.¹⁰⁰ In comparison, among all mechanization workers (tractor drivers, combine harvesters operators, repair workers for agricultural machinery) there were only 200 women in the Kazakh Republic as a whole.¹⁰¹

Planners regarded female homemakers as a potential source of working hands for animal farming, and the propaganda machine mobilized them specifically for calving/lambing/farrowing campaigns.¹⁰² Thus, having failed to mechanise animal farming in this particular decade, the state made use of gender roles for the sake of productivity: women were supposed to take care of newborn animals almost as much as they did of their own babies.

A lower level of mechanization in animal production led to lower productivity compared to the larger-in-scale crop production and thus, lower salaries. Kustanaiskii sovkhoz, one of the most advanced in the Kazakh tselina and one of the oldest in the republic, offers an example. While in 1956 annual salaries in both industries were comparable (6,000 versus 5,750 rubles, or by four percent higher in crop production than in animal farming), in 1959 the engagement in the better-mechanized crop production became much more rewarding (10,000 versus 6,800 rubles, or higher by 47 percent) and, thus, much more attractive for workers.¹⁰³ In

⁹⁸ For example: the household record books of Elshanka Village (Sovkhoz Kustanaiskii, Karabalyk Raion, Kustanai Oblast) for years 1951 to 1963 - GAKO, f. R-1332, op. 4, dd. 88, 174-175; op. 6, dd. 17-18.

⁹⁹ Pohl, *Women and Girls in the Virgin Lands*, 55, 57-58.

¹⁰⁰ GAPO, f. 646, op. 5, d. 166, sv. 33, l. 29.

¹⁰¹ *Partiinaia zhyzn' Kazakhstana* 5, 1961, 19-23.

¹⁰² “Neustanno povyshat' politicheskuiu i trudovuiu aktivnost' zhenshchin,” *Kazakhstanskaia pravda*, 8 January 1955, 2; GAPO, f. 646, op. 5, d. 166, sv. 33, l. 29.

¹⁰³ GAKR, f. 1563, op. 2, d. 60, sv. 3, ll. 19-20.

new sovkhoses, the income of livestock workers such as milkmaids could be ten times lower than that of tractor drivers. This means in the 1950s, the difference between mechanized work in crop farming and non-mechanized work in livestock production in terms of satisfaction for individuals could be very extreme.¹⁰⁴ In the early 1960s, after the monetary reform of 1961, propaganda claimed that the average income of sovkhos milkmaids had increased considerably and become “not less than what workers in the other sectors of sovkhos production make”.¹⁰⁵ However, the level of industrialization in animal farms remained far behind.

In order to attract young people to livestock breeding, the Party had to make some effort to encourage them to take up low-paid and manual-labor occupations in animal farms. Schools were expected to instill a “love for animals” in children.¹⁰⁶ The curriculum of secondary schools located in livestock-producing areas contained a practicum in animal farming, whereas their counterparts in crop-producing areas had early vocational guidance in crop production.¹⁰⁷ School graduates were encouraged to remain in the countryside and work in animal farming.¹⁰⁸ In 1959, previous work experience became an officially recognized advantage for university enrolment, and, for those who originated from livestock-breeding areas and wanted to pursue higher education, early work experience in animal production was preordained.¹⁰⁹ Since many sheep-breeding areas were populated with Kazakhs, the encouragement of Kazakh youth to remain in sheep-breeding would reinforce the stereotype that sheep-breeding was a Kazakh occupation, which led to an underlying resentment.¹¹⁰

Although the living conditions of shepherds were primitive, propaganda presented distant pastures as attractive places for working and living and shepherds as modern individuals. “Shepherds live in the steppe. One can think that in terms of working

¹⁰⁴ Pohl, *Women and Girls in the Virgin Lands*, 58.

¹⁰⁵ *Sel'skoe khoziaistvo Kazakhstana* 5, 1961, 39–43.

¹⁰⁶ *Uchitel' Kazakhstana*, 24 March 1955, 1; 14 March 1957, 1.

¹⁰⁷ *Uchitel' Kazakhstana*, 18 August 1955, 2–3.

¹⁰⁸ *Uchitel' Kazakhstana*, 13 June 1957, 3; *Narodnoe khoziaistvo Kazakhstana* 12, 1960, 78–87.

¹⁰⁹ *Kazakhstanskaia pravda*, 29 March 1959, 3.

¹¹⁰ Dave, *Kazakhstan. Ethnicity, language and power*, 66.

conditions we are aside from great events. No such thing. We do not have out-of-the-way spots and godforsaken places [anymore]. The tselina has stirred up everything [and] cut off the distances everywhere” - explained a young shepherd, who together with his wife and mother worked in distant herding in Akmola Oblast, in an agricultural magazine.¹¹¹ The number of shepherds among the titleholders of the Hero of Socialist Labor grew.¹¹² “Tending sheep is an art too” - went the title in *Kazakhstanskaia pravda*.¹¹³ This implied that even though this industry was not associated with machinery, except for sheering appliances, it required a particular set of special skills, too. Press presented shepherds as modernly dressed individuals, too – often in a business suit and with a tie (figures 4 and 5). In the late-1950s, regional agricultural departments organized permanent 10-month courses for shepherds.¹¹⁴ In the first half of the 1960s, sheep tending became a proper profession that could be learned in college.¹¹⁵

¹¹¹ “V družbe s naukoj,” *Sel'skoe khoziaistvo Kazakhstana* 4, 1961, 22–23.

¹¹² *Kazakhstanskaia pravda*, 30 March 1958, 1.

¹¹³ “Pasti ovets - eto tozhe iskusstvo,” *Kazakhstanskaia pravda*, 6 February 1958, 3.

¹¹⁴ GAKR, f. R-37, op. 1L, d. 4, sv. 2, l. 75.

¹¹⁵ *Kostanaiskaia oblast': stranitsy istorii*, 348.



Figure 5. A young shepherd dressed in the European/Western style: a long trench coat and a panama/fedora hat, Priishimskii sovkhos (North-Kazakhstan Oblast), 1960

Source: *Prostor* 1, 1960, 131.

Artists were instructed to draw their inspiration from the “everyday heroics” of shepherds. However, as much as the state mostly failed to bring progress to animal farms and especially distant pastures, novelists and filmmakers – contrary to what they managed to do for the VLC (Chapter Five) - failed to modernize the image of a herder and herocize the Second Tselina in their works. The fictional representation of the Second Tselina such as the novel *Plemia mladoe* (“The Young Tribe”; M. Auezov, 1962) and feature movies *V odnom raione* (“In One County”; Sh. Aimanov, 1960) and *Sledy ukhodiut za gorizont* (“Traces Go Beyond the Horizon”, M. Begalin, 1962) turned out to be more about the primitive and difficult routines of herders rather than their leading roles in boosting the Soviet livestock production. According to the Secretary on Ideology, Dzhandil’din, painters failed, too. After visiting a contemporary painting exhibition in 1959, the chief ideologue criticized Kazakhstani artists for creating the “impression as if the old, pre-revolutionary life of the Kazakh people has remained intact” and for perceiving the shepherd as “an old man who acts

as a guardian of all that remained from the former patriarchal-feudal society”. Some of the displayed paintings, as Dzhandil’din pointed out, “are far away from the creation of the images of our contemporaries [and] from the demonstration of the life of today’s kolkhoz and sovkhos auls which doesn’t resemble the old, pre-revolutionary aul at all”.¹¹⁶

All in all, at least according to the claims of propagandists, the Soviet Union overtook the United States in one animal product: butter which, in 1961, was produced at four kilograms per capita Union-wide, and even more in the Virgin Lands. This achievement was based not only on the increased milk production in sovkhoses and kolkhoses, but also on the poor transporting and central-processing capacities for the purpose of getting pasteurized milk to the towns and selling it to urbanities. Thus, the large amounts of milk produced was processed locally into butter which was easier to store and transport. In the Kazakh Republic in 1961, 70 percent of all milk produced by sovkhoses and procured by the state from kolkhoses and individual producers went to the production of butter.¹¹⁷

By the end of the Khrushchev decade, per capita production of meat in the Kazakh Republic reached 34 kilograms. This was almost half as much of that in the United States but, according to Kazakh economists, 66 percent more than the Soviet average.¹¹⁸ Since most of the produced meat was sold and consumed locally (due to the limited processing and refrigerating capacities),¹¹⁹ the local appetite for animal protein was essentially satisfied. The availability of meat and other food items to local urbanites contributed to their perception of the republic as a wealthy place. As Alma-Ata-based writer and epidemiologist Shchegolichin recalls in his memoirs about his family’s decision not to leave Kazakhstan for the Russian city of Yaroslavl around the

¹¹⁶ Dzhandil'din, N. “Nekotorye voprosy internatsional'nogo vospitaniia,” *Kommunist* 9 (13), 1959, 41.

¹¹⁷ Isaeva, Shakin, *Molochnaia promyshlennost'*, 14.

¹¹⁸ Baishev, *Razvitie narodnogo khoziaistva*, 70, 338.

¹¹⁹ *Narodnoe khoziaistvo Kazakhstana* 9, 1959, 3–7; 3, 1960, 34–35; *Sel'skoe khoziaistvo Kazakhstana* 3, 1961, 59–61; *Partiinaia zhyzn' Kazakhstana* 2, 1961, 36–42.

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late 1950s/early 1960s: “If in the ancient Russian city you don’t get food for the children, and you have to go to Moscow every time for food, we’d better stay in non-Russian, but rich Kazakhstan.”¹²⁰

There were other changes in the urban lifestyle showing that industrially produced meat and milk had made their way to towns. The first production line for prepared meat was launched in the Kazakh Republic, thus marking an improvement in processing and refrigerating capacities. This Pavlodar-based facility offered a range of sophisticated items some of which had not been known to local urbanites, at least by their labels: cutlets, goulash, schnitzel, mincemeat and beefsteaks.¹²¹ The appearance of household meat mincers for sale and meat recipes in women’s magazine also indicated the improved availability of meat.¹²² The growing number of household refrigerators meant that meat and dairy products were also becoming a summer-time staple.¹²³

The Kazakh Republic regained its status of a Soviet meat reserve. A great deal of livestock was annually driven (on hoof) to processing facilities in Russia.¹²⁴ Canned meat produced in the Kazakh Republic and in the Virgin Lands in particular was sold throughout the Soviet Union and made its way as far afield as the drifting Soviet stations at the North Pole.¹²⁵ By the end of the decade, sheep became not less of a brand of Soviet Kazakhstan as wheat. In 1961, at a meeting of the best agricultural workers in Tselinograd, Khrushchev was presented, not with a loaf of bread as he was in the early years of the VLC, but with a male lamb.¹²⁶ The Soviet government, upon a “pressing request” from the Kazakh side, identified the new tselina to be opened.

¹²⁰ Shchegolichin, *Mir vam, trevogi proshlykh let*, 74.

¹²¹ *Khronograf Pavlodarskoi oblasti*, 271.

¹²² *Shmel’* 4, 1957, 8; *Qazaqstan äjelderi* 6, 1956, 28.

¹²³ *Narodnoe khoziaistvo Kazakhstana* 10, 1960, 52–57.

¹²⁴ Kudaibergenov, “Pishchevaia promyshlennost’ Kazakhstana,” 14–15; *Kazakhstanskaia pravda*, 27 January 1956, 2; “Razvivat’ zhyvotnovodstvo na tseline,” *Partiinaia zhyzn’ Kazakhstana* 12, 1959, 27–30; “Kommunisty predlagaiut,” *Partiinaia zhyzn’ Kazakhstana* 12, 1959, 38.

¹²⁵ *Kazakhstan za 50 let*, 59; *Kazakhstanskaia pravda*, 30 March 1956, 1.

¹²⁶ “Osvoim miasnuiu tselinu,” *Sel’skoe khoziaistvo Kazakhstana* 4, 1961, 3–13.

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In 1964, pastures in the desert and semi-desert regions of the Kazakh Republic became the new battleground for abundance and wealth, this time through the development of sheep breeding, a long-time competency of the steppe dwellers.¹²⁷



Figure 6. Khrushchev with a gifted male lamb, Tselinograd, 1961

Source: *Sel'skoe khoziaistvo Kazakhstana* 4, 1961, 9.

Conclusion

Neither stockbreeders nor animals play a prominent role in most accounts of rural and agricultural development. The Second Tselina presents us with a unique prism for studying how the Cold War influenced Soviet development ideas and practices and what part stockbreeders and animals made in development schemes. In its bid to catch up with America, the Soviet Union largely failed, at least within the period under review, to industrialize animal farming. To compensate, Communists had to resort to practices which not long prior, had been deemed economically backward and ideologically deficient. Heavy reliance on nature and low-tech procedures, with

¹²⁷ The Resolution "On the Assimilation of Desert and Semi-desert Pastures for the Development of Sheep-breeding in the Kazakh SSR" was adopted by the Council of Ministers of the USSR on 1 February 1964. *KPSS i sovetskoe pravitel'stvo o Kazakhstane*, 250-259; Kunaev, *Ot Stalina do Gorbacheva*, 164.

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elements of scientific management and a large stratum of poorly educated rural dwellers, were at the core of Soviet practices in livestock production on the ground.

Although the regime transformed the mode of labor organization in the Kazakh countryside by nationalizing kolkhozes, livelihood patterns did not change radically for most of the population. Moreover, the state, once it had failed to bring mechanization to animal farms and relieve the mostly female workforce from arduous manual labor, made use of the local patterns and practices of production. Speaking in Marxist terminology, Soviet Communists did not resolve the differences between intellectual and manual labor, but – to some extent – reinforced them. Individualist attitudes kept prevailing over socialist patterns in animal farming. If, ideologically, the Virgin Lands failed to conform Communist premises, socially and economically they were better off because the campaign became a pipeline for state investments to the countryside and former kolkhoz people did become modern, waged workers eligible for welfare benefits.

The case of the Second Tselina demonstrates – against the background of the general lack of local agency in the Soviet totalitarian system - the comparative flexibility of both the Soviet economy and Soviet ideology, and proves that the latter did not always prevail over the former. It shows not only a high intensity in the imposition of the centre's ideas on the periphery, but also an elevated degree of learning from failures and adapting to actual circumstances. Rural producers were still compelled to deal with unfamiliar corn, as well as pigs which were not universally accepted and domestic birds which they had never previously kept in large numbers. However, longstanding competencies of the local population, such as horse and sheep breeding, became part of Soviet development concepts for agriculture and the countryside. The incorporation into Soviet modernity of sheep breeding, which remained largely old-fashioned and primitive throughout the decade under review, changed the overall development trajectory in the Kazakh Republic. The next chapter discusses what place the Kazakhs and other local groups enjoyed in the Virgin Lands as a model internationalist society for Soviet Communists.

Chapter Three.

The Cultural Tselina: Forging a Model Internationalist Society in the Virgin Lands

As mentioned in the introduction, the social transformation of the Kazakh countryside under Khrushchev's leadership has been largely associated with his brainchild, the Virgin Lands Campaign (VLC) and the mass resettlement of the Slavic workforce to the Kazakh steppe. The fact that the VLC brought the steppe dwellers under the very meticulous attention of Soviet social engineers catalyzed the propaganda efforts aimed at modernizing Kazakhs. Soviet scholarship saw the tselina campaign as a "social experiment" that "affirmed a socialist lifestyle in the new lands".¹ Whether socialist or not, new social patterns did begin to emerge while the old ones had not yet ceased to exist. Il'ias Omarov, a regional party official in the Virgin Lands who used to be the Secretary on Ideology (1947 – 1951) and whose later career led him to the post of Minister of Culture (1967 – 1970), labeled this drive to modernize Kazakhs through cultural interventions as "ploughing up the cultural tselina".² However, the regime's social engineering went beyond "just" modernizing Kazakhs culturally. The ultimate goal was to melt various cultures and peoples in the Virgin Lands into a model internationalist society. This chapter looks at the political, economic, cultural and social elements of this process as well as the place of Kazakhs in the "laboratory of the friendship of the peoples".³

The goal of the chapter is threefold. Firstly, to give a short overview of the demographic makeup in northern Kazakhstan prior to the VLC and how it changed in the Khrushchev decade. Secondly, to consider how Soviet ideologists envisioned an internationalist society and to discuss what changes in which fields the cultural tselina campaign implied. Thirdly, to draw a few examples to illustrate the regime's attempts

¹ Kapesov, "Izmenenie sotsial'nogo oblika sel'skokhoziaistvennykh truzhennikov kazakhskogo sela v usloviakh razvitogo sotsializma," 38-39.

² Omarov. I. "Druzhba narodov - zavoevanie Velikogo Oktiabria," *Partiinaia zhyzn' Kazakhstana* 3, 1959, 11-17.

³ A propagandistic epithet the Kazakh republic earned in the tselina period. For example: Besbaev, M. "Osvoenie tseliny i sblizhenie natsii," *Partiinaia zhyzn' Kazakhstana* 1, 1963, 58-63.

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to replace old practices with new, Soviet “traditions” and, where possible, Kazakhs’ response to these interventions.

Demographic mosaic

The influx of new settlers for the VLC dramatically boosted the population of the Kazakh Republic. Between 1954 and 1965, the rural population of the republic grew by more than 1.7 million (in comparison, the urban population increased by almost 2.5 million)⁴, most of whom came to Kazakhstan to work in the Virgin Lands. Although there were ethnic Kazakhs among the repatriates from China who made up a large group of migrants in the Kazakh tselina,⁵ the majority of newcomers fell into the Slavic group.

The Kazakh countryside was home, though not always voluntarily chosen, for many ethnic groups prior to the tselina mass resettlement. The 1959 census that was the only census in the tselina decade, as well as records on special settlers shed light on the patchwork demography of Soviet Kazakhstan. According to the census, most of the ethnic Kazakhs (81.6 percent, or 417,894 out of 512,352) in the Virgin Lands, or five northern provinces of the Kazakh Republic, resided in rural areas where they made up only 22 per cent of the population. They were greatly outweighed by Russians (45 percent of the population of the Virgin Lands) who, together with Ukrainians (14.4 percent), formed a large Slavic group.⁶

This Slavic group was very heterogeneous in how its members had found their way to the Kazakh steppe. It comprised at least four distinct subgroups. The first, in

⁴ Dutbaeva, “Vliianie osvoeniia tselinnykh i zalechnykh zemel' na dinamiku sotsial'noi struktury naseleniia Kazakhstana,” 115.

⁵ Repatriates from China made up, at least in the first years of the VLC, around 20 percent of the newcomers in the Virgin Lands. In 1955, a total number of around 16,000 repatriates arrived in kolkhozes of the Kazakh Republic, half of whom were Kazakhs and a third Russians; the rest were mainly Uighurs, Tatars, Uzbek and other ethnic groups. This proportion might have changed in the following years; the repatriation of “former Soviet citizens” to the Kazakh SSR continued until 1962. Ablazhei, *Kazakhskii migratsionnyi maiatnik*, 151, 220.

⁶ *Itogi Vsesoiuznoi perepisi naseleniia 1959 goda. Kazakhskaiia SSR*, 168-185.

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chronological order, was a group of emancipated serfs who appeared there in the 1890s in search of land on which to settle and who were part of the peasant colonization coordinated by the Tsarist government. A few decades later, former *kulaki* (wealthy peasants) arrived: they were exiled to Soviet Central Asia at the time of the First Five-Year Plan (1928 – 1932) to set up large grain-growing state farms. The regime's efforts to populate the land-abundant countryside brought two more groups to the Kazakh steppe. In 1954, in accordance with a special agreement between the Soviet Union and China, people who had fled the Soviet Union in the 1930s to escape collectivization and had ended up in a number of neighbouring regions, including China, began to come back. According to the arrangements, the repatriates were to join *kolkhozes* (collective farms) and *sovkhozes* (state farms) specifically in the Virgin Lands. The fourth influx of Slavic peoples were workers whom the Communist Party dispatched to the Kazakh steppe to staff new *sovkhozes*, as well as collective farmers who, in search of a better life, joined existing *kolkhozes* in the Virgin Lands within resettlement quotas. The first two groups, who were regarded as old settlers, generally saw the new resettlement as a continuation of the Slavic colonization of the Kazakh steppe.⁷

The census recorded three other large ethnic groups (between around 65,000 and 40,000 people each) in the Virgin Lands: Belarusians, Tatars and Poles. While the appearance of Belarusians was mainly a result of the influx of a new workforce, the Tatars and Poles as well as three other groups who did not even appear in the census report - Russified Germans, Chechens and Ingush - found themselves in the Kazakh steppe as victims of ethnic deportations.⁸ Between 1936 and 1946, the ethnic diversity of the Kazakh countryside was boosted as a result of the Stalinist state's horrific approach to the punishment of entire ethnic groups for their supposed predisposition to Nazi Germany. In the mid-1950s, the regime released Chechens and Ingush, whom they regarded as troublesome groups whose members were often involved in violent conflicts in the Virgin Lands and refused to work, resulting in most

⁷ "Pamiat' krest'ianskogo serdtsa," *Maiak*, 23 January 1979, 3; Shukhov, *Presnovskie stranitsy*. 241-249.

⁸ Tatars were also among the repatriates from China.

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of them returning to their homelands. However, Germans were not permitted to leave the region until 1972. In 1955, there were around 128,500 Germans registered as special settlers in the five tselina provinces.⁹ If this number remained unchanged until 1959, then Russified Germans were twice as numerous as the Belarusians in the Virgin Lands. Apparently, the VLC turned out to be one of the reasons for the retention of the diligent and skilled Germans in Kazakhstan: when, in 1965 the Russified Germans living in the Kazakh Republic called for the restoration of their autonomous territory in the Volga region and asked to be allowed to return there from exile, Anastas Mikoian, Chairman of the Presidium of the Supreme Council of the USSR, commented: "At present in the Virgin Lands Region, without the Germans it is impossible to run the rural economy".¹⁰

Koreans, a less numerous ethnic group in the Virgin Lands in 1959, were prominent at the onset of the VLC too: Koreans were resettled in the Kazakh Republic, predominantly in its two northern provinces (Kustanai Oblast and North-Kazakhstan Oblast) in 1937. The Soviet power did not deprive resettled Koreans of their civic rights because their transfer from the Soviet Far East to the Central Asian region (mainly Kazakhstan and Uzbekistan) was a measure to prevent the supposed infiltration of Japanese spies, rather than to punish them for collaboration with the enemy. In a period of two months in 1937 the Kustanai region alone received 5,100 Koreans.¹¹ By 1959, as is evident from the census report,¹² most Koreans had moved from the northern provinces, a zone of dry-land farming, to the south of the Republic, a zone of irrigated agriculture where they, being skilled vegetable growers, found more prospects for their families and their community as a whole.

Kazakhs in the Virgin Lands, as in other regions of the republic, lived mainly in rural areas and engaged predominantly with livestock breeding, primarily sheep. Although the VLC-associated transfers of populations made the republic and especially its

⁹ Or almost a half of all ethnic Germans (around 243,500) registered as special settlers in the Kazakh Republic. APRK, f. 708, op. 28, d. 285, l. 10.

¹⁰ Pohl, *The Loss, Retention, and Reacquisition*, 212-213.

¹¹ Liegkii, Kim, "Iz istorii zarozhdeniia 'Koreiskogo posielka' v gorode Kostanae," 27.

¹² *Itogi Vsesoiuznoi perepisi naseleniia 1959 goda. Kazakhskaiia SSR*, 168-185.

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northern regions even less Kazakh demographically, the objective to achieve internationalist diversity in the Virgin Lands implied that Kazakhs had to remain culturally prominent. However, this did not mean that all features of *kazakhshylyk* (Kazakhness, or being truly Kazakh and doing something in the originally Kazakh way) had to be preserved for the sake of the creation of the Soviet super-culture.

“We Are Internationalists”

According to the Soviet nationality theory formulated by Lenin and Stalin, in order to transform into one communist society and one Soviet nation, all ethno-national cultures had to undergo three stages: *rastsvet* (blooming), *sblizhenie* (rapprochement, drawing together), and *sliianie* (fusion, merger). This implied that each culture had to go through a linear process in stages and many particular developments that were supposed to apply to it within each stage. This process would eventually lead to a conformed homogenous type of socialist modernity. Soviet nation builders believed that, prior to the VLC, the blooming of Kazakh culture had already occurred and that it had reached the rapprochement stage at which it had begun to draw together with other national cultures and the Russian culture in the first place. Propaganda efforts during the Great Fatherland War and the purges of “nationalists” before and after the war greatly contributed to this transition.¹³

To accelerate the shift to the third stage, the Party employed in the Kazakh tselina, a Communists’ “laboratory” for melting cultures and peoples, the principle of internationalism. This principle was a derivation from the Communist Manifesto and, to be more precise, a variation of the leitmotif for the would-have-been World Revolution “Workers of the World, Unite!” that was inversed to target own peoples. It was a continuation of the main principle of the Stalinist nationality policy: the Friendship of the Peoples that regarded state-recognized ethno-national cultures as

¹³ According to Carmack, “the narrative of militant Kazakh heroism [produced by Soviet propaganda during the Great Patriotic War] firmly inscribed the Kazakh people into the Soviet family of nations” and “nurture[ed] an identity that combined Kazakh and pan-Soviet elements”. (Carmack, “History and Hero-Making”). Chapters Four and Five provides some details on the state cleansing of “Kazakh nationalism” in the second half of the 1930s to the early-1950s.

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primordial and equal and the Russian culture as central and the first among equals.¹⁴

In the Kazakh tselina, internationalism played three functions: it nurtured the Soviet identity, offered a plausible explanation for the initial multi-ethnicity of the Kazakh countryside, and confronted “local nationalism”.

My analysis of how local ideologues and propagandists interpreted and introduced internationalism is based on their publications. It could be that their apprehension of this notion did not vary much from that of their counterparts in other Soviet republics. However, the way this principle was localized and implemented on the Kazakh soil was undoubtedly unique. Before going any further, I would like to explain who the conductors of Soviet ideology, or professional ideologues and propagandists, were, in the context of the Kazakh Republic. The system of preservation of the Communist orthodoxy (Marxism-Leninism) had a clear structure in the Kazakh Republic, as, perhaps, in any Soviet republic. In the head, at the Central Committee (CC) of the Communist Party of Kazakhstan, there was a Secretary on Ideology and the Department for Propaganda. The former position was always filled by an ethnic Kazakh while the latter was always headed by an ethnic Russian. The Secretary on Ideology held permanent membership in the CC Bureau, the most influential decision-making body, not only for the CC but also for the Council of Ministers (a government) and the Supreme Council (a parliament): the Bureau actually appointed chairpersons for both.

For most of the tselina period, from 1957 to 1965, Nurymbet Dzhandil'din, an ethnic Kazakh, occupied the post of Secretary on Ideology. His duty was to make sure that Communist orthodoxy was maintained properly in all party and state affairs and applied to the local settings without deviations. The Department for Propaganda oversaw the conformity of the cultural, educational, mass communication and other spheres of public life to the Soviet ideological principles and agenda.¹⁵ There was a

¹⁴ For a detailed account on nation building under Stalin, see, for example: Martin, *The Affirmative Action Empire*.

¹⁵ For more on the political and administrative system of the Kazakh Republic, see: Cleary, “Politics and Administration in Soviet Kazakhstan.”

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secretary in charge of ideology and propaganda in all regional party committees and there was a party cell in every sovkhos and in many kolkhozes. These local structures were established to ensure that Soviet propaganda and Communist values reached and took root in the countryside. Clubs, red yurts, print material, including periodicals as well as radio listening and movie showings were all part of the propaganda machine.¹⁶

The Writers' Union of Kazakhstan and the Academy of Science of the Kazakh Republic were official propagators of Communist ideology and Soviet values too. Many of the members of the Writers' Union and many of the scholars of the Academy of Science were communists and thus, were involved in propaganda professionally and "through the party line" (find more about the ideological settings for Kazakh writers with regard to the VLC in Chapter Five).¹⁷ In general, the Soviet Marxism-Leninism, as Akiner puts it, "was propagated through every conceivable channel of mass communication and mass persuasion", including all levels of formal education. The task of propaganda was to shape and continuously reinforce the "general perception that there was a greater degree of social justice and security under the Soviet regime than previously; also, that there were increased opportunities for personal achievement, based on merit, rather than on birth."¹⁸

For Soviet theorists of Communism, an internationalist society was an anticipated outcome of the rapprochement stage and an essential basis for the next stage of the development of national cultures, fusion. The Third Party Program, a strategic document of paramount importance adopted by the Central Committee of the Communist Party in 1961, gave a direction towards "a greater rapprochement"

¹⁶ For a more detailed account on the place of radio in these efforts, see below; on that of clubs, red yurts, periodicals and cinema, see Chapters One, Four and Five.

¹⁷ Although I do not have earlier data on the political affiliation and ethnic breakdown of Kazakhstani writers, more recent data suggests that ethnic Kazakh and communists prevailed in the writing community. As of 1 May 1966, communists made up 70 percent of the membership of the Union of Writers of the Kazakh SSR. Most of them (161 out of 242) were ethnic Kazakhs. *Spravka ob organizatsionno-tvorcheskoi rabote Pravleniia Soiuza pisatelei Kazakhstana*, 5.

¹⁸ Akiner, "Melting pot, salad bowl – cauldron," 378-379.

intended to result, and was, supposedly, already resulting, in forming “an international[ist] culture common to all the Soviet nations”.¹⁹

Propaganda claimed that internationalism took different forms in practice. From the mid-1950s and until the collapse of the Soviet Union, which was a coherent period with regard to promoting internationalism, it increasingly highlighted the supposed manifestations of internationalism in various areas of inter-ethnic, predominantly Russian-Kazakh, encounters. Staffing Kazakh schools with teachers from Russia at the onset of the VLC and enrolment quotas for Kazakhs in Russian universities were presented as internationalist support.²⁰ Populating the Virgin Lands with workers from other Soviet republics and especially, from among the “great Russian people”, was celebrated as an expression of internationalism. Giving Slavic nicknames to people of non-Slavic origin, but not the other way round, was increasingly portrayed and seen as internationalist. A canteen menu consisting of a variety of dishes whose origin was “hard to establish” was praised as a sign of internationalism.²¹

For the Kazakh Republic, the tselina became “a concrete expression of the ideas of proletarian internationalism” and a “genuine school of internationalist education of workers”.²² Portraying working collectives in the Virgin Lands as multi-ethnic and thus, internationalist, was a widespread practice in the press and official proceedings. Kazakh literature and cinema celebrated multi-ethnic family-like collectives in the tselina farms.²³ Such representation was, first of all, to “prove” the validity of Soviet nation-building theories: in the Virgin Lands, a “laboratory” where these theories were put into practice, national cultures were supposedly moving forward, towards the ultimate fusion into one Soviet nation. Secondly, efforts to shape the Kazakh

¹⁹ *Programme of the Communist Party of the Soviet Union*, 104.

²⁰ Zadorozhnyi, *Shkoly Kazakhstana*, 104.

²¹ Dzhandil'din, *Priroda natsional'noi psikhologii*, 280.

²² “Ob odnoi porochnoi broshiure,” *Kazakhstanskaia pravda*, 18 December 1959, 4; Dzhandil'din, Nurymbet “My – internatsionalisty,” *Partiinaiia zhyzn' Kazakhstana* 11, 1961, 19.

²³ For example: the feature movie *My zdes' zhyviem* (“We Live Here”) directed by Aimanov, Sh. and Volodarskii, M. and produced by Kazakhfilm in 1956, or the fictional novel *Lodka, pereplyvaiushchaia okean* (“A Boat Sailing Across the Ocean”), initially written by Ilyas Yessenberlin in 1975.

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tselina into a melting pot were made to downplay the inter-ethnic tension that was evident in the first years of the VLC (and often ended in violent conflicts)²⁴ and prevent any nationalistic upsurges in the future. To this end, propaganda contraposed internationalism and nationalism. As much as internationalism stood for positive developments in the Soviet society, nationalism was presented in an exclusively negative connotation.²⁵

While internationalism was understood as “brotherhood, comradely mutual assistance and cooperation of workers of different nationalities in the struggle for their freedom and a better future”²⁶, nationalism was explained as “a painful state of a national feeling [“national pride and national dignity”] which is excessively stirred up under the influence of a certain social evil [and] politically negative anti-human ideas as well as actions caused by this state”. Therefore, the task of ideologues was to identify and replace this negative influence with “noble social and ideological-political grounds subordinated to the progressive thoughts and tasks of the revolutionary classes”. As a result, the “national feelings” would express themselves as Soviet patriotism and internationalism.²⁷ However awkward and maybe even naïve it may sound in theory, in practice it implied that if a person opposed internationalism or the VLC as one of its supposed manifestations, he/she was labelled a nationalist. In Khrushchev’s Thaw, this accusation might not lead to a labour camp, but could ruin somebody’s career.

The Kazakh Republic, although a host of this massive campaign, was not assigned with any other progressive or prominent role in making this intervention possible. Party ideologues presented the VLC as inspired and led personally by Khrushchev (propaganda attempted to change this image after his dismissal) and benefiting all Soviet people. Attempts to appropriate the VLC and present it as a “purely

²⁴ About inter-ethnic conflicts between local and new groups in the Virgin Lands: Kozlov, *Massovyie besporiadki v SSSR pri Khrushcheve i Brezhneve*, 113-124; Pohl, “The ‘planet of one hundred languages’.”

²⁵ Krasovitskaia, Tishkov, *Etnicheskii i religiozniy faktory*, 301.

²⁶ Dzhandil'din, *Priroda natsional'noi psikhologii*, 188.

²⁷ Ibid, 163.

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Kazakhstan phenomenon” were deemed anti-internationalist and, thus, crushed in the bud. For instance, a 1959 pamphlet about the struggles of Kazakh communists for the VLC provoked the indignation of Kazakh propagandists because the author underrated the role of the Communist Party of the Soviet Union (CPSU) in general, and that of Khrushchev in particular, as well as the “fraternal help from the great Russian people and other peoples of the Soviet Union”.²⁸ It seems that because of this attack, the doctoral dissertation this publication was based on was annulled, a Candidate of Science’s degree was taken away and the author had to re-write his thesis. The goal of the re-worked dissertation read as “to show the leading role of the CPSU in the opening of tselina expanses of Kazakhstan” in contrast to the old one that was focused on the Kazakh party’s efforts in this Soviet endeavor.²⁹

The tselina campaign, as a supposedly internationalist phenomenon, was effectively used as an ideological cover for the ethnic deportations to Kazakhstan of the 1930s and 1940s, a taboo of Soviet press, literature and public discourse in general.³⁰ It allowed management of the complex ethnic mosaic that northern Kazakhstan had become even prior to the VLC. In referring to one of the oldest sovkhozes in the republic (sovkhoz Kustanaiskii) as a “big family”, a local newspaper wrote in 1955: “Representatives of almost thirty different nationalities gathered here from all corners of our country. For many years now, Russians and Ukrainians, Belarusians and Kazakhs, Chuvash, Moldavians and many, many others have been living here together in a single fraternal family”. The story featured a Kazakh driver, three tractor operators (a Russian, a Ukrainian and a German), a German milkmaid, an Ingush

²⁸ “Ob odnoi porochnoi broshiure,” *Kazakhstanskaia pravda*, 18 December 1959, 4; “Boevaia programma deistvii,” *Partiinaia zhyzn' Kazakhstana* 1, 1960, 9. See also: Cleary, “Politics and administration in Soviet Kazakhstan,” 94, 353.

²⁹ Shamshatov, “Rabota partiinykh organizatsii Kazakhstana po osvoeniiu tselinnykh i zaleznykh zemel' v 1954-1956 gg.,” 2; Shamshatov, “Deiatel'nost' partiinoi organizatsii Kazakhstana po osvoeniiu tselinnykh i zaleznykh zemel' v 1954-1960 godakh,” 3.

³⁰ For a similar conclusion (to use the notion of a “laboratory of internationalism” for the Kazakh republic in order to cover the real reason behind multi-ethnicity, deportations) see: Krasovitskaia, Tishkov, *Etnicheskii i religiozni faktory*, 226.

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hammerer and three construction workers of Russian, Kazakh and German origin.³¹ According to this village's household records books, these were the most populous ethnic groups, and, as explained earlier in the chapter, they did not end up in the Kazakh steppe as a result of the VLC.³²

Kazakh propagandists warned, however, that internationalism should not bring Kazakhs to "national nihilism" ("rejection of cultural heritage, the unfounded denial of it") because it could hurt "national feelings".³³ According to the Secretary on Ideology of Kazakhstan, Nurymbet Dzhandil'din, "the internationalization (*internatsionalizatsia*) of the national form should not be regarded as a process of the denationalization of culture".³⁴ "National feelings" would disappear, as another theorist explained, after Kazakh culture advanced to the fusion stage: national features would be replaced by moral and cultural features common to all builders of Communism and only the best traditions of national cultures would remain to form a unified Communist culture.³⁵

Cultural interventions

Notorious attempts of Soviet nation-builders to keep native cultures "national in form" and to fill them with "socialist" content were especially rigorous in the Kazakh tselina. The Stalinist formula for a national culture ("socialist in content, national in form") could also be understood as the simultaneous processes of nominally preserving ethno-national identities while nurturing their bearers' Soviet, sub-

³¹ "V bol'shoi sem'e," *Stalinskii put'*, 11 June 1955.

³² Between 1953 and 1955, Komsomolets, a headquarter village of the Kustanaiskii sovkhoz, comprised 410 families which included: 119 Russian families, 102 Ukrainian families, 44 Ingush families, 39 families of ethnic Germans, 15 Kazakh families, 76 mixed families (most of whom emanated from wedlock between a Russian and a Ukrainian) and the rest (17) families were identified as Armenian, Jewish, Latvian, Greek, Mordovian, Belarusian and Korean. GAKO, f. R-1332, op. 4, dd. 145-160.

³³ Omarov, I. "Druzhba narodov - zavoevanie Velikogo Oktiabria," *Partiinaia zhizn' Kazakhstana* 3, 1959, 16-17.

³⁴ Dzhandil'din, *Priroda natsional'noi psikhologii*, 173.

³⁵ Karasaev, "Formirovanie i razvitie kazakhskoi sotsialisticheskoi natsii," 21.

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national allegiance.³⁶ In the tselina time, Kazakh theorists and propagandists of Communism deemed cultural particularities that did not contradict Soviet values or could be refined to complete the sovietization of Kazakhs useful and thus, progressive. For instance, Kazakh hospitality was viewed as useful in the light of the mass resettlement that needed to happen for the VLC and, thus, was officially celebrated. The ancient legend about the Kazakh dream of the Promised Land (*zher iuk*) and a happy life in the distant future became a reference to the Virgin Lands.³⁷ It seems that for local theorists and propagandists, it was sometimes hard to define whether sundry practices were worth preserving or not. There was also confusion about whether “this or that” cultural feature belonged to “content” or to “form”. “[N]ot being able to separate the best national traditions from the harmful remnants of the old society, some of our researchers as well as some individuals from among the artistic intelligentsia lump everything together” - complained Dzhandil'din in 1959.³⁸

Kazakh propagandists of Soviet values sought to uproot such mundane practices as eating with hands and sitting on the floor, for reasons of being unhygienic and inconsistent with the image of the builders of Communism. “Having a possibility to purchase all the necessary items of the new lifestyle, what is stopping us, [who have] been brought up in the Soviet socialist system, now?” - wrote N. Sarsenbaev, a strenuous ideologue associated with the Academy of Science, in 1955, whose book “Upbringing Workers in the Spirit of Communist Morality” was published in Russian, Uighur and Kazakh. If these “remnants” were more or less harmless, others, such as following the tribal lineage, patriarchal gender norms coming from the tribal past, and religious prejudices, were claimed to be obstructive to the achievement of Soviet justice and to the building of capable local cadres and thus, were less tolerable by

³⁶ For a comprehensive discussion of these social engineering efforts in the years of the Great Fatherland War, see: Carmack, “History and Hero-Making,” 95–112.

³⁷ Dakhshleiger, G.; Tursunbaev, A.; Shafiro, Sh. “Pravda ob osvoenii tseliny i vymysly burzhuaiznykh falsifikatorov,” *Partiinaiia zhyzn' Kazakhstana* 12, 1959, 23.

³⁸ Dzhandil'din, N. “Nekotorye voprosy internatsional'nogo vospitaniia.” *Kommunist* 9 (13), 1959, 30–43.

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Kazakh communists.³⁹ At the same time, the regime continuously reinforced the association of Kazakhs with pastoralism and emphasized that those who actually owned the livestock in the past were "suppressors of the people" and an actual "carrier of the feudal-bourgeois customs".

One of the examples that illustrates the peculiarities of Soviet nation building, or how "socialist" content was wrapped up in a "national" form in the Kazakh Republic, was the *aitys*. *Aitys* is a contest between two poetry improvisers (*akyns*) who speak or sing in Kazakh to music they play on traditional instruments like the *dombra*. In pre-revolutionary Kazakh steppe this art form was not only a popular entertainment in the pre-revolutionary Kazakh steppe but also one of the main ways for the transmission of knowledge among steppe dwellers. It survived the October Revolution for a reason that was largely pragmatic. As Akiner explains, Communists used the individuals' sense of preserving their own ways of communicating to establish the new order in the Kazakh steppe. *Akyns* acted as "semi-official cultural ambassadors" who composed lyrics glorifying the role of Lenin and the October Revolution in the liberation of Kazakhs from the dark past and depicting the bright future that lay ahead of them.⁴⁰

During the war, local party committees used *akyns* for mobilizing Kazakh workers and farmers for hard work to provide for the Red Army: they were sent to factories, kolkhozes and sovkhoses to expose shortcomings in production and work discipline.⁴¹ Soon after the war, the practice of *aitys* was discontinued. This was, perhaps, the result of the Moscow-sanctioned attack on folk epics that had recently not only inspired Kazakhs to fight in and provide for the Red Army but also glorified Kazakh warriors from the pre-revolutionary past.⁴² One of the implications of this was that some of the classical *aitys* pieces and the names of some of the *akyns* from the past,

³⁹ Sarsenbaev, *Vospitanie trudiashchikhsia v dukhe kommunisticheskoi morali*, 129-130.

⁴⁰ Akiner, *The Formation of Kazakh Identity*, 39; Ishanov, Kh. "Narodnye akyny v bor'be za Sovetskuiu vlast'," *Uchitel' Kazakhstana*, 4 July 1957, 2.

⁴¹ Orynbaeva, *Povsednevnaia zhizn' kazakhstanskogo sela*; Musrepov, *Cherty epokhi* ("Aitys vozvrashchen").

⁴² *Bol'shevik Kazakhstana* 1, 1947, 34-52.

referred to as “reactionary poets”, were eliminated from textbooks on Kazakh literature.⁴³ Perhaps, in the eyes of propagandists, the folk atmosphere of *aitys* competitions, which they could not always take under control, created cultural and social references to the pre-revolutionary past. Meanwhile, the regime cherished the *akyns* which it handpicked to serve its propagandistic needs: the honorary title *People’s Akyn of the Kazakh SSR* was established in 1948 (a corresponding title for Kazakh writers appeared only 36 years after this).

In 1957, which for Soviet society as a whole was the moment of de-Stalinization and a loosening of restrictions, the practice of *aitys* contests was renewed.⁴⁴ Again, the reason was largely pragmatic. The regime employed this practice in its efforts to reach out to Kazakh shepherds, a group once marginalized but which, as I discuss in two previous chapters, quickly grew in importance for the Communist Party in relation to its commitment to overtake the United States in meat production. The *aitys* was a familiar form of entertainment for herders and was associated with other elements of the Kazakh culture (such as *dombra*, traditional clothing and, most importantly, the Kazakh language). On the one hand, the revival of this “folkloric” form, which was accompanied by state-sanctioned ethno-graphic expeditions to collect folkloric pieces in remote regions and debates on the rehabilitation of the names of the “reactionary poets” of the past,⁴⁵ fostered the impression that the Kazakh culture kept blooming. On the other hand, this “national form” was filled with “socialist content”. Thus, one of the tselina provinces reported that *aitys* contestants “glorif[ied] the Soviet people, the wise policies of the Communist Party, the heroics of labor in the virgin lands” as well as “sharply criticize[d] the shortcomings and negligent workers”.⁴⁶

Aitys contests fitted especially well in the Soviet practice of so-called socialist competitions when two farms, or two raions (districts), or two provinces competed -

⁴³ Zhaksalykov, *Syn stepei*, 168-169.

⁴⁴ GAGN, f. 136, op. 6, d. 88, sv. 2, l. 15

⁴⁵ GAGN, f. 136, op. 6, d. 24, sv. 1, ll. On the rehabilitation of Kazakh intelligentsia see Chapter Four.

⁴⁶ Dzenaliev, I. “Sovkhozye ochagi kul'tury,” *Partiinaiia zhizn' Kazakhstana* 3, 1959, 50–53.

according to decisions from above, but presented as local initiatives – for higher numbers in agricultural production. One of the examples of ideologically charged “folklore” was a regional *aitys* contest that took place in the Kustanai province in 1959. These verses were read by two *akyns*: the first one represented a cattle-breeding area (Dzhangel’dinskii Raion) while the second spoke for an area that – with the launch of the VLC – had considerably expanded its crop production (Kamyshninskii Raion).

“Akhmetkhan:

I’m a son of akyn Abikai, I’ve seen a lot in my lifetime. At an *aitys* of *akyns*, I turn into a race horse. [...] By the will of the Party, the once-deserted steppe is being transformed in front of our eyes. In meadows and pastures [there are] huge flocks of sheep, herds of cows and horses. Intense work is in full swing. Before our eyes, the appearance of the old villages is changing, there is a rapid construction of housing, public facilities and industrial sites. For all this, many thanks to [our] dear Communist Party.

Zhusuibek:

I am also not as simple as I look. My verses are streaming like golden wheat grains are streaming from a combine harvester. Since we’ve started this competition, let’s glorify [our] dear party [and] its Leninist farsightedness. Huge territory of our district, by the will of the party, has been transformed into fertile fields. From year to year, grain production is increasing. [...] So the workers of our raion create fabulous mountains of grain.”⁴⁷

Later on in the contest, the former praised his district for having sheep that “cannot move because of all their fat” and criticized the rival for having “a lot of emaciated livestock”, feeding sheep with bad-quality fodder and undervaluing the importance of horse breeding. The latter glorified his home area for not only producing “bread” but also dealing with animal husbandry, mocked the other district for not doing poultry and pig farming and advised them to take up crop cultivation to have enough

⁴⁷ GAKO, f. 1113, op. 3, f. 151, ll. 6-9.

grain “at least to feed the poultry”. Both *akyns* condemned the other district for not doing enough for workers, schoolchildren and the retired.

Since we do not know anything else about these two improvisers and the communities they represented in this contest, it remains unclear whether these *akyns* were truly convinced of the VLC’s success or had appropriated the VLC in order to continue a long-standing competition between two regions or tribes. Nevertheless, their words could, probably, have fostered a spirit of competition among workers and farmers, which was the very idea behind a socialist competition.

From the point of view of local propagandists, the return of *aitys* could potentially bring back the knowledge and spread of reactionary views and feudal customs which, in their eyes, were incompatible with the image of Soviet men and women and thus dangerous for Soviet ideology. Therefore, folklore pieces “connected to the disappeared or obsolete phenomena of everyday life” were to be blacked out.⁴⁸ Even with all the restraints, the *aitys*, nevertheless, remained a popular entertainment; after all, behind the Party’s achievements which were supposed to inspire *akyns*, there were individual contributions of many ordinary Kazakh workers. This neo-traditional practice, or old practice tailored to new political purposes, became so widespread, that writer Mukhtar Auezov noted in 1960 that the *aitys* was experiencing its “golden time”.⁴⁹ However, this “golden time” was meant to be short: the ultimate goal of social engineers was to replace folk music associated with the past with “new songs dedicated to the Communist Party, the Soviet Motherland [and] the heroic deeds of the Soviet people”.⁵⁰

The Soviet ideology machine focused on generating not only “socialist” content but, eventually, new, “socialist” forms, since outdated “national” forms were supposedly

⁴⁸ Smirnova, *Kazakhskaiia narodnia poeziia*, 8-9.

⁴⁹ Auezov, *Sobranie sochinenii*, 5: 485.

⁵⁰ The respective resolution was approved in September 1964. The task to create such songs was assigned to the Union of Writers and the Union of Composers. “O sostoiianii i merakh po dal'neishemu razvitiuu muzykal'nogo iskusstva v respublike,” *Kazakhstanskaia pravda*, 5 September 1964, 3.

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not appropriate for the “embodiment of new contents”.⁵¹ However, Soviet censors did not always manage to ensure that a cultural form contained “socialist” content, and if before Stalin’s death, the regime restrained such ideologically defective content through physical elimination of its producers, the Khrushchev decade brought some degree of liberalization in the socio-cultural sphere, though not always unambiguous. Therefore, in the late-1950s and the 1960s, we can observe local attempts to reverse this formula so as to communicate “national” content in a “socialist” form. One such example was the rehabilitation of earlier banned folklore songs (“national” content) to meet the demand of the rapidly expanding radio audience and fill the stream of the growing share of Kazakh-language radio broadcasting (“socialist” form).⁵² (For more on the role of the radio in introducing new traditions, see below.) Another example was the production of national (or, as Kudaibergenova puts it, “nationalist”) content by Kazakh novelists.⁵³ However, as I show in Chapter Five, the main guideline for Kazakh writers was to address Soviet modernity and, thus, produce propaganda-charged literary pieces.

The Kazakh elderly played a decisive role in the preservation of customary norms, including religious ones. Old practices survived with those who had gone through the brutalities and losses of forced sedentarization, the Great Terror and the war years. For atheist propaganda, which was on the rise in the years of the VLC, the rural elderly was one of the most important groups to be covered: they were religious, they observed old customs which they wished to transmit to the younger generation and they were not part of working collectives where new rituals were more evident. State-sponsored clubs of atheist propaganda, which – with the tselina campaign – became more numerous and more active but not necessarily as effective as they were expected to be, offered lectures on scientific and antireligious themes, promoted new community rituals and encouraged the secularization of family events. For example, they offered their halls for wedding parties to shield young couples from

⁵¹ Dzhandil'din, N. “O nekotorykh voprosakh razvitiia natsional'noi kul'tury,” *Kommunist Kazakhstana* 7, 1957, 18.

⁵² APRK, f. 708, op. 31, d. 1475, ll. 65, 68.

⁵³ Kudaibergenova, *Rewriting the Nation in Modern Kazakh Literature*, 56.

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the influence of the elderly.⁵⁴ However, by the end of the decade, Kazakh apologists of Soviet ideology admitted that there was still not enough explanatory work among the elderly regarding the “harmfulness of old customs [and] moral”.⁵⁵

From the point of view of Kazakh communists, the greatest danger lay in the tradition of reckoning the seven ancestors, a practice that had remained mainly among the rural elderly.⁵⁶ Known as *shezhyre*, a genealogical memory, or a genealogy register, traced all Kazakhs to their roots - lineages (*ru*), tribes, cohorts (*zhuzy*) and, ultimately, a singular ancestor. Old Kazakhs who maintained their *shezhyre* could more easily relate to the past order that could shape their perception of how social structures should look and how local politics should work. Such an attitude was undoubtedly against the Soviet order and could potentially exclude other ethnic groups from state affairs. According to Esenova, although under Soviet rule, such registers were restricted to the informal sphere of social activities and kept discreetly,⁵⁷ they did contribute to how local politics was shaped in Soviet Kazakhstan.

This influence was the reason for the earlier-mentioned Sarsenbaev and other Kazakh propagandists to portray *aksakaly* (“the elderly”) as being especially harmful to the adoption of Soviet lifestyle and values by younger generations.⁵⁸ “On occasion they [some of the elder Kazakhs] preach the idea of the superiority of a certain clan, the representatives of which, they assert, should occupy leading posts in society, e.g. chairmanship of collective farms or raion offices. Such propaganda leads, in individual collective farms and raions, to conflicts between the representatives of different clans and nationalities” - wrote another Kazakh apologist of Communism in 1964.⁵⁹ On a side note: This genealogical knowledge had eventually made it over to the younger generations which is evident from the fact that the reconstruction of

⁵⁴ GAKO, f. 113, op. 13, d. 130, ll. 1-7

⁵⁵ Dzhumagazin, *Razvitie sotsialisticheskogo soznania*, 210.

⁵⁶ See more on the role of the *shezhyre* in consolidating and nurturing the Kazakh identity before, during and after Soviet rule in: Esenova, “Soviet Nationality, Identity, and Ethnicity in Central Asia.”

⁵⁷ Esenova, “Soviet Nationality, Identity, and Ethnicity in Central Asia,” 23.

⁵⁸ Sarsenbaev, *Vospitanie trudiashchikhsia*, 129-130

⁵⁹ Quoted in: Cleary, “Politics and Administration in Soviet Kazakhstan,” 385.

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shezhyre registers became highly popular in the post-Soviet years and also from the memoirs of those who, in the tselina years, thought of themselves as internationalists.⁶⁰

One of the most intolerable “remnants” in Kazakh society for Communists were religious prejudices. Religion threatened progress in very direct ways: priests (Muslim and Christian) forbade their parishes to attend movie screenings, go to clubs and listen to the radio.⁶¹ Whenever Kazakhs followed Muslim traditions, they did it rather discreetly. Anusa apai, one of my interviewees who was born in 1941 in Turgai, a remote, pastoral and mostly Kazakh-populated area in the south of Kustanai Oblast, cannot recall any of her relatives performing the Islamic prayer, or *namaz*, in the 1950s.⁶² Another interviewee, Gul’nar, who was five years old in 1966 when her family moved to Turgai, clearly remembers that her grandmother (on her maternal side) and other elderly people read *namaz* five times a day; however, Gul’nar’s father who worked in the raion party committee would not admit this “for the sake of promotion along the party line”.⁶³ Kozybaev, who around that time was the First Secretary of Arkalykskii Raion (part of the Turgai region) recalls in his memoirs that old Kazakh herders read *namaz* and their families followed customary practices with regard to having guests, serving food and conducting funerals.⁶⁴ He also mentions an earlier episode (in around 1950) when a regional official (the deputy head of the agricultural department and the oldest in a small group of high regional officials) performed - in one of the *auls* they inspected - a traditional ceremony of burial, including the washing of the deceased and a prayer. Kozybaev recalls it as a brave and decent deed adding that “in that time, many careers had ruined because of the observance of the customs of the ancestors”.⁶⁵

⁶⁰ Akbasov, *Sud’ba stepniaka*.

⁶¹ “Oni porvali s religiei,” *Partiinaia zhyzn’ Kazakhstana* 11, 1959, 60–62; Barahhoev, “Iz vospominanii spetspereselentsa.”

⁶² My interview with Anusa Abdigazy kyzy.

⁶³ My interview with Gul’nar Yessergepova.

⁶⁴ Kozybaev, “Tyndagy kunder,” 269–270.

⁶⁵ Ibid, 168–173.

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Propaganda condemned Muslim feasts (*Kurban Ait* and *Oraza Ait*) not so much as being religious, but because they “as a rule [were] accompanied by the slaughter of a large number of livestock” and on these days “many” believers skipped their work.⁶⁶ Keeping *oraza*, a month-long dawn-to-sunset fasting which breaks with *Oraza Ait*, was exposed as detrimental not only for agricultural production but also for the health of those who had to work hard in the fields.⁶⁷ Thus, the concern was twofold: the sake of economic efficiency and a way of condemning a “tradition” in the name of modernity. Handling these religious practices was problematic not only for newly-arrived managers, but also for local ones, dispatched to Kazakh villages from towns. Uzynkol’skii Raion located next to the Kazakh-Russian border in the Kustanai province offers an example. Communist Akhmetov, who was an industrial specialist and an ethnic Tatar, presumably of Muslim background himself, was assigned in 1955 from the Karaganda province, an industrial region in central Kazakhstan, to chair a Kazakh kolkhoz in the Virgin Lands. After having spent a couple of months in the place of his assignment, he was so frustrated by, as he saw it, the lack of work discipline amongst locals that he wrote a letter to Khrushchev. He arrived in the kolkhoz exactly in the period (November) when local families slaughtered horses to preserve meat throughout the winter (this practice has nomadic roots and is called *sogym*) and, thus, were busy with this and having guests for meals rather than going to work. According to the new chairman’s complaint, the majority of the kolkhoz population was elderly and their influence on the young people was the reason for “bai [or: feudal] remnants” not having yet been eliminated from Kazakh kolkhozes.⁶⁸

The adherence of the Kazakh rural population to Muslim belief also threatened the center's economic plans for the republic in another, more specific way. The religious prejudice against eating pork – as Kazakh authorities realized after pig breeding had been named a key reserve of cheap and “fast” meat – stood in the way of an emerging industry. Prior to the VLC, counties populated mostly by Kazakhs, even in northern

⁶⁶ Sarsenbaev, *Vospitanie trudiashchikhsia*, 127.

⁶⁷ Dzhumagazin, *Razvitie sotsialisticheskogo soznania kolkhoznogo krestianstva*, 182-183.

⁶⁸ APRK, f. 708, op. 29, d. 188, ll. 118-121.

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Kazakhstan, did not have a single pig.⁶⁹ Kazakhs would take it as disrespectful to their “national habits” when they were forced to deal with pigs and looked down on those who did as if they were unclean.⁷⁰ In the early years of the campaign, pig farming was so unpopular in the Kazakh Republic that even in the Virgin Lands, having the initial large share of the Slavic population, collective farms either did not keep pigs at all or tried to get rid of piglets as early as possible by selling them on the kolkhoz market.⁷¹

Starting from spring 1957 (after the record harvest of wheat in the Kazakh tselina and the republic’s failure not only to increase meat deliveries to the state, but even to keep up with the figures of the previous year) agricultural and rural authorities of all levels were ordered to carry out “a wide explanatory work” on how important pig farming was to fulfil the republic’s plan for meat production.⁷² The task in front of propagandists was to convince Kazakhs that their prejudices had religious rather than ethno cultural grounds and thus had to be overcome as inconsistent with the Soviet lifestyle.⁷³ Kazakh propaganda spotted those few Kazakhs, supposedly Muslims, who had already engaged in pig breeding and elevated them as labor heroes and true internationalists in the public’s eye.⁷⁴ The brightest example of Soviet propaganda in this regard was Damelia Jaksylykova.

⁶⁹ GAPO, f. 646, op. 5, d. 371, sv. 90, l 369.

⁷⁰ Cleary, “Politics and Administration in Soviet Kazakhstan,” 386; the case study of Damelia Jaksylykova I review below; my interview with Maksim Glushkov: Maksim’s grandmother who moved to the Virgin Lands (Nauryzum Raion, Kustanai Oblast) in the 1960s experienced similar treatment as well. In the beginning, the local Kazakhs would not let her and other “pork-eating” settlers use the local well out of fear that it would make the water unclean. Later on, as Maksim recounts his grandmother’s story, both sides somehow accommodated each other.

⁷¹ GAKO, f. R-268, op. 1, d. 1430, ll. 12, 20.

⁷² GAPO, f. 646, op. 5, d. 371, sv. 90, ll. 257-260.

⁷³ Feliforov, N. “Internatsional'noe vospitanie trudiashchikhsia,” *Partiinaia zhyzn' Kazakhstana* 4, 1964, 52.

⁷⁴ Yergaliev, U. “Uvelichim proizvodstvo svininy,” *Kazakhstanskaia pravda*, 20 February 1958, 3; Feliforov, N. “Internatsional'noe vospitanie trudiashchikhsia,” *Partiinaia zhyzn' Kazakhstana* 4, 1964, 52. See also: Cleary, “Politics and Administration in Soviet Kazakhstan,” 386.

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Damelia became a sovkhos worker in 1954, after she graduated from the seventh grade in her home area, El'shanka village. This village was a branch of one of the oldest sovkhoses in the republic, Kustanaiskii in Kustanai Oblast. For four years, she was an auxiliary worker (*raznorabochaia*) on the threshing floor and in various construction sites of the branch. The narrative of how a young woman of Kazakh ethnicity eventually joined a swinery was told in the press as follows:⁷⁵ Once, when Damelia and her female workmates worked on cleaning off the snowdrifts around an animal farm, she heard the piglets screeching, checked on them and discovered that the animals were not fed because the pig tender had fallen sick. She gave them some fodder and water, and this day turned out to be the start of her new, "real" job. Despite Damelia's enthusiasm for her new occupation, her mother did not approve of this choice. In the beginning, she looked down on her daughter as if she was unclean and thus made Damelia – before she entered the living room – wash thoroughly with hot water, change the clothes and use "eau de cologne", and also allotted Damelia her own cup, spoon and towel.

As the narrative goes, later on Damelia's mother embraced her daughter's decision and "proudly told her neighbors that her daughter had become the first Kazakh pig tender in the sovkhos". In 1958 Damelia took care of 300 pigs, in 1959 she was in charge of 500 animals and managed – by applying "advanced techniques" – to produce more than 60,000 kilograms of pork. In 1960, on the eve of the 8th March, International Women's Day, 22-year old Damelia, together with 252 best female workers from all over the Soviet Union, was conferred the title of Hero of Socialist Labor.⁷⁶ That year she raised 1,277 pigs weighing 100 kilogrammes each. Speaking at a forum in Akmolinsk in January 1961, Damelia called on Kazakh youth to "get out of the influence of harmful traditions" and not to "keep themselves aloof from pig breeding". "If we stand aside, how can we come to communism?" – she asked the audience.⁷⁷ A year later, Nikita Khrushchev, in his speech at a conference in the Virgin

⁷⁵ *Kazakhstanskaia pravda*, 20 February 1960, 1; *Leninskaia smena*, 15 February 1961, 3; *Leninskaia smena*, 23 March 1961, 3.

⁷⁶ *Vedomosti Verkhovnogo Soveta SSSR* 10 (994), 1960, 71.

⁷⁷ "Pervyi sliet tselinnikov Kazakhstana," *Sel'skoe khoziaistvo Kazakhstana* 1, 1961, 16-17.

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Lands, praised Damelia Jaksylykova as the first Kazakh woman who had “responded to the call of the Party” and “had enough courage to discard age-old prejudices”.⁷⁸

Such propagandistic measures yielded quite impressive results. Republic-wide, the swine herd grew five-fold between 1953 and 1962.⁷⁹ Some sovkhoses kept pigs because, as state enterprises, they were obliged to, but did not provided sufficient care so that the number of animals were reduced to the minimum: one sovkhos in Pavlodar Oblast was reported to have only one animal on its swine farm.⁸⁰ Perhaps the most bizarre way adopted to develop a taste for pork among Kazakhs and to celebrate internationalism was the production of a sausage that was made of a mix of two kinds of meat - pork and horsemeat - and called *Druzhba* (*Friendship*).⁸¹ This product served to vary the notoriously poor assortment of foodstuffs in Soviet grocers and to become another symbol of Soviet modernity which supposedly overcame the religious prejudices (of Muslims against eating pork and of Christians against horsemeat) of the time.

Patriarchal attitudes prevailing in Kazakh society threatened another pillar of Soviet power: emancipated women as conductors of progress. Such marriage practices originated in the patriarchal and tribal past of Kazakhs, like polygamy, forced marriage (including *amangerstvo*, re-marrying a woman to her late husband's brother, and marriage for a *kalym* - “bride price”) as well as the abduction of a woman against her will, were especially intolerable.⁸² All these “remnants” were crimes, according to the Criminal Code of the Kazakh Republic, and the punishment, depending on the gravity of a crime, ranged from one year of correctional labor to one year of imprisonment; having a sexual relationship with an underaged girl (under

⁷⁸ Khrushchev, *Stroitel'stvo kommunizma v SSSR*, 5: 196 – 251.

⁷⁹ Smagulov, *Puti uvelicheniia produktov zhyvotnovodstva*, 23; Saktaganova, *Ekonomicheskaiia modernizatsiia*, 210.

⁸⁰ GAPO, f. 646, op. 5, d. 1073, sv. 216, ll. 49-51.

⁸¹ *Kazakhstanskaia pravda*, 16 August 1964, 1.

⁸² Dzhandil'din, Nurymbet “My – internatsionalisty,” *Partiinaia zhyzn' Kazakhstana* 11, 1961, 23; Baigaliev, Kh. “O preodolenii perezhytkov proshlogo i kommunisticheskomo vospitanii trudiashchikhsia,” *Partiinaia zhyzn' Kazakhstana* 1, 1960.

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16 years) could add another three to eight years to the imprisonment term.⁸³ The press reported such occurrences as more peculiar to the southern regions⁸⁴ where Kazakhs were demographically dominant and where, at least between 1953 and 1955, the number of Kazakh girls with a school education was lower for exactly these reasons.⁸⁵ Therefore, the role of the tselina campaign in modernizing the northern regions was once more implied. Although, polygamy and child marriage cases dropped significantly by 1960,⁸⁶ the practice of taking a *kalym* – under the disguise of expensive presents to a bride's parents - remained relatively strong among Kazakhs,⁸⁷ especially after the act of giving and accepting a bride price was excluded from the Criminal Code in 1959.⁸⁸

The overburdening of women with household chores was another target for ideologues. Homekeeping was seen in the Soviet Union as the responsibility of women in general. In Soviet schools, girls would learn how to sew and cook while boys would master carpentry and mechanics. In Kazakh families, however, women were more involved with household chores than their counterparts in non-Kazakh or non-Muslim families. In Kazakh families, as regularly criticized in Kazakh periodicals such as magazines *Qazaqstan әйелдері* ("Women of Kazakhstan"), *Shmel'* and its Kazakh-language version *Ara* ("Bumblebee") as well as *Madeniet zhane Turmys* ("Culture and Everyday Life"), a woman literally served her husband (and his parents if they lived together). Men in Kazakh families, in contrast to the portrayal of men in non-Kazakh families, avoided doing such "men's duties" as fetching water or cutting firewood.⁸⁹ Fighting with these gender stereotypes in Kazakh families was especially important in the light of the shortage of workforce, which was particularly acute in

⁸³ Mamutov, *Prestupleniia*, 312-313.

⁸⁴ *Uchitel' Kazakhstana*, 22 December 1955, 3.

⁸⁵ *Uchitel' Kazakhstana*, 5 August 1953, 2; *Kazakhstanskaia pravda*, 08 January 1955, 2.

⁸⁶ Between 1950 and 1960, the number of people convicted for bigamy and polygamy dropped by 50 percent, and de facto marriages to those who were under the age of legal consent (18 years) dropped by 77 percent. Mamutov, *Prestupleniia*, 312-313.

⁸⁷ Cleary, "Politics and administration in Soviet Kazakhstan," 383.

⁸⁸ Dzhumagazin, *Razvitie sotsialisticheskogo soznania kolkhoznogo krestianstva*, 183.

⁸⁹ *Ibid*, 183-184.

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the Virgin Lands. The regime needed women in agricultural production, more specifically – in animal farming, not at home. Local communists adopted a number of measures to overcome such prejudices and eradicate patriarchal practices. These steps encompassed the enrolment of Kazakh girls into secondary education, promoting women to high posts,⁹⁰ ridiculing such attitudes towards women in the press and convening public lectures on the issue. For instance, Kazakh girls were afforded priority enrolment in boarding schools, a social lift for rural youth, leading to higher education.⁹¹ Besides instilling Soviet values and a sense of loyalty to the Communist Party, boarding schools were also designed to isolate young people from their older relatives' influence. Without such institutions, young Kazakhs pursuing their education, would have had to move to larger settlements with secondary schools and depend on their distant relatives living there.⁹²

As the tselina campaign drew the Kazakh countryside closer to the Soviet public mainstream, Soviet rituals there appeared to be more evident. Soviet holidays which had not been followed in some of the rural localities (newcomers, who had arrived in one kolkhoz and observed that the locals did not organize a public gathering to celebrate 1st May, International Workers' Solidarity Day, called it a "barbarous fact (*dikii fakt*)"⁹³) grew more popular. On International Women's Day, party officials of all levels would praise – in the press, at parades and other public gatherings - the contribution of women to the economic development of the republic and the role of the Soviet power in the emancipation of Kazakh women. The new tradition in sovkhozes was to name, on 8th March or 7th October (Day of the October Revolution), their best workers and to stick their names and photographs on a Board of Fame or

⁹⁰ Women were promoted mostly to representative, rather than party or executive, bodies. The most impressive appointment of the time in this regard was Zaure Omarova, a mining engineer from Karaganda and deputy to the Supreme Council of the USSR from one of the Karaganda election districts, who, in 1958 became Chairman Deputy of the Council of Ministers.

⁹¹ This privilege was reconfirmed in the new education law of 1959. *Zakon Ob ukreplenii svyazi shkoly s zhyzn'iu i o dal'neishem razvitii sistemy narodnogo obrazovaniia v Kazakhskoi SSR. Vedomosti Verkhovnogo Soveta i Pravitel'stva Kazakhskoi SSR* 10, 1959, 76.

⁹² Abdigazy kyzy, *Aga amanaty*, 66-70; Akbasov, *Sud'ba stepniaka*, 53.

⁹³ APRK, f. 708, op. 28, d. 190.

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in a Book of Fame. It is hard to say if making it to these boards and books of fame was of any emotional or professional importance for workers. It was, perhaps, regarded as the first step towards membership in local soviets (representative bodies) or the prospect of being awarded the title of Hero of Socialist Labor, the real attributes of status in Soviet society. Another meaningful feature of the new fêted days was the giving out of cash bonuses or, preferred by workers, actual presents. Such presents could vary from a width of fabric and warm underwear to a guitar and a camera.⁹⁴ Due to the general shortage of consumer goods, such material encouragement was effective and thus, special occasions, like the 40th anniversary of the October Revolution in 1957, were highly anticipated. To make Soviet celebratory activities more popular in predominantly Kazakh localities, celebration programs began to include elements of the Kazakh culture such as the *aitys* and Kazakh games involving horses.⁹⁵ Horseracing was nearly abandoned as a cultural practice after collectivization and regained prestige after the 1958 resolution that “rehabilitated” the horse as a source of meat and milk as well as a means of transportation and a cultural symbol.⁹⁶

Such symbolic embodiments of Soviet values and achievements as 8th March, 22nd April (Lenin’s birthday), 9th May (Victory Day) and others had not been unknown before the VLC. They were main themes for periodicals, such as the monthly magazine *Qazaqstan äjelderī* published in Kazakh since 1925, which, although with considerable delay and in small numbers, would eventually reach the Kazakh countryside. However, due to a high illiteracy rate in the older generation,⁹⁷ these significant dates would, perhaps, have remained empty words for most of the elderly if not for the growth of radio broadcasting.

⁹⁴ GAKR, f. R-37, op. 1L, d. 3, sv. 2, l. 440.

⁹⁵ ARG, f. 14, op. 2, d. 342, ll. 25-28.

⁹⁶ The Resolution “On Measures to Eliminate the Existing Shortcomings and Further the Development of Horse Breeding in Kolkhozes and Sovkhozes of the Kazakh SSR” approved by the Council of Ministers of the Kazakh SSR on 4 May 1958. GAPO, f. 646, op. 5, d. 175, ll. 3-5.

⁹⁷ Although the overall literacy rate was high in the republic, literacy figures did not cover people over 49 because, as I think, it would considerably lower them.

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The coverage and repertoire of the radio expanded dramatically under the tselina campaign and was especially instrumental in not only explaining to rural Kazakhs Moscow's new plans for the republic, but also introducing new "traditions" to them. North-Kazakhstan Oblast, one of the tselina provinces, was in the lead in radio broadcasting coverage: by 1958, it had connected all its settlements to the radio net, with one radio connection (*radiotochka*) per five residents and one radio receiver per 19 residents.⁹⁸ With the growing number of radio receivers for sale⁹⁹ and increasing hours of broadcasting in Kazakh,¹⁰⁰ the radio grew as an "efficient [and] tireless agitator, propagandist and enlightener" for rural dwellers.¹⁰¹ Besides highlighting important dates and recent or upcoming events, the Kazakh Radio Station streamed programs on agricultural topics, radio concerts featuring music of various ethnic groups living in Kazakhstan, and anti-religious lectures.¹⁰² The repertoire of radio concerts also included new songs about Soviet modernity in general and the tselina in particular. For example, in 1958, Kazakh Radio, together with the Kazakh Komsomol, organized a competition for the best lyrics to celebrate the record harvest of 1956.¹⁰³ One of the songs written on this occasion was *Sholpan Degen Shofier Kyz* ("Sholpan is a Young Woman Driver" in Kazakh). This piece praised a young woman named Sholpan (which indicates her – Kazakh – ethnicity) who worked as truck driver at a grain-growing sovkhoz.¹⁰⁴ This song presumably encouraged women to take up occupations that had been considered the preserve of males and, thus, clearly reflected the demand of the Virgin Lands for a permanent workforce, of which one of the potential sources was local women.

⁹⁸ APRK, f. 708, op. 31, d. 1475, ll. 8-15.

⁹⁹ *Narodnoe khoziaistvo Kazakhstana* 10, 1960, 54.

¹⁰⁰ APRK, f. 708, op. 31, d. 1475, l. 65.

¹⁰¹ *Partiinaia zhyzn' Kazakhstana* 6, 1958, 23.

¹⁰² APRK, f. 708, op. 31, d. 1475, l. 64. Anti-religious propaganda on the radio earmarked not only Kazakhs. Another target group for such propaganda was the Christian population: listeners would be offered a talk from a former Baptist priest or a lecture on the "harmfulness" of Easter. Alpysbaeva, Saiakhimova, "Kontsept 'Tselina'"; GAGN, f. 208, op. 1, d. 25, sv. 2, l. 9.

¹⁰³ APRK, f. 708, op. 31, d. 1475, l. 71.

¹⁰⁴ *Qazaqstan äjelderī*, November 1958, 2.

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Another, more peculiar, way of establishing new “traditions” was a tear-off calendar. The first of these calendars in Kazakh came out at the end of 1959, for the year 1960.¹⁰⁵ The demand for such a calendar was voiced by two groups of authors (from western and southern Kazakhstan) back in 1956 and 1957. As their reasons for needing such a concise and “clear” source of information, the petitioners wrote that they wanted to read about Kazakh historical figures and contemporary personalities in the Kazakh language and to “explain [about what they read in this calendar] to old men and old women in their native language”.¹⁰⁶ Kazakh propagandists seized this opportunity and, even though the production of such a calendar presented technical difficulties, it took two years for the first ever tear-off calendar to be produced in the Kazakh language.

Although the calendar turned out - quite predictably – to be loaded with a lot of propaganda,¹⁰⁷ it was practical, entertaining and somewhat decorative, and thus, perhaps, made a good gift item.¹⁰⁸ Among other things, it featured the most important dates for Soviet Communists. Besides all the above mentioned, it marked, for example, the Day of Children's Protection (1st June) and the Day of Soviet Youth (24th June). Such reminders, accompanied with other propaganda efforts, for example, by clubs whose numbers in rural areas and range of activities grew too, forged, though not as efficiently as Kazakh authorities had envisaged, a pathway for Soviet “traditions” to the Kazakh countryside. However, by the end of the Khrushchev decade, Kazakh ideologists admitted that the new rituals were slow in rooting in the countryside and that breaking down old customs required more time, effort and persistence.¹⁰⁹

Contrarily, some cultural Kazakh practices that were condemned by the regime prior to or in the initial years of the VLC, were on the rise after 1957. The attitude of

¹⁰⁵ *Partiinaia zhyzn' Kazakhstana* 10, 1959, 75–78.

¹⁰⁶ APRK, f. 708, op. 30, f. 299, ll. 45-49.

¹⁰⁷ *Partiinaia zhyzn' Kazakhstana* 10, 1959, 75–78.

¹⁰⁸ I held in my hand the 1962 calendar and can imagine that this well might have been the case.

¹⁰⁹ Suzhykov, *Sotsial'no-ekonomicheskie problemy natsional'noi konsolidatsii*, 354; Sarsenbaev, *RoI' novykh bezreligioznykh internatsional'nykh obriadov*, 14

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Communists to certain elements of the Kazakh culture clearly changed in the Khrushchev period. Besides *aitys* and Kazakh sports games, propagandists supposedly refined and reintroduced other earlier restricted customs. For example, such previously banned Kazakh wedding rituals as *zhar-zhar* (farewell of the bride to her parents and home village) and *betashar* (introducing the bride to her husband's relatives) became part of a secular, Soviet-style wedding ceremony, which the rural populace was encouraged to follow.¹¹⁰ As Kazakh theorists of Communism claimed, these rituals were now filled “with new content and ethos” since, according to Soviet morale and law, a woman could not be married off against her will and, therefore, she would have known her fiancé's parents before the wedding. Thus, such rituals were preserved as symbolic elements within new customs.¹¹¹ The use of yurts, an element from the old, nomadic life which Communists associated with backwardness, was encouraged again: in around 1960, the republic started the industrial production of yurts for Kazakh shepherds.



Figure 7. The cover of the magazine *Mădeniet zhăne Tŭrmys* (October 1964) was devoted to Ten Days of Russian Art and Literature in the Kazakh Republic and

¹¹⁰ Zhaksalykov, *Syn stepei*, 169.

¹¹¹ Sarsenbaev, *Obychai i traditsii v razvitii*, 36.

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depicted two women in national dresses: Kazakh and Russian. The fact that this campaign was limited to just 10 days could imply that Soviet nation-builders did not mean to make Russian culture dominant in Kazakh society.

Conclusion

Attempts to modernize the Kazakh countryside by altering cultural practices yielded contradictory results. On the one hand, the Kazakh culture gained more recognition, although the demographic dissolution of Kazakhs made it less prominent in the “internationalist laboratory”. On the other hand, Kazakhs’ self-identification as Muslims strengthened the association between Kazakhness and backwardness. The term *kazakhshylyk* acquired a negative, anti-internationalist connotation in Soviet Kazakhstan. As poet Zhuban Moldagaliev wrote in his poem *Ia – Kazakh* (“I’m Kazakh”) dated 1964, *kazakhshylyk* “had occasionally covered up stupidity, greediness, ignorance” and, thus, “desecrated the name of [the poet’s] nation”.¹¹² The changing social settings did not require younger Kazakhs to associate themselves with their native culture. Moreover, it encouraged them to abandon Kazakh cultural norms in order to follow new, Soviet norms and become fully-fledged Soviet people. The younger generation adopted the dual Soviet-Kazakh identity and some of them readily gave up their mother tongue, although, as I show in Chapter Four, it was not so straightforward. The tselina case clearly demonstrates that the way cultural and social engineering was performed in the Khrushchev Thaw was less violent and more intense compared to the Stalinist period. To build an internationalist Soviet society in the Virgin Lands meant for its constituents, to be more culturally uniform, more economically efficient and more politically loyal.

The emphasis on productivism, which was characteristic of Soviet planning economy in general and grew stronger in the Kazakh Republic in connection with the VLC, as well as the concern of securing stable production, reinforced nation-building efforts. The notion of tselina, untapped, unexplored and untamed economically and

¹¹² Moldagaliev, *Ia - kazakh!*, 384.

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culturally, served as a good framework for Soviet nation-builders to fill it with new meanings in their quest to modernize, not only the Virgin Lands, but Kazakhstani society as a whole. In order to smooth differences in the complex societal mosaic of the Virgin Lands and beyond, the regime embarked on a project of social engineering aimed at building the new collective identity which would subdue all other allegiances. These efforts were aimed at creating not only the regional, tselina identity, but also the overarching internationalist culture in Soviet Kazakhstan. Although this shared culture implied homogenization, it also allowed some ethno-cultural particularities which had been brutally suppressed in the preceding twenty-year period. In this sense, nation-building efforts associated with the VLC nurtured both identities: sub-ethnic, internationalist and ethno-cultural, primordial, and this duality has been a stabilizing factor and a unique societal feature for Kazakhstan since. Symbolically, 1st May, International Workers' Solidarity Day in the Soviet Union, has, since 1995, been celebrated in the post-independence period as Kazakhstan People's Unity Day. Internationalist culture incepted and fostered during the tselina campaign, eventually became the foundation for the modern Kazakhstani nation.

Chapter Four.

Language Dilemma in the Virgin Lands' Kazakhstan

In late 1956, a series of extraordinary meetings took place at the Central Committee (CC) of the Communist Party of Kazakhstan (CPK), in Alma-Ata. As one of the participants noted, it was the first public discussion on the Kazakh language to have been held in the 17 years he had been working in the Kazakh State University. These meetings gathered together those who were associated with the development of the Kazakh language (linguists, writers, educators and press editors) and were summoned as a response to recent publications in the newspaper *Qazaq adabiet* ("Kazakh Literature") and the public resonance caused by them.¹ In its press campaign, the newspaper dared, without the sanction of the CC, to speak openly about the grave situation in which the Kazakh language as a language of state business, a medium of instruction and a study subject had found itself by the mid-1950s. Although the newspaper was reprimanded — by a special resolution of the CC — for "unfounded" and "harmful" assertions as well as for "know[ing] no measure", as the Secretary of Ideology, Nurymbet Dzhandil'din, put it, this endeavor became a trigger for the gradual return of the Kazakh language into the public arena of Soviet Kazakhstan.²

Although it is commonly believed that the Kazakh language ultimately lost ground in the years of the Virgin Lands Campaign (VLC), the native language of Kazakhs was actually on the rise in the post-1956 tselina period. For almost two decades prior to Khrushchev's Secret Speech that condemned Stalin's "cult of personality" and some of the regime's crimes (25 February 1956), the Kazakh language was under multiple attacks for, as especially-fervent Communists saw it, being a medium in communicating nationalist ideas. The Khrushchev regime contributed greatly, although unintentionally, in breaking down the association between the Kazakh

¹ "Stenogramma soveshcheniia u sekretaria TsK KPK t. Zhurina O prepodavanii kazakhskogo iazyka v shkolakh i vuzakh Kazakhstana, 16 November 1956". APRK, f. 708, op. 29, d. 361, ll. 55-57.

² "Za dal'neishyi rastsvet kul'tury kazakhskogo naroda," *Kazakhstanskaia Pravda*, 7 February 1957, 2, 4; Dzhandil'din, N. "O nekotorykh voprosakh razvitiia natsional'noi kul'tury," *Kommunist Kazakhstana* 7, 1957, 15-21.

language and Kazakh nationalism. This became possible mostly thanks to the rehabilitation of many of the Kazakh intelligentsia, including those linguists, writers, and educators who had perished in the Great Terror, as well as the restitution of their works, some of which were the foundation of Kazakh linguistics.³

Although, as this chapter demonstrates, the desperate state in which the national language of the Kazakh Soviet Socialist Republic (SSR) found itself by the mid-1950s, rooted in the late 1930s and the 1940s, the VLC provides a useful framework — in terms of scale and scope — for studying the fate of the Kazakh language. Moreover, the campaign itself was a contributing factor with regard to language planning from 1954 onwards, which was especially revealing in the education system and serves as a good lens on this too.

This analysis contributes to a better understanding not only of the interplay between the Kazakh language and the changing social patterns, but also of the overall language situation in the 1950s and the 1960s. This period has largely remained a blind spot in historical narratives about the Kazakh culture under Soviet rule. Due to the shortage of comprehensive scholarly endeavors on the socio-political development of the Kazakh language in this particular decade, our perspectives on this matter have been limited to date. The 1990 statement of academic Akhmetov that "the prestige of the Kazakh language was decreasing, the scope of its use was narrowing [,] 700 Kazakh schools were closed in Kazakhstan in a relatively short time",⁴ is quoted over and over again in relation to the tselina period.⁵

Undoubtedly, the tselina decade, which saw the enormous influx of Slavs in the Kazakh Republic and was meant to be a celebration of internationalism on Kazakh soil, was a turbulent period for the Kazakh language. However, to do justice to the

³ For example, together with the rehabilitation of the name of Kudaibergen Zhubanov, a linguist sentenced to death as an enemy of the nation in 1938, his works came back in scientific use. *Repressirovannaia tiurkologiia*, 207.

⁴ *Vestnik Akademii Nauk* No. 5, 1990, 20-32.

⁵ For example: Muritova, *Kul'turnoe stroitel'stvo*, 18-19; Abylkhozhyn, *Ocherki sotsial'no-ekonomicheskoi istorii*, 276; Masanov, *Istoria Kazakhstana: narody i kul'tury*, part 2.2.

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efforts to preserve the Kazakh language under Soviet rule, this chapter provides a detailed and focused account on the state of the Kazakh language as it was prior to the VLC and on its development in the tselina years.

This chapter explores three roles of the Kazakh language: as an official language, as a medium of instruction and as a study subject. Changes in how the Kazakh language performed these functions are examined in close relation with the Russian language. The place of the native languages of some officially recognized ethnic minorities is discussed as well. Although the language dilemma became especially prominent in the decade under the VLC, I first — in each of the three following sections — discuss what weight the Kazakh language had in its respective capacity prior to the VLC and then how it changed throughout the years under the VLC.

Kazakh as a Language of State Affairs⁶

After the devastating famine that struck the Kazakh steppe as a result of the brutal collectivization of nomads, the Soviet power renewed its efforts to foster a sense of nationhood among the former nomads, as well as to accustom the steppe dwellers to Soviet structures. The Soviet state saw Kazakhs as one of its constituent nations that had to have its own territory, language and distinct culture. The Kazakh language was authorized as a state language in the Kazakh Republic, an autonomous territory within the Russian Federation until 1936,⁷ because it was the language of its titular

⁶ Although Ubiria claims that the Kazakh language had never been accorded the status of a state language before the 1989 Language Law (Ubiria, *Soviet Nation-Building in Central Asia*, 148-157, 213), in a number of legal document, such as the Resolution on the Revocation of Benefits for Kazakh-speaking Specialists (the Council of People's Commissars of the Kazakh SSR, 1941) or the Resolution on Promoting the Use of the Kazakh Language in Clerical Work (*deloproizvodstvo*) in Governmental and Other Institutions (the Council of Ministers of the Kazakh SSR, 1958) it was referred to as the state language (*gosudarstvennyi iazyk*) or one of the two state languages. Therefore, in this chapter the notions "state language", "official language" and "national language" are interchangeably applied to the Kazakh language.

⁷ Between 1920 and 1936, Kazakhstan as an autonomous republic of the Russian Federation was officially referred to as Kirgiz Republic (1920 to 1925) and Qazaq Republic (1925 to 1936). On 5 December 1936, it was granted the status of a national republic within the USSR.

ethnic group, the Kazakhs. First, in 1921, it was formalized for district-level state affairs and later, in 1933, for use in central, regional and local authorities with the exception of the districts containing a non-Kazakh — in most cases, Slavic — majority; in such areas both Kazakh and Russian had to be in formal use. In contrast to other Soviet republics where *korenizatsiia*, a campaign that aimed at staffing the state apparatus with local cadres who were native in respective titular languages, had ended due to the supposedly growing threat of local nationalism,⁸ in the Kazakh Republic it continued, as a sort of compensation measure for the recent famine. In order to stimulate non-Kazakh personnel to learn Kazakh, a language allowance was introduced, which ranged from a five percent increase in salary for oral fluency to a 15-percent increase for full fluency. University teachers were entitled to a 25-percent salary increase for teaching in Kazakh.⁹ In 1934, Kazakh became an obligatory study subject for grade four and above.¹⁰

The *korenizatsiia* campaign was partly successful in both its phases, particularly among top officials, the Militia and lower technical staff, such as watchmen and coachmen. This means that the majority of white collars at mid-level positions were represented by non-Kazakhs. As a result of the transition of the Kazakh language to new scripts (in the late 1920s from Arab to Latin and in the 1930s from Latin to Cyrillic), even some qualified specialists of Kazakh ethnicity had difficulties in adapting and turned out to be functionally illiterate in the eyes of the state bureaucracy. On each attempt, the standardization of the new writing system in predominantly illiterate society took time and drained resources. Nevertheless, the regime did not give up on the Kazakh language and remained committed to its development. The mass circulation of books printed in Kazakh almost tripled between 1928 and 1940. Half of the total print of newspapers and magazines issued

⁸ See, for example: Suny, *The Revenge of the Past*, 107.

⁹ Tsentral'nyi gosudarstvennyi arkhiv RK, *Iazykovaia politika v Kazakhstane*, 139-141.

¹⁰ Ibid, 145-146.

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in the Republic was in Kazakh.¹¹ By 1940, “the [Kazakh] language, in printed and spoken form, was firmly established as a symbol of national identity”.¹²

The transition to the adjusted Cyrillic alphabet had hardly started before Nazi Germany attacked the Soviet Union in 1941 and the Great Fatherland War broke out, with many of those who had adjusted to the new script being conscripted. The Kazakh-speaking sector of the population was also thinned out by the purges of Kazakh “nationalists”. In the Great Terror of the late-1930s and yet another round of purges in the late-1940s, a great number of educated Kazakhs in general and Kazakh intellectuals in particular, among whom were also linguists and writers, were charged as enemies of the nation and repressed, most of them perishing in the GULag.¹³ The physical elimination of native speakers and the ban on the works of repressed intellectuals, undermined the development of the Kazakh languages and discouraged the use of Kazakh. A strong link had been established between Kazakhness and nationalism. The newspaper *Qazaq adebieti* was discontinued in 1940 (renewed in January 1955) in order, perhaps, not to stir up nationalist sentiments among literate Kazakhs. The knowledge of the Kazakh language ceased to be an advantage: in 1941, the Council of People’s Commissars of the Kazakh Republic revoked benefits for non-Kazakh civil servants for being fluent in Kazakh. Ironically, it was done under the pretext that the “knowledge of the Kazakh language as the state language is mandatory for all citizens of the Kazakh SSR, and therefore the provision of benefits for the knowledge of the Kazakh language is not necessary”.¹⁴ In the years of the Great Fatherland War, the Russian language clearly dominated in frontline propaganda: as Carmack notes in this regard, “Russian and Kazakh were complementary languages but Russian belonged to a higher cultural place, a level to which all Soviet peoples should aspire”.¹⁵

¹¹ *Kazakhstan za 40 let*, 486.

¹² Akiner, *The Formation of Kazakh Identity*, 37.

¹³ Alpatov et al, *Repressirovannaia tiurkologiia*, 176; Zhaksalykov, *Syn stepei*, 163-164.

¹⁴ Tsentral’nyi gosudarstvennyi arkhiv RK, *Iazykovaia politika v Kazakhstane*, 221.

¹⁵ Carmack, “History and Hero-Making,” 99.

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After the war, many top positions in the Kazakh state apparatus were filled with veterans,¹⁶ as everywhere else in the Soviet Union. In the Kazakh case, veterans had learned or improved their Russian while at war and also grew convinced about the superiority of the Russian language. For example, veteran and poet Zhumagali Sain, who actually wrote his poetry in Kazakh, said at one of the above-mentioned CC meetings: “[...] I agree with the minority [present at the meeting] who say[:] why do we need to learn the Kazakh language when we can speak Russian[?] I agree that with this [Russian] language we could quickly elevate the Kazakh people to the level of the Russian people. But we are still very far from this, although it may be that we are striving for this.”¹⁷ This inevitably led to further linguistic Russification of central and regional bureaucracies. In the same period (after the war but prior to the VLC), the Kazakh language which had been mandatory as a study subject in Russian-medium schools, as I discuss in greater detail below, ceased to be such.

The mass resettlement to the Virgin Lands further consolidated the position of the Russian language in the republic’s bureaucracy. After all, Russian had been long and firmly established as the language of inter-ethnic communication in the Soviet Union. Staffing state offices with Slavs became a clear trend in the northern provinces of the Kazakh republic. In two out of the five tselina regions, first secretaries of Kazakh ethnicity were replaced by Slavs. In Kustanai Oblast, the largest in the Virgin Lands, Ivan Khramkov (a Russian), was appointed to lead the regional party committee, having replaced in this post Sagaltai Zhanbaev (a Kazakh) who had headed the region for six years but was not very fluent in Russian. Khramkov found himself in Kazakhstan prior to the VLC: in 1948 he was sent to Kazakhstan from Moscow Oblast to strengthen the Kazakh agitpop and “made [his] political capital in the fight against Kazakh nationalists”,¹⁸ . In Kustanai Khramkov was remembered as somebody who cast out Kazakh specialists under the pretext that they could not work with Russian-speaking newcomers.¹⁹ Throughout the tselina period, especially its first half, there

¹⁶ Kunaev, *Ot Stalina do Gorbacheva*, 77.

¹⁷ APRK, f. 708, op. 29, d. 361, ll. 14-15.

¹⁸ Kozybaev, *Tot samyi Zhanbaev*, 183-184.

¹⁹ Kozybaev, “Tyndagy kunder,” 254-255.

was a trend against appointing Kazakhs to head local administrations in the Republic as a whole. However, this trend did not start with the VLC itself but emerged rather in the earlier period. For example, at the raion level party secretaries of Kazakh ethnicities made up 63 percent of all secretaries of this rank in 1950, their share dropped to 58 percent in 1952 and continued to decrease throughout the campaign reaching 52 percent in 1962. The same was evident in a less numerous group of higher-ranked party functionaries, that is regional party committee secretaries: 55 percent of Kazakh ethnics in 1950, 47 percent in 1953, and 32 percent in 1956. By 1970, this pattern changed in favor of Kazakhs but their share in party leadership at regional, town and country levels did not reach that of the pre-tselina period.²⁰ Meanwhile, compared to the actual share of Kazakhs in the total population, republic-wide the Kazakhs were over represented among local officials and in the party membership, and strongly over represented in the central elite.²¹

In the second half of the 1950s, the association between Kazakhness and nationalism was still evident: party censors kept looking for traits of “Kazakh nationalism” everywhere in the public domain.²² As writer Esenberlin later wrote about this period in his political semi-fiction: “And of what can one Kazakh accuse another Kazakh? Of nationalism, of course!”²³ All in all, the Kazakh language, as the head of the Kazakh Agricultural Institute, Gabbas Zhumatov concluded, had been “penned to a corner (*okazalsia v zagone*)” which was especially relevant, as I discuss below, to its position in higher education.²⁴ The situation of the Kazakh language remained ambiguous. On the one hand, the language was formally promoted: for example, the circulation of print media in Kazakh kept growing.²⁵ On the other hand, it seems that there were some tacit norms working against the Kazakh language, and the VLC reinforced them.

²⁰ *Kommunisticheskaia partiia Kazakhstana. Organizatsionno-pravovoe razvitie*, 158-166

²¹ Although throughout the period there was a trend against the Kazakhs at the local level, in the second half of the 1960s it was reversed. *Kommunisticheskaia partiia Kazakhstana. Organizatsionno-pravovoe razvitie*, 165-166; Cleary, *Politics and Administration in Soviet Kazakhstan*, 402-403.

²² For example: Karibzhanov, *Slavnyi syn zemli kazakhskoi*. 109-116.

²³ Yesenberlin, *Lodka, pereplyvaiushchaia okean*, 58.

²⁴ APRK, f. 708, op. 29, d. 362, l. 3.

²⁵ *Kazakhstan za 40 let*, 487.

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As Alma-Ata based writer Schegolikhin, who in the mid-1950s worked on two novels about the tension of traditionalism and modernity in Kazakh society, concluded later in his memoirs, the “national question” was a “sensitive and closed topic” in the Kazakh Republic.²⁶

As already mentioned, the state in which the Kazakh language found itself by the mid-1950s was discussed for the first time in November 1956. For the Soviet society as a whole, it was a changing time: earlier that year, Khrushchev presented his Secret Speech, the campaign of political rehabilitation was in full swing, and the Kazakh Virgin Lands had just produced a record harvest. As one of the initiators of *Qazaq adabietі*’s cause for the Kazakh language later said, their hopes were particularly inspired by Khrushchev’s speech.²⁷ The issues discussed at these CC meetings turned out to be so sensitive, that their minutes were declassified only in 2007.²⁸ While the critical thoughts voiced by some Kazakh intellectuals were dissonant with the party line of the time, the loose position regarding the native language of other intellectuals, perhaps, would not do well in the post-independence consolidation of the Kazakh identity. Taking into account the scarcity of written testimonies of the time, these declassified files give a valuable insight into the language situation of Soviet Kazakhstan.

The discussions that took place in the period between 15 and 20 November 1956 highlighted the gravity of the situation facing the native language of Kazakhs and one of two official languages of the Kazakh Republic. Writer Muqanov, an influential figure in Soviet Kazakhstan who understood political currents well, took the lead.²⁹

²⁶ Shchegolikhin, Ivan “Dnevnik pisatel’ia 1953 – 1957,” *Prostor* 1, 2009, 87-89.

²⁷ Dave, *Kazakhstan. Ethnicity, language and power*, 68-69.

²⁸ APRK, f. 708, op. 29, dd. 360, 361, 362.

²⁹ He was the only writer from the first generation of Kazakh Soviet writers who had managed to avoid persecution in the three waves of purges among the Kazakh intelligentsia. At the meeting in question, he even dared to criticize one of the Soviet nation-building tenets: “Now our party speaks of Stalin’s mistakes, and [this is] right. At the XVII Party Congress, under the pretext of answering some questions, he spoke about the national language and spoke about the unification of languages. Nobody will punish and exclude me from the Party if I express my opinion that talking about creating a unified

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He pointed at two former heads of the KPK, Nikolai Skvortsov (a Russian) and Zhumabai Shaiakhmetov (a Kazakh),³⁰ for ignoring the Kazakh language on “nationalist” and “chauvinist” grounds.³¹ (Taking into account that both the functionaries were appointed to the office in the time of the Great Terror, one of their primary assignments was to suppress nationalist sentiments among the Kazakh intelligentsia.) “[A]s a result, the Kazakh language was expelled from all state institutions” - Muqanov concluded. According to him, “the Kazakh language ceased to exist as a state language and turned into a purely informal language (*chisto bytovoi iazyk*)” in the Virgin Lands where he had recently been on assignment as a representative of the Writers’ Union of Kazakhstan.³² He was backed by fellow writer Syrbai Maulenov.³³ Poet Zhumagali Sain, who supported the use of the Kazakh language as a practical necessity, noted: “I have been to kolkhozes with not a single Russian but the [incoming] directives are all written in Russian, and they [kolkhoz administrators] have to answer in the broken [Russian] language”.³⁴ In the view of some participants, one of the most scandalous of the recent examples of disregard towards the language on an official level was that the Vice-Chairman of the Council of Ministers and an ethnic Kazakh himself, Masymkhan Beisebaev, gave a speech in Russian in front of a large audience, comprising Kazakh herders, who were required to use headphones for simultaneous translation.³⁵ The Kazakh writers referred to the experience of two other Soviet republics, Ukraine and Belarus, where, according to

language is nonsense, I don’t believe it, it’s the wrong theory. [...] The Kazakh language, which is in a deplorable state now, got into this grip (*betonomeshalku*) too”. APRK, f. 708, op. 29, d. 361, l. 44.

³⁰ Skvortsov was the First Secretary of the Central Committee of the Communist Party of Kazakhstan in 1938 to 1945, Shaiakhmetov was in the party leadership of the Kazakh Republic from 1938, starting as the Third Secretary, to 1954, having served as the First Secretary for eight years.

³¹ APRK, f. 708, op. 29, d. 361, l. 41.

³² APRK, f. 708, op. 29, d. 361, l. 38.

³³ Ibid, ll. 31-33.

³⁴ Ibid, l. 16.

³⁵ Ibid, l. 14-15. There were also instances when public speeches were given in Kazakh and the audience had to use headphones to listen to their translation in Russian, for example, at the Third Writers’ Congress in 1954.

them, the use of the titular languages, although so close to Russian, was a norm for state affairs.³⁶

The November 1957 meetings demonstrated one more tendency that clearly reflected the low status of the Kazakh language. Kazakh intelligentsia, not only in Alma-Ata but also in the regions, were sending their children to Russian-medium schools. As noted at one of the CC meetings, many of the participants had enrolled their children at Russian-medium schools.³⁷ Considering that those were people who were professionally engaged with the development of the Kazakh language, there apparently had been not much hope that the Kazakh language would emerge strongly again in the near future. Linguist Smet Kenesbaev whose children studied in Russian, too, explained the reasoning for Kazakh parents having their children in Russian-medium schools: "We want our children's secondary school diploma to be followed by a higher degree. Higher education is in Russian. It is clear that each of [us] wants to send our children to a strong, fully-fledged school."³⁸ Poet Sain added: "[I]f my son graduates from school in Kazakh [and] if he is not a philologist, a poet or a composer, then he will not be able to even become a clerk of yours, comrade Tashenev [the Chairman of the Presidium of the Supreme Council (Parliament) of the Kazakh SSR]. [B]ecause you will ask him[:] can you write in Russian. If you can't, then we can't take you. Why should I put my son in such a position".³⁹

The publications in *Qazaq adebiyeti* and the CC meetings had an impressive and prompt response on the side of the CPK and the Kazakh government. In the same year when the articles came out and the meetings took place, it became possible in some faculties to take entrance exams in Kazakh, although in some cases, as in the Mining and Metallurgy College, teaching was conducted in Russian anyway, due to the lack of textbooks and underdeveloped professional terminology in general.⁴⁰ The following year, the Kazakh language became a mandatory study subject for pupils of

³⁶ APRK, f. 708, op. 29, d. 361, ll. 16-17, 42.

³⁷ Ibid, ll. 4-5.

³⁸ Ibid, ll. 10-11.

³⁹ Ibid, l. 16

⁴⁰ APRK, f. 708, op. 29, d. 362, ll. 15-20.

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Kazakh ethnicity going to Russian-medium schools (a more detailed account on the changing importance attributed to the Kazakh language in the school curriculum is given in the third part). In 1958, the Ministry of Enlightenment began to publish the journal *Qazaq tili men adebiyeti* ("Kazakh Language and Literature"), and its Russian-language analogue came out soon too. The Council of Ministers officially admitted that "in recent years" the republic's authorities on all levels had discounted the Kazakh language: communications between them and the Kazakh population had been conducted mostly in Russian and even official forms, labels on manufactured goods and street signs had been produced exclusively in Russian. In its February 1958 resolution, the Council demanded that all state affairs were to be conducted both in Kazakh and Russian.⁴¹

The republic never returned to the *korenizatsiia* policy of the 1920s and early-1930s. The new principle was that the ethnic ratio in state organizations had to mirror the ethnic composition in a given administrative unit. Dzhandil'din explained this as follows: "First of all, Kazakhstan is a multi-ethnic republic. Russians, Ukrainians, Uyghurs and a number of other ethnicities comprise a significant proportion of its population. And we, the Communists, cannot disrespect and disregard the interests of all these ethnicities in the selection and training of cadres. Otherwise, we would not be internationalists." The second reason for not favoring Kazakh ethnics, in Dzhandil'din's view, was that "numerous national cadres" had grown enough to be treated equally to others. He claimed that the CPK was following two principles in this regard: "careful consideration of the ethnic composition of the population and selection of personnel according to their political and business qualities."⁴²

Another impulse for the increased use of the Kazakh language was stockbreeders as the new focus group of Soviet propaganda. As I show in Chapter One and Chapter Two, in 1957 Kazakh shepherds came forward as new "labor heroes" who made an important contribution to the abundance of animal produce in the Soviet Union and

⁴¹ Tsentral'nyi gosudarstvennyi arkhiv RK, *Iazykovaia politika v Kazakhstane*, 228-231.

⁴² Dzhandil'din, N. "Nekotorye voprosy internatsional'nogo vospitaniia," *Kommunist* 9 (13), 1959, 34-35.

thus, enhanced the political standing of the Communist regime. The Kazakh language was the only means via which this least advanced and most disadvantaged group could be reached. The task of increasing their “cultural level” was assigned to the Kazakh intelligentsia. Dzhandil'din described this task as follows: “We must ensure that shepherds and other livestock workers, no matter how far they are from kolkhoz and sovkhos headquarters, do not feel left behind [and] live an active life with the entire Soviet nation.”⁴³ While, as I mention in the previous chapter, Kazakh writers and other artists generally failed to fulfil this task, formal education partly filled this gap.

In the following two parts, the lens is applied to school and higher education in order to examine the interrelation between the Kazakh language, the Russian language and other state-recognized languages in the Kazakh Republic in the 1950s. I approach this by scrutinizing their roles as mediums of instruction and school subjects to reveal how their significance in the education system changed (or did not change) against the background of the unfolding VLC.

The Kazakh Language as a Medium of Instruction

Schooling in the native language was a right guaranteed to all the titular nationalities and some of the other recognized ethnicities in the Soviet Union by the Soviet Constitution. School education was the primary tool of the Communist Party for instilling Soviet values and molding Soviet people, and native-language instruction was inevitable for the purpose of expanding the reach of schooling. Between 1914 and 1940, the number of schools more than tripled in the Kazakh Republic, amounting to nearly 7,800. Elementary schools (four years in duration) prevailed over secondary ones (seven or 10 years in duration), making up 70 percent of all schools; in most cases, elementary schools were the only level available for rural dwellers. School education was so firm on the Soviet domestic agenda that the school network kept growing even during the Great Fatherland War. Despite a dramatic decrease in

⁴³ Dzhandil'din, N. “O nekotorykh voprosakh razvitiia natsional'noi kul'tury,” *Kommunist Kazakhstana* 7, 1957, 19-20.

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the number of available schoolteachers (by 11 percent) and in the number of schoolchildren (by 30 percent), the total number of schools showed a moderate growth between 1940 and 1945 (from 7,790 to 7,869), mainly due to the increased availability of elementary schools.⁴⁴

Since teaching was considered by Kazakhs to be a predominantly male vocation, schools found themselves during the war years in the situation of an extreme shortage of Kazakh-speaking teachers. As many as 9,000 Kazakh teachers, or 20 percent of all schoolteachers of the Kazakh Republic, were conscripted into the Red Army. Many of them must have perished in the war. The evacuees from war-affected parts of Russia partially filled this gap in Kazakh-medium schools: besides improving the situation regarding the teaching of the Russian language, the language of instruction for a number of subjects (mathematics, physics, chemistry) in senior grades was shifted to Russian.⁴⁵

However, the majority of Kazakh youth would not master Russian. This had two solid reasons: the absence of the Russian language in the curricula of Kazakh-medium elementary schools and high dropout rate in secondary schools and. Although Soviet educators claimed that 98 percent of all Kazakhstani children aged eight to 11 years were covered by formal education even before the war, the humanitarian crisis in which the Soviet Union found itself after the invasion of Nazi Germany seriously impeded this achievement: during the war, the total school enrolment reduced on average by 20 percent annually.⁴⁶ Out of all the first graders of 1937/38, less than a quarter completed grade seven and only two percent received a full school education of 10-year duration.⁴⁷ Although a seven-year school education became mandatory in the Soviet Union in 1948, it had not been universal in the Kazakh Republic prior to the VLC.⁴⁸ Having barely started before the war, the introduction of seven-year school education was impeded after the war by the continuing shortage of teachers and the

⁴⁴ *Kazakhstan za 40 let*, 420-449.

⁴⁵ Sembaev, *Istoriia razvitiia sovetskoi shkoly v Kazakhstane*, 344-345.

⁴⁶ *Uchitel' Kazakhstana*, 26 August 1955, 2; Zadorozhnyi, *Shkoly Kazakhstana*, 12.

⁴⁷ Zadorozhnyi, *Shkoly Kazakhstana*, 12.

⁴⁸ *Uchitel' Kazakhstana*, 25 August 1955, 2

impoverishment of the countryside: children had either to work or perform household chores in order to maintain their families' labor capacity.⁴⁹

The recovery of school education was a prominent feature of the post-war reconstruction in the Soviet Union. The Kazakh Republic was not an exception. Already by 1950/51, the school network expanded in all aspects: compared to the first post-war year (1945/46), the number of schools increased by 17 percent and totalled almost 9,100, the size of the teaching pool grew by 50 percent (from 39,700 to almost 60,400), the number of schoolchildren increased by almost 70 percent. In the early 1950s, in order to make secondary school education more accessible, some primary schools were transformed into seven-year ones (schools with grades from one to seven) and some of the existing seven-year schools opened grades eight to 10.⁵⁰ While elementary schools could be found even in remote, thinly-populated places, seven-year schools were half as common, and having a 10-year school (a school with grades from one to 10) was a prerogative of towns, district centers and workers' settlements (*rabochie posielki*). Kazakh-medium secondary schools were even less evident. For instance, in 1953, a large region (in terms of area and size of population) such as Kustanai Oblast, had 54 10-year schools and only 12 of them taught in Kazakh.⁵¹ The children from stockbreeding families, teenage girls of Kazakh ethnicity and the children of special settlers were among the least covered by seven-year education.⁵² In order to bring girls from Kazakh families as well as the children of Kazakh shepherds to secondary schools, the Ministry of Enlightenment encouraged local authorities to establish and maintain boarding facilities at existing schools, which in most cases was beyond their capacities.⁵³

According to the Fifth Five-Year Plan of the Development of the National Economy of the USSR (1951 – 1955), by the end of the five-year term, the Soviet countryside

⁴⁹ Zadorozhnyi, *Shkoly Kazakhstana*, 11.

⁵⁰ GAPO, f. 646, op. 2, d. 303, l. 80-82; GAAO, f. 629, op. 3, d. 6, sv. 1, l. 1.

⁵¹ GAKO, f. 268, op. 1, d. 1200, l. 73.

⁵² GAKO, f. 268, op. 1, d. 1200, ll. 34, 75; *Kostanaiskaia oblast': stranitsy istorii*, 251–253.

⁵³ GAKO, f. 250, op. 1, d. 361, ll. 123-124.

should have been ready for the introduction of full school education.⁵⁴ In 1953, the republic was far behind this target. The coverage of children of school-going age was still far from complete and the drop-out rate was considerable, although significantly lower than during the war (in school year 1950/51 it was around five percent).⁵⁵

One could have assumed that the VLC-associated influx of new settlers to the Kazakh Republic boosted the total number of pupils and, thus, put a great deal of pressure on the recovering school education system. However, this was not the case. Between 1951/52 and 1956/57, the total number of pupils dropped slightly, which took place against the growing numbers of schools. Although it was largely the result of the low birth rate during the war, the regime took counter measures nevertheless. Administrative and criminal liabilities were introduced in 1957 for those who impeded the pursuance of school education by children and youth. The decree treated such an impediment as “infringement on the rights guaranteed by the Constitution of the Kazakh SSR concerning education” and qualified it as disorderly misconduct punishable by correctional labor of a maximum of six months or a fine of up to 500 rubles.⁵⁶ According to the same decree, farms had to arrange regular transport for pupils wherever schools were located more than two kilometers away from their homes. As a result of this and the expanding school network, as well as the continuing influx of family settlers to the Kazakh Republic, in school year 1957/58 the total number of pupils already showed a positive trend and, having reached its 1951 level, continued to increase.⁵⁷

The VLC had, nevertheless, another implication for the Kazakh Republic’s education system. Against the background of the advancement of secondary school education in the Kazakh countryside, it contributed to the decrease of the share of Kazakh-medium schools. The official statistics rarely showed the number of Kazakh-medium schools in the republic’s total. However, some figures can be retrieved. In school year

⁵⁴ *Pravda*, 20 August 1952, 3.

⁵⁵ Zadorozhnyi, *Shkoly Kazakhstana*, 12.

⁵⁶ *Uchitel’ Kazakhstana*, 12 December 1957, 1.

⁵⁷ *Kazakhstan za 40 let*, 420-449.

1955/56, there were 3,395 Kazakh-medium schools, or 39 percent of all schools. Just a year later, this number dropped by almost 200, while the total number of schools increased by almost 150, and the share of Kazakh-medium schools dropped to 36.5 percent.⁵⁸ This decrease was, most likely, a result of the reduction of the number of so-called dwarf schools, or schools that were located in herding areas, had 10 to 20 pupils and instructed in Kazakh.⁵⁹ Later, regional educational departments would re-open such schools, shut them down again and re-open them once more.⁶⁰ However, the long-term trend was their reduction and replacement by smaller numbers of more capacious boarding schools.⁶¹ This new type of schooling was meant primarily for Kazakh shepherds' children. Another type of school that seemingly grew in popularity was the so-called mixed school where instruction was conducted in two or more languages. In the school year 1955/56, 16 percent of all schools, or 1,417 out of 8,676, were "mixed", and almost 95 percent of all "mixed schools" taught both in Kazakh and Russian.⁶² The number of such schools, which, in the eyes of propagandists, were another symbol of internationalism, probably grew in the later period too.⁶³

One of the tselina provinces, Kustanai Oblast, offers a more detailed account. In school year 1953/54, or one year before the beginning of the mass resettlement to the Kazakh Virgin Lands, there were 816 schools in the region, 244 of which instructed in Kazakh. In two years, the total number of schools increased to 883 while that of Kazakh-medium schools decreased slightly. In particular, 18 elementary schools were shut down and three new 10-year schools were established. The share of pupils attending Kazakh-medium schools out of the total number of schoolchildren dropped: from 35 percent to 27 percent.⁶⁴ In school year 1963/64, the total number

⁵⁸ *Istoria Kazakhskoi SSR*, 634-638; *Uchitel' Kazakhstana*, 4 April 1957, 1-2.

⁵⁹ GAAO, f. 629, op. 3, d. 6. sv. 2; GAPO, f. 646, op. 5, d. 286, l. 51.

⁶⁰ *Uchitel' Kazakhstana*, 27 June 1957, 1; GAKO, f. 250, op. 1, d. 681, ll. 2-3.

⁶¹ Zadorozhnyi, *Shkoly Kazakhstana*, 68-69.

⁶² APRK, f. 708, op. 29, d. 1406 ("Spravka o khode vypolneniia", Sharipov, A.)

⁶³ *Uchitel' Kazakhstana*, 6 August 1964, 3.

⁶⁴ GAKO, f. 268, op. 1, d. 1200, l. 73; f. 250, op. 1, d. 415, l. 1.

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of pupils almost doubled compared to that of 1956, while the share of Kazakhs dropped to 22 percent.⁶⁵ Although the report of the regional education department did not provide any information on the breakdown of the number of schools by language of instruction for 1963/64, it is most likely that the share of Kazakh-medium schools kept declining. The high concentration of Kazakh-medium schools remained in the southern Kazakh-populated and livestock-breeding districts of the Virgin Lands, unheeded by Soviet social engineers in the initial years of the VLC.⁶⁶

For regional authorities, the issue of the language of school instruction was about retaining the new workforce. The absence of Russian-medium schools could have been a reason for new settlers deciding not to stay and requesting transfers to places where such schools were available. The two following examples offer insight into the impact of the change at grassroots level. Both cases stem from Kustanai Oblast and more precisely from Fiodorovskii Raion, an area located in the very north of Kustanai Oblast, next to the Russian-Kazakh border.

In April 1956, 48-year old Startsev, a father of three (the youngest was 14 years old) and an agricultural specialist, was released from a labor camp to be sent to the Virgin Lands. He rejected his reallocation to the kolkhoz to which he had been assigned, explaining to the director of the local machine-and-tractor station: “The Molotov kolkhoz has a Kazakh population. There is a Kazakh school. My child needs to quit studying [because of] the Kazakh language. I do not know how I can carry out work among kolkhoz people if I do not speak their language (*ne znaiu ikhnei rechi*)”. After such an explanation, the station director threatened to sue Startzev. To protect himself, he wrote to the General Prosecutor of the USSR complaining that he was “being sent forcibly” and that for his children there were “no chances given” to continue studying and living together with him. “I demand basic conditions for my life, to give me the chance to be with my family” – wrote Startsev in his complaint. He added that he was not refusing to work, but asked the General Prosecutor to take into account the forcible nature of such an assignment and to overturn this decision. It seems that

⁶⁵ GAKO, f. 250, op. 1, d. 681, ll. 2-3.

⁶⁶ GAKO, f. 250, op. 1, d. 464, ll. 366-367.

Moscow redirected this complaint to the Prosecutor's Office of Kustanai Oblast where the case actually took place, and then was forwarded to the regional agriculture department. Already at the end of June of the same year, Startsev had been assigned to another location (a seed testing station in the same province).⁶⁷ Such readiness to fight for his rights to work and live in a Russian-speaking environment is especially impressive given Startsev's "dark" past. There could be many such cases in which not only former inmates but, even more likely, Komsomol members and Communists with "undamaged reputations", complained about being sent to Kazakh-populated kolkhozes.

Another scenario was that Russian-speaking parents could organize themselves and campaign for changing the language of instruction in existing schools. Petitioning had been known as a lever for parents to do this. After the 1938 Resolution which actually discouraged the replacement of native languages with the Russian language in school instruction, as many as 66 Kazakh-medium schools in North-Kazakhstan Oblast alone, shifted their instruction to Russian as a result of petitioning by parents.⁶⁸ The same was observed in the national autonomies of the Russian Federation, where non-Russian parents opted for Russian-language school instruction because of the poor quality of instruction in non-Russian schools.⁶⁹

A documented case of a similar nature took place in the spring of 1955. The parents living in kolkhoz *imeni Lenina* ("Named after Lenin") petitioned for the change of the language of instruction in the local seven-year school, from Kazakh to Russian. What was remarkable is that the population in this kolkhoz was predominantly made up of ethnic Kazakhs: according to available household records books (*pokhoziaistvennye knigi*), they constituted 90 percent of the total.⁷⁰ Two reasons were cited in the decision that was taken by the local council based on this petition. First, the parents

⁶⁷ GAKO, f. 1116, op. 3-I, d. 583, ll. 99–108.

⁶⁸ Such a development was, perhaps, more characteristic of the republic's northern and central regions which had a large Slavic population and where Kazakhs, a demographic minority, sought to adapt to the Russified environment. Beletchenko et al, *Severo-Kazakhstanskaia oblast'*, 234.

⁶⁹ Blitstein, *Nation-Building or Russification*, 265.

⁷⁰ GAKO, f. R-1417, op. 2, dd. 60, 61, 65.

were concerned that their “children having graduated from the Leninskaia Kazakh-medium school could not continue their studies”. This concern refers to the fact that higher education was offered in the Kazakh Republic mostly in Russian and, considering the proximity of Russia, a good command of Russian would be especially critical if one intended to continue pursuing their – tertiary or higher - education in Russia. The second reason was connected to the tselina settlers directly: the children of “many Russian and Ukrainian families who arrived in the kolkhoz” could not study in Kazakh. The district council decided to fulfil this request and sent it for approval to the province soviet.⁷¹ Although the ultimate fate of this petition is unknown, the kolkhoz household records for the period 1955 to 1957 allow us to suggest that, at least for another couple of years, Kazakh was kept as the language of instruction in the Leninskaia school.⁷² However, not all Kazakh-medium schools survived in the tselina districts being flooded with Slav settlers, with even faint attempts to preserve Kazakh-language school instruction leading to their condemnation on anti-nationalist grounds.⁷³

Newcomers, however, created a demand not only for Russian-medium schools. Kazakh repatriates from China who spoke Kazakh and never learned the Cyrillic script, sent their children to Kazakh-medium schools.⁷⁴ In 1955, Pavlodar Oblast which - at least in that particular year - was the major recipient of repatriates from China, counted almost 1,400 school-age children of Kazakh ethnicity from the repatriated families.⁷⁵ As Ablazhei suggests, the demand for schooling in Kazakh created by the return of ethnic Kazakhs from China, reversed the emerging trend towards the reduction of the number of Kazakh-medium schools.⁷⁶ This could have been so because for the regime, the issue of schooling for the repatriates ceased to be

⁷¹ GAKO, f. R-139, op. 2, d. 48, l 107.

⁷² The household record books contain data on the local teachers: 11 out of 12 of all the teachers were of Kazakh ethnicity. Thus, it is likely that the school continued to instruct in Kazakh at least until 1957. GAKO, f. R-1417, op. 2, dd. 60, 61, 65.

⁷³ Kozybaev, “Tyndagy kunder,” 258.

⁷⁴ Ablazhei, *Kazakhskii migratsionnyi maiatnik*, 196.

⁷⁵ Ibid, 220; GAPO, f. 646, op. 5, d. 186, ll. 557, 566.

⁷⁶ Ablazhei, *Kazakhskii migratsionnyi maiatnik*, 196.

domestic and turned into an issue of international prestige. However, this reversal did not last long, because, as discussed above, a smaller number of boarding schools replaced a larger number of dwarf-sized schools. The Kazakh repatriates from China majorly fell into the category of Kazakh shepherds, one of the target groups for this new type of education institution.⁷⁷

In the Kazakh Republic, as everywhere else in the Soviet Union, the choice of a school generally depended on the ethnicity of a pupil: a Russian would normally go to a Russian-medium school; a Kazakh to a Kazakh-medium one; an Uzbek to an Uzbek-medium one, and so on.⁷⁸ However, non-Russian parents increasingly opted for Russian-medium schools because of the poor quality of instruction in Kazakh-medium schools, the limited availability of secondary Kazakh-medium schools in rural areas and, most importantly, the prevalence of Russian instruction in tertiary and higher education. By 1959, a quarter of all Kazakh children attended schools where the language of instruction was Russian.⁷⁹ On the one hand, regional education departments (for example, the Akmola Education Department) criticized their district branches and heads of schools for not conducting “explanatory work” with parents of Kazakh ethnicity who had chosen Russian-medium schools for their children.⁸⁰ On the other, propaganda presented such a development as a manifestation of internationalism in Soviet Kazakhstan.

In school year 1959/60, the right to decide which school to send their children, despite their ethnicity, was legally granted to Soviet parents. The Kazakh Republic

⁷⁷ Ibid, 198-202.

⁷⁸ In the school year 1955/56 there were 134 Uzbek-medium schools, 23 Uighur-medium ones and nine Tajik-medium ones, as well as 1417 “mixed” schools using two or more languages of instruction. More than 90 percent of the latter were schools of dual Russian-Kazakh instruction. APRK, f. 708, op. 29, d. 1406, ll. 19-21.

⁷⁹ Dzhandil'din, N. “Nekotorye voprosy internatsional'nogo vospitaniia”, *Kommunist* 9 (13), 1959, 36.

⁸⁰ GAAO, f. 629, op. 3, d. 6, sv. 2, l. 177

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was one of the first in the Soviet Union to adopt the new education law introducing such a norm.⁸¹ Article 14 of the Kazakh version of the law read as follows:⁸²

Instruction in the schools of the Kazakh SSR is conducted in the native language of the pupils. The parents, however, have the right to decide into which school with which language of instruction they wish to send their children.⁸³

As many scholars believe, through this norm, the Soviet state encouraged those who were ready to give up their mother tongue and adopt Russian instead, to do so.⁸⁴ In the Kazakh Republic, it amounted to more than encouragement. As Dzhandil'din pointed out in September 1959, which was, perhaps, the final accord in the presumably semi-public and heated debates around this sensitive issue: "Some people consider it necessary to establish a procedure in which the children of Kazakhs could study only in Kazakh schools. Such a view is nothing more than a manifestation of bourgeois nationalism, against which a struggle must be waged."⁸⁵ In the 20 years after this law came into force, around 35 percent of all pupils of Kazakh ethnicities attended Russian-medium schools, which was the highest percentage among all titular nations, except for Russians, in the entire Soviet Union.⁸⁶

⁸¹ For a detailed analysis on how this norm was realized on the legislative level in other national republics of the Soviet Union see: Bilinsky, "The Soviet Education Law of 1958-9."

⁸² The Law "On Strengthening the Connection between the School and Life and Further Development of the Education System in the Kazakh Soviet Socialist Republic" adopted by the Supreme Council of the Kazakh SSR on 28 March 1959.

⁸³ Zakon Ob ukreplenii svyazi shkoly s zhyzn'iu i o dal'neishem razvitii sistemy narodnogo obrazovaniia v Kazakhskoi SSR. *Vedomosti Verkhovnogo Soveta i Pravitel'stva Kazakhskoi SSR* 10, 1959, 69–87.

⁸⁴ Karklins, *Ethnic Relations in the Soviet Union*; Bilinsky, "The Soviet Education Law of 1958-9"; Kreindler, "Soviet Language Planning since 1953"; Blitstein, "Nation-Building or Russification"; Ubiria, *Soviet Nation-Building in Central Asia*.

⁸⁵ Dzhandil'din, N. "Nekotorye voprosy internatsional'nogo vospitaniia," *Kommunist* 9 (13), 1959, 36. See also: Cleary, "Politics and Administration in Soviet Kazakhstan," 391.

⁸⁶ Karklins, *Ethnic Relations in the Soviet Union*, 105.

To sum up, the shrinkage of Kazakh-language schooling in the years of the VLC was a reflection of the declining share of ethnic Kazakhs in the northern provinces of the Kazakh Republic. Although the availability of secondary Kazakh-medium schools grew, especially through the establishment of boarding schools, the network of Russian-medium schools expanded at a more considerable pace, which made school education in Russian more accessible to all. The VLC advanced school education in the Kazakh countryside and increased the demand for Russian-language school instruction. If it were not for the mass resettlement of the Slavic workforce, secondary education would probably have spread in rural areas at a slower pace and mostly through establishing Kazakh-medium schools. However, due to the demand on the side of the growing number of Russian-speaking families, the supply of Russian-speaking teachers from Russia and Ukraine as well as the availability of higher education almost exclusively in Russian, school instruction in Russian clearly dominated.⁸⁷

The Kazakh Language as a Study Subject

In this part, I discuss how the role of the Kazakh language as a study subject changed between two milestones which scholars usually point out when talking about the consolidation of the position of the Russian language in the Soviet school system. I have already mentioned them both in this chapter. The first landmark decision was the resolution of 1938 which made it mandatory to study the Russian language in all native-language schools of the Soviet Union. The second watershed moment was the school reform of 1958-59, which allowed parents in the national republics to decide whether to send their children to Russian-medium schools or to native-language schools, and whether they learnt there their native language and the Russian language respectively. This part also highlights other, no less important

⁸⁷ The number of teachers sent to the Virgin Lands from Russia, Ukraine and other Soviet Republic was more considerable than the Kazakh Republic itself could produce. In 1954 to 1956 around 1500 non-Kazakh teachers arrived in the Virgin Lands from outside of the Republic and at least 275 of them came in 1954-1955 from Russia and Ukraine. *Uchitel' Kazakhstana*, 7 April 1955, 2; *Kommunisticheskaia partiia Kazakhstana v bor'be za osvoenie*, 445.

developments that changed the language situation in the school system of the Kazakh Republic in this period.

In 1938, the Russian language became a compulsory study subject in all national schools of the Soviet Union. According to the resolution signed by Stalin and Molotov, national schools (“non-Russian schools” as they were referred to in the text) had to teach the Russian language in grades two to 10, and allocate to this subject an average of four hours a week.⁸⁸ In other words, this policy aimed at bringing up bilingual children whose knowledge of their mother tongue would indicate their belonging to their ethnic background and whose ability to speak the Russian language would make them part of the Soviet nation.

For the Kazakh Republic, this decision meant that the number of hours allocated to teaching Russian in Kazakh-medium schools had to increase. If, before the 1938 resolution, Kazakh pupils began to study Russian in grade three and continued learning it until grade 10, spending two to three academic hours on this subject a week, in school year 1938/39 classes of Russian had to start one year earlier and the weekly lessons had to be increased by one hour. Although the resolution did not make any provision regarding teaching titular languages in Russian-medium schools, Kazakh had already been mandatory in schools where the language of instruction was not Kazakh.⁸⁹ However, considering the shortage of bilingual teachers even for the needs of native-language schools, the Kazakh language was taught, most likely, in a small number of Russian-medium schools. In contrast, the Russian language, without the knowledge of which one could hardly pursue tertiary or higher education in the

⁸⁸ The Resolution “On Mandatory Learning of the Russian Language in Schools of the National Republics and Regions” approved on 13 March 1938. Based on this, the Kazakh Republic adopted, on 6 April 1938, the resolution “On Mandatory Learning of the Russian Language in Kazakh schools of the Republic”.

⁸⁹ The Resolution “On Mandatory Studying of the Kazakh Language in non-Kazakh schools” adopted by the Presidium of the Kazakh Central Implementation Committee on 14 April 1934 as it is given in: Tsentral’nyi gosudarstvennyi arkhiv RK, *lazykovaia politika v Kazakhstane*, 145-146.

Kazakh Republic and – not to mention – beyond it, was in demand in Kazakh-medium schools, although they struggled to teach it well.⁹⁰

In 1953, the Ministry of Enlightenment of the Kazakh Republic exempted the Kazakh language as a mandatory study subject from the curriculum of Russian-medium schools. As former Minister of Enlightenment, Sembaev, explained, he “personally” advocated that the Kazakh language should be removed from school curricula because he did not know of “a single person” who after having studied Kazakh would use it, “except for those who lived and were brought up together with Kazakh youth”.⁹¹ Beside the lack of interest on the side of pupils to learn Kazakh, there was also an insufficient number of teachers, their poor competence,⁹² and an absence of textbooks on the Kazakh language for Russian-speaking pupils.⁹³ The underlying problem was that the teaching of the Kazakh language was lagging in general. Because of the underdeveloped methodology, which, among other things, resulted in the absence of visuals and orthographic dictionaries, as well as poorly prepared teachers and an insufficient number of the total hours of Kazakh tutoring, Kazakh pupils could not speak good Kazakh upon graduation from native-language schools.⁹⁴ In other words, the Kazakh language as a study subject had been long neglected.

In school year 1955/56, all Russian-medium schools of the Kazakh Republic adopted, as directed by the Council of Ministers of the Soviet Union and implemented by the Council of Ministers of the Kazakh SSR, the school programs of Russia, and studying the Kazakh language was (once again) made non-mandatory for Russian-medium

⁹⁰ Sembaev, *Istoriia razvitiia sovetskoi shkoly*, 256.

⁹¹ APRK, f. 708, op. 29, d. 361, ll. 1-4.

⁹² According to the minutes, at some point in the past the Ministry of Enlightenment of the Kazakh Republic had shut down training programs for Kazakh-speaking teachers at teachers' colleges, while schools were staffed with former militiamen. APRK, f. 708, op. 29, d. 361, ll. 68-74.

⁹³ *Uchitel' Kazakhstana*, 30 October 1953, 4; APRK, f. 708, op. 29, d. 361, ll. 68-74.

⁹⁴ Compared to other titular nations of the Soviet Union, Kazakh-medium schools allocated much less time on teaching the native language. For example, in the school year 1956/57, Kazakh pupils spent — within a 10-year school program — 300 hours less on studying the Kazakh Language than Uzbek pupils on studying their native language and 900 hours less than was allocated to studying Russian in Russian-medium schools. *Uchitel' Kazakhstana*, 4 April 1957; APRK, f. 708, op. 30, d. 1528.

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schools.⁹⁵ This was most likely associated with the VLC and the regime's efforts to make the Virgin Lands a more attractive place for new workers and, thus, expand and secure the permanent workforce there. In some districts where Kazakhs were more prominent demographically, the Kazakh language was still taught in Russian-medium schools; however, this subject was not popular among pupils.⁹⁶

At the same time, the importance of the Russian language as a study subject grew in the school curricula of Kazakh-medium schools. Compared to the late 1930s, the total number of hours allocated to the Russian language per week in grades two to 10 increased from 37 to 53, having almost reached the number of hours given to studying the Kazakh language (60 hours).⁹⁷ When educators advocated the importance of the Russian language for Kazakh-medium schools, they would usually underline the point that mastering Russian introduced pupils to the "great Russian culture" and granted them unlimited access to scientific and technical literature written in Russian by "great Russian and Soviet scientists".⁹⁸ Learning the Russian language at school was associated with "Communist upbringing": it was believed that teaching Russian was necessary to "instill in pupils Soviet patriotism", "love for the Communist Party" and "love for their nation". For instance, teaching programs on Russian grammar instructed teachers to use examples that reflected the essence of the Soviet people's life and for what they were supposedly striving.⁹⁹

Between 1953 and 1957 the requirement of learning Russian in Kazakh-medium schools was not formally coupled with that of learning Kazakh in Russian-medium schools and in practice, the Kazakh language was not taught in many Russian-medium schools. Universities, and especially teachers colleges, were first to experience the

⁹⁵ Sembaev, *Istoriia razvitiia sovetskoi shkoly*, 327; The Decree "On the Exemption from the Mandatory Studying of the Kazakh Language in Russian[-medium] Schools" issue by the Council of Ministers of the Kazakh SSR on 4 June 1955, as it is given in: Tsentral'nyi gosudarstvennyi arkhiv RK, *lazykovaia politika v Kazakhstane*, 225-226.

⁹⁶ GAKO, f. 250, op. 1, d. 392, l. 145; f. 250, op. 1, d. 361, l. 128.

⁹⁷ *Uchitel' Kazakhstana*, 4 August 1955, 2-3.

⁹⁸ GAAO, f. 629, op. 3, d. 6, sv. 2, l. 37.

⁹⁹ GAKO, f. 250, op. 1, d. 392, l. 42.

poor knowledge of Kazakh among ethnic Kazakhs graduating from Russian-medium schools. After four years of the Kazakh language not being part of the school curricula, Kazakh children did not have any command of Kazakh. For example, school graduates coming to Alma-Ata based pedagogical colleges to become teachers for Kazakh-medium schools could not speak Kazakh and thus, could be trained only to become teachers of the Russian language.¹⁰⁰ Since higher education programs did not include Kazakh as a study subject (with the exception of teachers colleges), young specialists could not express themselves in Kazakh after graduation and thus, could not work in the Kazakh-speaking milieu. University programs also lacked Kazakh-speaking staff, textbooks in Kazakh and Kazakh-written scientific literature in general.¹⁰¹ For that reason, some of them had to switch the language of instruction for particular disciplines or entire classes to Russian, as it was in the Kazakh Agriculture Institute, the Veterinary College and the Abai Pedagogical College.¹⁰² For the Medical College, for instance, it was easier first to teach the Russian language to Kazakh students and then train/instruct them in Russian rather than maintain Kazakh-taught programs. Situations in which young professionals of Kazakh ethnicity (such as physicians, agronomists, livestock specialists, engineers and so on) could not communicate with Kazakh-speaking compatriots, grew common. For instance, patients had to talk to available doctors through a translator whom they (the patients) had to bring along.¹⁰³

In February 1957, the Council of Ministers of the Kazakh Republic approved a resolution on the mandatory learning of the Kazakh language by pupils of Kazakh ethnicity who attended Russian-medium schools.¹⁰⁴ As mentioned earlier in this chapter, this decision was, perhaps, prompted by a series of publications in *Qazaq adabietı*. Besides resuming the teaching of Kazakh in Russian-medium schools, the

¹⁰⁰ APRK, f. 708, op. 29, d. 362, ll. 20-21, 23-24.

¹⁰¹ For example, the Director of the Veterinary College regarded the development of scientific literature in Kazakh which was “almost” absent a higher priority than the opening of Kazakh-taught programs in higher education institutions. APRK, f. 708, op. 29, d. 362, ll. 14-20, 27-28.

¹⁰² APRK, f. 708, op. 29, d. 362, ll. 2-8, 14, 21-23.

¹⁰³ Ibid, ll. 24-26; *Qazaq adabietı*, 22 April 1956, 3; APRK, f. 708, op. 30, d. 294, l. 44.

¹⁰⁴ GAPO, f. 646, op. 5, d. 416, ll. 250-251; *Uchitel' Kazakhstana*, 12 September 1957, 2.

newspaper called for the opening of Kazakh-taught programs at universities as well as for the inclusion of the Kazakh language as a study subject into higher education programs.¹⁰⁵ The question of restoring the Kazakh language in the curricula of Russian-medium schools found much support among linguists, writers and educators. While most argued that it should be taught only to ethnic Kazakhs, some supported the idea of fostering not only Kazakh-Russian bilingualism, but also Russian-Kazakh bilingualism. For instance, a strong point was made by Muslim Bazarbaev, Deputy Director of the Institute of Language and Literature under the Academy of Science of the Kazakh Republic: “Starting from grade five we include foreign languages in the study program and hope that one day this will be of use, but the Kazakh language [is not in the study program] as if we don’t need it”.¹⁰⁶

In spring 1957, a major public event heralded the return of the Kazakh language from the period of neglect, in the form of the republican conference on teaching the Kazakh Language and Kazakh Literature.¹⁰⁷ This event marked a new level of the relationship between the Kazakh and Russian languages: the role of the former as a mother tongue for Kazakh pupils was preserved while the latter was assigned the title of “second mother tongue”.¹⁰⁸ Kazakh intellectuals, such as the head of the Kazakh State University, Darkanbaev, and writer Mukhar Auezov, stressed that having knowledge of the two languages for Kazakh pupils was “in the spirit of internationalism” and a sign of being “highly educated and cultured”.¹⁰⁹ It seems that the concept of Russian as the “second mother tongue”, which a few years later became part of high-level party rhetoric, had been coined in Soviet Kazakhstan.¹¹⁰

¹⁰⁵ *Qazaq adebiety*, 22 April 1956, 3.

¹⁰⁶ APRK, f. 708, op. 29, d. 361, ll. 55-57.

¹⁰⁷ *Uchitel' Kazakhstana*, 11 April 1957, 2.

¹⁰⁸ *Uchitel' Kazakhstana*, 28 March 1957, 2.

¹⁰⁹ Ibid; Auezov, M. “Liubite rodnoi iazyk, rodnoi literaturu!” *Uchitel' Kazakhstana*, 28 March 1957.

¹¹⁰ As Kreindler notes, Khrushchev introduced the concept of Russian as a “second native language” when he proclaimed at the 22nd party congress (October 1961) that “the Russian language had in fact become the second native tongue”. Kreindler, “Soviet Language Planning since 1953,” 47-48.

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Starting from the school year 1957/58, all such schools were to introduce classes of Kazakh in grades two to seven for pupils coming from Kazakh families. According to the resolution, fifth-, sixth- and seventh-graders of other ethnicities could join too.¹¹¹ Thus, Kazakh as a second language in schools instructing in Russian became mandatory for pupils of Kazakh ethnicity and optional for pupils of non-Kazakh origin. Although the practical application of this norm was, most likely, seriously affected by the shortage of teachers, in cases where they were available, the Kazakh language could be taught to entire groups and not exclusively to ethnic Kazaks.¹¹² Another important implication of this decision was that the methodological basis for teaching the Kazakh language to Russian speakers began to form and respective textbooks began to appear.¹¹³

In the same year (and in fact, on the same date), the German language, the mother tongue of pupils of German ethnicity, made its way in to the school curricula of both Kazakh-medium and Russian-medium schools.¹¹⁴ In 1958 and 1960, the Korean language and the Dungan language became formally part of the school curricula too.¹¹⁵ While propaganda presented this multilingualism as a manifestation of internationalism,¹¹⁶ the practical side of these changes was, most likely, the retention of the workforce in the Kazakh countryside and maintenance the social order.

In 1956 and 1957, both languages – Kazakh and German - were gaining in stature in the school curricula of Russian-medium schools in the Kazakh Republic. However,

¹¹¹ GAPO, f. 646, op. 5, d. 416, ll. 251-252; *Uchitel' Kazakhstana*, 1 September 1957, 1; *Uchitel' Kazakhstana*, 12 September 1957, 2.

¹¹² My father, Rymbai Tonkobaev, an ethnic Kazakh, went to a Russian-medium school in Karaganda Oblast, central Kazakhstan. His group studied Kazakh only in grades six and seven (school years 1958/59 and 1959/60). Out of 15-16 classmates, there were only “two to three” ethnic Kazaks in his group, two ethnic Germans, one ethnic Korean and the rest was of the group was represented by Russians. My interview with Rymbai Tonkobaev.

¹¹³ *Uchitel' Kazakhstana*, 12 September 1957, 2.

¹¹⁴ GAPO, f. 646, op. 5, d. 416, l. 250.

¹¹⁵ *Uchitel' Kazakhstana*, 31 July 1958, 2; Tsentral'nyi gosudarstvennyi arkhiv RK, *lazykovaia politika v Kazakhstane*, 232-234.

¹¹⁶ Dzhandil'din, Nurymbet “My — internatsionalisty,” *Partiinaia zhizn' Kazakhstana* 11, 1961, 19.

surprising as it seems, the standing of German grew somewhat stronger. A pupil of German ethnicity attending a Russian-medium school would be offered two hours of German a week from grade two to grade four and he/she would continue studying German, now as a foreign language, three to four hours a week throughout secondary school. If a pupil of German origin, as a non-Kazakh, was willing to study the Kazakh language, he/she would be offered two hours a week from grade five to grade seven only. A pupil of Kazakh ethnicity attending a Russian-medium school would be offered the same number of hours of his/her native tongue as their fellows of German ethnicity, but only until grade seven, while from grade four to 10, they would also learn German as a foreign language, since — due to the large share of Russified Germans in the republic's population — it was the only option available in rural schools in most cases.¹¹⁷ Therefore, there should be no surprise that the second language of a graduate of a Russian-medium school would be German rather than Kazakh.

There were also some other positive changes in school curricula showing the gradual loosening of the connection between Kazakhness and nationalism. In the 1958/1959 school year, Kazakh literature was introduced (one academic hour per week) in grades eight to 10 of Russian-medium schools and a short course (13 hours total) of Kazakh history.¹¹⁸ The introduction of these subjects in the curricula of Russian-medium schools was done under the pretext of giving a “proper internationalist upbringing”.¹¹⁹ At the same time, in order to decrease the study load, the time allocated for Russian literature was reduced in Kazakh-medium schools.¹²⁰

In the school year 1959/60, the option to decide whether their children would study Kazakh in a Russian-medium school and Russian in a Kazakh-medium school was legally provided to parents. The same Article 14 of the 1959 education law,

¹¹⁷ *Uchitel' Kazakhstana*, 11 August 1955, 2-3; GAKO, f. 250, op. 1, d. 681, ll. 30-32.

¹¹⁸ *Uchitel' Kazakhstana*, 10 October 1957, 4; Sembaev, *Istoriia razvitiia sovetskoi shkoly*, 329.

¹¹⁹ APRK, f. 708, op. 29, d. 362, ll. 38-40.

¹²⁰ *Uchitel' Kazakhstana*, 10 January 1957, 3; 7 August 1958, 3.

mentioned earlier with respect to the right to choose the language of instruction, regardless of ethnic belonging, read as follows:

The study of Russian in schools with Kazakh or some other language of instruction as well as the study of the Kazakh language in schools with Russian or some other language of instruction is conducted according to the wishes of the parents and pupils.¹²¹

Curiously enough, the newspaper *Kazakhstanskaia Pravda* omitted this line (“as well as the study of the Kazakh language in schools with Russian or some other language of instruction”) when it published the law in March 1959.¹²² The bulletin of the Supreme Council and the Government of the Kazakh SSR printed this article in full in the autumn of the same year. A European scholar of the time, Yaroslav Bilinsky, who had seen only the first version of this article, concluded: “Apparently the Kazakh language is so looked down upon that the law does not envisage the study of the Kazakh language in Russian schools.”¹²³ However, the Kazakh language had already become a study subject in the Russian-medium schools of the Kazakh Republic. As mentioned earlier, the 1957 decree made it obligatory for ethnic Kazakhs to study their native language and voluntary for non-Kazakhs to join classes of Kazakh.

The right to opt for not studying Russian in Kazakh-medium schools remained largely nominal. In 1960, there was reportedly “not a single Kazakh school [or] a single Kazakh school group where Kazakh children did not study the Russian language”.¹²⁴ According to the Minister of Enlightenment, Zakarin, “the voluntary nature of the Russian language in Kazakh schools” would not affect the “desire of Kazakh youth to master the Russian language” and the Russian language would “remain the second native language for Kazakh workers”.¹²⁵ Regional educational authorities did not consider the possibility of excluding the “second mother tongue of Kazakh pupils”

¹²¹ *Vedomosti Verkhovnogo Soveta i Pravitel'stva Kazakhskoi SSR* 10, 1959, 76.

¹²² *Kazakhstanskaia Pravda*, 29 March 1959, 2-3.

¹²³ Bilinsky, “The Soviet Education Law of 1958-9,” 145, 155.

¹²⁴ *Uchitel' Kazakhstana*, 10 August 1960, 2-4.

¹²⁵ *Kazakhstanskaia pravda*, 29 March 1959, 2-4.

from the curriculum of Kazakh-medium schools, and spoke rather about improving the proficiency of Russian-language teachers.¹²⁶ However, there was a limited number of Kazakh pupils who exercised their right and chose not to learn Russian. In June 1960, the *Teacher of Kazakhstan* wrote that “many readers” were wondering how graduates of Kazakh- and Uighur-medium secondary schools should be graded for the Russian language if they had not studied it or did not wish unsatisfactory grades for this subject to appear in their school-leaving certificates. In response to this, the School Department of the Ministry of Education clarified that since Russian had become an optional subject for these kinds of schools, this subject had to be eliminated from the certificate.¹²⁷ Such cases were exceptional and most likely connected exclusively to repatriates who had recently arrived in the Kazakh Republic from China.¹²⁸ The status of Kazakh and Russian languages in the school system of the Kazakh Republic by the end of the Khrushchev decade is illustrated neatly by the following example: In transition exams which teenagers had to take after grade eight to enroll in grade nine, and after grade 11 to pursue higher education, the former did not play any role in Russian-medium schools while the latter was part of the exams in Kazakh-medium and other non-Russian schools.¹²⁹

Conclusion

To sum up, in the tselina decade, the Kazakh language returned to public spheres but was meant exclusively for use by ethnic Kazakhs. The aim behind the gradual restoration of the Kazakh language (against the background of the consolidating positions of the Russian language) was to promote Kazakh-Russian (but not Russian-Kazakh) bilingualism and to communicate economic and political goals to rural producers, with whose help the USSR intended to outstrip its ideological enemy.

In contrast to the previous period, the development of the Kazakh language proceeded in comparatively peaceful circumstances. According to official rhetoric,

¹²⁶ GAAO, f. 629, op. 3, d. 6, sv. 2, ll. 37-49.

¹²⁷ *Uchitel' Kazakhstana*, 2 June 1960, 3.

¹²⁸ Ablazhei, *Kazakhskii migratsionnyi maiatnik*, 200.

¹²⁹ *Uchitel' Kazakhstana*, 12 March 1964, 1.

the Russian language did not endanger national languages, but was second (the second mother tongue) after native languages. However, the regime was not ready to recognize national languages as second mother tongues for ethnic Russians, and the Kazakh Republic was an extreme example of this. The ideological machine largely ignored the argument advanced by some passionate advocates of the Kazakh language (like linguist Amanzholov, writers Muqanov and Tazhybaev, and, later on, the Minister of Enlightenment and writer himself, Sharipov) that learning Kazakh by non-Kazakhs in the Kazakh Republic was a matter of the “friendship of the nations” and “internationalist upbringing” too.¹³⁰ As the chief propagandist, Dzhandil’din, maintained, “nobody has right to make the knowledge of the Kazakh language a compulsory condition for working in Kazakhstan.” He believed that “[s]uch a requirement cannot contribute to the strengthening of friendship among peoples” and that “studying the Kazakh language in the present circumstances should be voluntary.”¹³¹ In general, there was an understanding that if studying Kazakh was to be an employment requirement, then “Russian comrades” would not be interested in settling down in the Kazakh Republic and that it was young individuals of Kazakh ethnicity who should rather be trained for working in the Kazakh-speaking milieu.¹³² After all, as Akiner puts it, “it was not, in fact, part of the Soviet ethic that [extra-territorial settler groups] should assimilate to the local culture.”¹³³

The resolving of the language dilemma in favor of the Russian language could be presented as a voluntary move. Like Ubiria says, “if some groups, particularly many Kazakh urbanities, later adopted Russian as their first or only language, it was not a result of forced Russification; those Kazakhs willingly shifted to Russian in order to better accommodate themselves in the Russian-dominated urban milieu or their republic and thus enhance their chances for upward social mobility” adding that “it should be stressed that whatever were the reasons for these people to adopt Russian

¹³⁰ APRK, f. 708, op. 29, d. 361, ll. 28-29, 34, 43-44, 45-46; *Uchitel’ Kazakhstana*, 10 August 1960, 2–4.

¹³¹ Dzhandil’din, N. “O nekotorykh voprosakh razvitiia natsional’noi kul’tury,” *Kommunist Kazakhstana* 7, 1957, 17-18.

¹³² APRK, f. 708, op. 29, d. 362, ll. 2-8.

¹³³ Akiner, “Melting Pot, Salad Bowl — Cauldron”, 382.

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as their first language, no one had compelled them to forget their native Kazakh."¹³⁴ It could be so if we assume that Kazakhs had active agency in deciding for themselves and if the standing of their language had not been severely damaged in the preceding period. The inferiority of the Kazakh language was so deeply ingrained in the Kremlin's perception of its eastern borderland that, for instance, local intellectuals' proposal voiced in 1962, to undertake translations from other languages directly into Kazakh, skipping the step of translating first into Russian, was received as an infringement on and disrespect towards "the great Russian language".¹³⁵

¹³⁴ Ubiria, *Soviet Nation-Building in Central Asia*, 231.

¹³⁵ Dunn, Dunn, "Soviet Regime and Native Cultures," 159.

Chapter Five.

Ploughing up the Literary Tselina: Fiction in Making the Virgin Lands Campaign

This chapter analyzes the efforts of Communist propaganda to inscribe the Virgin Lands Campaign (VLC) in Soviet mythology. It looks at the place of literary fiction in shaping a public discourse about “taming” the virgin steppe economically and culturally. The propaganda mainline with regard to the campaign was to present it as a “revitalizing” force for the steppe and its inhabitants’ life. In the eyes of Soviet planners, the scattered and diverse population of the Kazakh countryside was another tselina to be tamed, and, as I show in this chapter, Kazakh literature was part of these efforts.

I discuss the role of Kazakh writers in crafting a literary narrative about the transformation of rural life in Soviet Kazakhstan in the 1950s and 1960s. In particular, I deal with the issues of how writers as professional propagandists of Communist values, who were charged with the task to heroicize the “feat of Soviet people” on Kazakh soil and monumentalize the Tselina Campaign as a Soviet epic, handled this job.

The task of Soviet Kazakh artists, many of whom were members of the Communist Party of the Soviet Union (CPSU) and of the Union of Writers and thus, officially and professionally engaged in agitprop, with regards to the campaign was three-fold. Firstly, they had to present the Virgin Lands as a prospective place to move to and settle down in. Secondly, they were supposed to convince local residents that such a development was beneficial for them, too. Thirdly, they were expected to herald the emergence of the new community and identity, namely, the tselina people. Kazakh artists’ contribution in the VLC was so valued that they were - on par with those who actually toiled the land - awarded with the medal “For the Development of Virgin Lands”.¹

¹ Alimbaeva, “Geroi fil'mov o tseline,” 118.

They, without a doubt, produced a one-sided account for which they were paid by their only employer, the state. However, since it was the only literary perspective on Soviet modernity available to the audience in the Kazakh Republic, it is worth examining.

The focus of this piece is on the literary endeavors by three Kazakh writers (Mukhtar Auezov, Sabit Muqanov and Ilyas Yessenberlin).² Their names are still remembered in present-day Kazakhstan where they are seen as preservers of Kazakh identity whereas their involvement with the Tselina Campaign is largely forgotten. Cinematic works about the Kazakh tselina are mentioned in passing.

Before delving into the analyses, I outline the socio-political circumstances under which Kazakh intellectuals had to work and the accessibility of fiction in the form of books and movies in the Kazakh countryside.

Socio-political climate in the Kazakh steppe

At the time when the CPSU, through its party cells in sovkhozes and kolkhozes, worked on instilling in its rural subjects qualities that the Soviet people were supposed to have (such as belonging to a collective, diligence and honesty), Soviet writers and filmmakers were supposed to create the image of the Soviet man and the Soviet woman in their works. With the onset of the campaign, the Union of Soviet Writers of Kazakhstan (as its official title went) started to dispatch their members to the “New Lands” with the task of creating literary pieces celebrating the “feat” of Soviet people.³ The ideological line was to glorify the Party’s leadership and its vision of the Soviet countryside, and to highlight the protagonists: typical characters endowed with the best qualities supposedly inherent in the Soviet people whose

² More on literary translation in Soviet Kazakhstan: Peter Doyle, Iurii Dombrovskii (Amsterdam, 2000), 20; “Stenogramma zasedaniia III s"ezda sovetskikh pisatelei Kazakhstana”, The Central State Archive of the Republic of Kazakhstan (TsGARK), f. 1778, op. 1, d. 737, l. 38; “K novomu pod"emu kazakhskoi sovetskoi literatury,” *Sovetskii Kazakhstan* 10, 1954, 106.

³ In September 1954, the Union of Writers of the Kazakh SSR comprised 129 members. *Sovetskii Kazakhstan* 10, 1954, 102-114; APRK, f. 708, op. 29, d. 1384, ll. 58-60.

deprivations and sacrifices for the common cause were presented as an act of heroism in the Virgin Lands.

Literary pieces published in the republic were subject to meticulous state censorship or self-censorship, and the period under the VLC was not an exception. These were lessons learned after several rounds of purges of Kazakh intellectuals and, in particular, the most recent one from the late 1940s to the early 1950s. Even those writers who seemed to be influential figures could not put their critical thoughts down on paper — especially when it came to the “national question” (*natsional’nyi vopros*) that included a declined status of the Kazakh language as an official language, ethnic deportations,⁴ interethnic conflicts, local resistance to the campaign, and so on. Moreover, at their meetings and in the press, local writers “tried to expose their peers, expose their ideological mistakes, and point out even slightest doubts of their un-Sovietness”.⁵ The expression of such “criticism and self-criticism” was encouraged by the Party and helped its ideologues detect authors whose ideas and world views even slightly diverged from Soviet doctrines.

As is well known, writers could not be published independently in the Soviet Union. For a book to be published in the Kazakh SSR, it had to be included in the publishing plan of the Kazakh State Publishing House of Fiction Literature⁶ and approved by the ideological apparatus of the Communist Party of Kazakhstan (CPK). The reason for withdrawal from publishing or sale and even the repression of an author could be, for example, the “idealization of reactionary feudal figures” of the past.⁷ It was easier

⁴ As writer Olzhas Suleimenov recalls, for the 1966 movie *Zemlia Ottsov* (“The Fathers’ Land”) he as a screenwriter and Shaken Aimanov, who directed this movie, wanted to show “for the first time in Soviet cinema” the scenes of the deportations the Chechens and Ingush to the Kazakh steppe, and defended these pieces to the political establishment in Moscow. However, “Moscow did not allow”. Suleimenov, “Slovo o Shaken Aimanove,” 5–6.

⁵ Kudaibergenova, *Rewriting the Nation in Modern Kazakh Literature*, 55.

⁶ In 1965, it was renamed Izdatel’stvo “Zhazushy”.

⁷ One of such example was the history textbook ‘Kazakhstan in the 20-40s of the XIX century’ (1947) whose author Ermukhan Bekmakhanov ‘idealized the feudal-monarchic movement of the Sultan Kenesary Kasymov’ and was repressed for this in 1952 (rehabilitated in 1954). – *Kazakhstan, Natsional’naia entsiklopediia*, 1: 389-390; *Pravda*, 26 December 1950, 2-3.

for some authors to be published in Frunze (the capital of the neighboring Kyrgyz SSR, present-day Bishkek) or in Moscow, because the censorship authorities there seemed to interfere less with writers.⁸ It was, perhaps, especially important for Kazakh communists that literary pieces produced in multi-ethnic Kazakhstan, which was potentially socially explosive because of this and having a large share of political exiles and prisoners, were ideologically flawless. This focus grew more prominent in connection with the Tselina Campaign and the experiment to build an internationalist society associated with it.

The “dark” past of writers, once exposed, could reduce their chances of being published, because it served as a reason for exclusion from the Writers' Union and/or the Party. All three writers whose literary works are analyzed here (and who, at times, acted at as screenwriters as well) were close to being repressed, or went through the GULag. In 1932, Mukhtar Auezov (1897 - 1961) was placed on a three-year parole for, among other things, “organizing an underground struggle against the Soviet regime” and “writing works praising the pre-revolutionary life and [pre-revolutionary] lifestyle of the Kazakh people”.⁹ In 1953, he left Kazakhstan for Moscow to avoid a possible arrest after accusations of “bourgeois-nationalist mistakes” supposedly manifested in his literary works.¹⁰ Sabit Muqanov (1900 - 1973) was the co-author of a textbook on the history of pre-revolutionary Kazakh literature, due to the content of which its other co-author¹¹ was repressed in 1953 as a “nationalist” while Muqanov was accused of “political short-sightedness”.¹² Ilyas Yessenberlin (1915 - 1983) was repressed (he spent two years at the construction site of the Karakum Canal in the

⁸ Shchegolikhin, “Dnevnik pisatel'ia 1953 – 1957,” *Prostor* 1, 2009, 72; Yessenberlin, *Mysli, vystupleniia, dnevniki, pis'ma*, 350. Similarly, Cleary observed that the “treatment of creative workers [in the Kazakh SSR] is more cavalier than in Moscow”. - Cleary, “Politics and administration in Soviet Kazakhstan, 1955-1964”, 73.

⁹ *Kazakhstan, Natsional'naia entsiklopedia*, 1: 300.

¹⁰ *Ibid*, 301.

¹¹ Kazhym Zhumaliyev who headed the Kazakh Literature Department of the Kazakh Pedagogical University before being forcibly expelled to Karaganda in 1951 and then repressed in 1953; he was rehabilitated in 1954. Sarseke Medeu, “Neobuzdannyyi istorik,” *Prostor* 4, 2010, 31, 47.

¹² *Pravda*, 26 December 1950, 2-3.

Turkmen SSR), and rehabilitated in 1953. In the late 1960s, Yessenberlin was at the center of an ideological scandal surrounding his historical novel *Khan Kene*.¹³ The work provoked disgust among the propagandists, being labelled “nationalist” and, apparently,¹⁴ Yessenberlin’s friendship with the then First Secretary of the Central Committee of the CPK, Dinmukhamed Kunaev — in an overall climate of political thawing — saved the book and Yessenberlin’s career.

The Kazakh cinema, which until the death of Stalin was in its infancy, was not particularly targeted by the repression machine. One of the few tragic exceptions was writer Beimbet Mailin who co-worked with V. Ivanov and G. Musrepov on a screenplay for the 1938 movie *Amangel’dy* and was – right after he finished his work on the movie – accused of being an enemy of the nation and sentenced to death.¹⁵ The Kazakh filmmaking community was not large, strongly associated with the Russian cinema production and worked mostly on modern themes, which, perhaps, all contributed to the relative safety of this profession.¹⁶ In contrast, the Kazakh theatre, which staged many folklore/past-related plays,¹⁷ was a primary target for party censorship. After Mailin was condemned as an enemy, the Kazakh Opera Theatre refused to stage Mailin’s three opera plays (*Zhalbyr*, *Shuga* and *Dudarai*).¹⁸ The “politically harmful” play, *Edige batyr*, written by Khazym Zhumaliev was removed from the stage because it supposedly “extolled one of the oppressors of the Russian people, Edige, exalting him to a national hero of the Kazakhs”; Zhumaliev was later sentenced to a 10-year term in a labor camp for “malefic school textbooks on

¹³ The novel is centered on Kenesary Kasymov who, in the first half of the 19th century, was the leader of an uprising against the Russian Empire’s power in the Kazakh steppe and, therefore, was recognised by Soviet ideologues as a reactionary feudal figure. As already noted (see footnote 16), the historian who defined the Kasymov movement as a national liberation movement of the Kazakh people, was repressed.

¹⁴ This is according to his semi-biographic/semi-historic novel *Lodka, pereplyvaiushchaia okean*. Yessenberlin, *Mysli*, 350.

¹⁵ Azarov, *Kazakhskie pisateli vnutri Bol’shogo terrora*.

¹⁶ Nogerbek, *The Various Births of Kazakh Cinema*.

¹⁷ *TsK VKP(b) i natsional'nyi vopros*, 961–965.

¹⁸ Azarov, “Kazakhskie pisateli vnutri Bol’shogo terrora”.

Kazakh literature”.¹⁹ Plays *Kyz Zhybek* and *Er Targyn* were banned for “the excessively luxurious decorations as if they embellished the past life of Kazakhs”.²⁰

Many of the Kazakh intelligentsia who had been repressed and survived became propagandists of the regime after release. In the casts of the movies that I touch upon in this piece, Shakhan Musin who performs the character of partorg (party organizer) Saparov in *My zdes' zhyviem* (“We Live Here”) is particularly interesting. A long-time victim of the GULag, Musin was invited to this role by his former classmate and one of the few Kazakh film directors, Aimanov, a couple of years after his release. Musin, who had been a theatre performer, spent more than 10 years in labor camps for supposedly anti-Soviet activities. His name was rehabilitated only in 1957 when this movie had already been released. Curiously enough, he plays a sovkhos partorg in another tselina movie, *Bespokoinaia vesna* (“Restless Spring”; A. Medvedkin, 1956), too. In both parts, his task was to create a character who ensures that all differences between newcomers are resolved, the tselina collective is formed and the Party’s guidelines are followed.

The Musin case was not exceptional. Another such example is Ibragim Salakhov, a writer of Tatar origin, who was repressed from 1937 to 1947, had a very rough time upon return to his home town of Kokchetav and, in 1965, published a book about the establishment of a new sovkhos in the Virgin Lands.²¹ The plot resembles his own biography, which he later reconstructed in his memoirs about his disturbing experience with the repression machine as well as his life before and after the GULag.²² However, unlike the real Salakhov, his character becomes a sovkhos partorg

¹⁹ Kuznetsov, Pavel “V atmosfere bezideinosti i blagodushyia,” *Pravda*, 30 September 1946, 3; Zhaksalykov, *Syn stepei*, 166-167, 183.

²⁰ Sarseke, Medeu “Neobuzdanniy istorik,” *Prostor* 3, 2010, 94.

²¹ Novel “In the Kokchetav Steppes” was initially published in Tatar and in 1969 in Kazakh. It has never come out in Russian.

²² Salakhov, *Chiernaia Kolyma*.

who is convinced that “[w]e should not live in the past” and “the Party believed in him”.²³

The regime’s fervent control over the minds of people imply that there were reliable channels through which propaganda-charged content reached the audience. In the years of the VLC, propaganda coverage in the countryside, as I also discuss in the previous chapters with regard to clubs, radio and periodicals, increased significantly. The next part looks into the expanding role that propagandists assigned to books and movies.

Books and Movies in Everyday Life

Prior to the VLC, the rural economy of the Kazakh Republic, not to mention cultural life in its villages and *auls*, was suffering the results of long neglect; as any rearward region in the Soviet Union, the Kazakh countryside had been drained of resources to provide for the front during World War Two and for the post-war recovery as well.²⁴ As shown in Chapter One, “cultural construction”, or the construction of cultural facilities like clubs and libraries in rural Kazakhstan, was one of the developments reinforced by the VLC. All these arrangements were to ensure that, among other purposes, the regime’s ideological messages, wrapped in the form of cultural or educational activities, would reach its dispersed rural population.

The availability of rural libraries and movie projectors was a special concern, primarily due to the need to distribute educational literature and documentaries on agriculture.²⁵ Libraries and movie showings were open to everybody and no political credentials were required to visit/attend them. Libraries were reportedly evident in each rural settlement and mobile libraries (*biblioteki-peredvizhki*) “provide[d] books” to field brigades and animal farms.²⁶ In order to reach the rural Kazakh-speaking

²³ Salakhov, *Kokshetau dalasynda*, 137.

²⁴ Shaiakhmetov, *Otchetnyi doklad o rabote TsK KP(b)K na IV s'ezde Kommunisticheskoi partii (bol'shevikov) Kazakhstana*, 29-30.

²⁵ TsGARK, f. 1890, op. 1, d. 499, l. 18; Abyzov, “Zhyzn' Kazakhstana na ekrane,” *Kazakhstanskaia pravda*, 15 January 1956, 3.

²⁶ GAKO, f. 1113, op. 3, d. 37, l. 83.

population with propaganda, the Ministry of Culture of the Kazakh SSR demanded from regional and district libraries that their collections contained Kazakh-language literature (both original and translated), and that librarians generated in their visitors an interest in Kazakh-language writings.²⁷ In the same year, the collected works of four “most important Kazakh writers” — Auezov, Muqanov, Musrepov and Mustafin — became available for readers through a paid subscription.²⁸ However, the situation improved slowly: after a couple of years, there still was not a sufficient demand for books and press in Kazakh and many copies remained untapped in storehouses.²⁹

Kazakh readership was generally smaller than the Russian one. According to the 1959 census, only 30 percent of the republic’s population (around 2,785,000 out of 9,310,000) claimed the Kazakh language as their mother tongue (compared to 50 percent, or around 4,578,000, whose home language was Russian). More than three quarters of the Kazakh native speakers resided in the countryside.³⁰ Therefore, it was quite logical for the Party to focus on rural areas in its efforts to provide the Kazakh population with books. Although the literacy rate in the Republic was high (97.2 percent for people aged between nine and 49),³¹ the actual readership was much lower. It was represented by a smaller segment of literate Kazakhs who could comprehend long and complex texts — perhaps, by those Kazakhs who had had at least a school education (either complete or incomplete) - this group made up a fifth of all ethnic Kazakhs residing in the Republic.³² Beside libraries, bookstores and paid subscriptions, such literary pieces could have also been part of curricular and extracurricular programs in secondary schools, activities in rural clubs such as group readings and amateur theatre performances, and radio readings. Curiously enough,

²⁷ Ibid, ll. 76-77.

²⁸ TsGARK, f. 1890, op. 1, d. 477, l. 62.

²⁹ *Kazakhstanskaia pravda*, 28 January 1956, 3; APRK, f. 708, op. 29, d. 360.

³⁰ *Itogi Vsesoiuznoi perepisi naseleniia 1959 goda. Kazakhskaia SSR*, 186-187.

³¹ APRK, f. 708, d. 32, op. 1454, ll. 1-3.

³² *Itogi Vsesoiuznoi perepisi naseleniia 1959 goda. Kazakhskaia SSR*, 188.

Kazakh intelligentsia and local officials of Kazakh ethnicity clearly ignored Kazakh-language press and books in favor of Russian-language pieces.³³

In contrast, the potential viewing audience, which included the illiterate and semi-literate, was certainly wider. The investments secured for the VLC and the development of rural areas associated with the campaign, made it possible to expand the cinema network. Between 1954 and 1959, the number of movie projectors available in the republic more than doubled, having reached 4,370, or one projector per around 2,100 residents.³⁴ In the Kazakh countryside, it was more likely for people to see a feature movie (rather than a documentary) because it was more profitable for screening teams to screen them: the entrance fee charged for feature movies was three times as high as that for a documentary and, it seems, they also attracted many more viewers.³⁵ In the years of the VLC, cinema as an attribute of the new rural life was used by propaganda to show that the urban culture had finally reached the countryside. Movie screenings were not only held to educate rural dwellers but also to elevate their “cultural level” and retain the workforces in rural areas in general and — with the start of the Second Tselina — in distant pastures in particular.

In the Seven-Year Plan for the Development of the National Economy (1959 — 1965, known as *Semiletka*), any rural settlement that consisted of more than 80 houses was to have a movie projector.³⁶ In 1959, a resident of the Kazakh Republic went to the cinema, on average, 20 times, while most of screenings took place in the countryside where more than 80 percent of all movie projectors were located/used.³⁷ Even a shepherd residing in distant pastures reportedly saw movies seven times a year.³⁸

³³ APRK, f. 708, op. 29, d. 360, l. 28; *Kazakhstanskaia pravda*, 28 January 1956, 3.

³⁴ *Kazakhstan za 40 let*, 484. Propaganda claimed that in this period it even tripled, having reached 5,000. *Narodnoe khoziaistvo Kazakhstana* 9, 1960, 44–45.

³⁵ “Kino — shirokuyu dorogu,” *Partiinaia zhizn' Kazakhstana* 9, 1960, 36.

³⁶ *Narodnoe khoziaistvo Kazakhstana* 4, 1959, 32–36.

³⁷ *Istoria Kazakhskoi SSR*, 657–658; *Kazakhstan za 40 let*, 484–485.

³⁸ As a party magazine claimed in 1959, as many as around 700,000 shepherds and workers alike, watched movies in distant herding areas. According to the 1959 census, there were around 120,000 shepherds (*chabany*) and herders (*pastukhi* and *gurtopravy*) in the Kazakh SSR. “Kino — shirokuyu

Whether it was so or not, the regime clearly worked on the modernizing the image of Kazakh shepherds, if not the shepherds themselves. Most of the available movie projectors were for non-stationary use and mobile screening teams (*kinoperedvizhki*) had to take movies to small and remote settlements that happened to be Kazakh villages (*auls*) and herding stations. This situation changed in 1959, or the first year of the *Semiletka*, when the number of stationary cinemas doubled in the Kazakh countryside. Stationary cinemas could cover more people (and thus, were more profitable), required fewer personnel and also ensured a better maintenance of the equipment which before, was often damaged or destroyed in transit due to the impassibility of roads (especially at times of spring flooding and autumn slush) or the total absence of roads between villages which cut off most of the potential audience.³⁹

Ideological settings. The Union of Writers

In September 1954, when the first crop was being harvested in the Virgin Lands, the Third Congress of Soviet Writers of Kazakhstan was held in Alma-Ata, the capital of the Kazakh SSR. It was organized after a 15-year break from the previous congress. Similar forums took place in all the Soviet republics in preparation for the All-Union Writers' Congress convened in Moscow later the same year. At the Alma-Ata congress, writers were called on to "raise Kazakh Soviet literature to the new level." For Kazakh writers this meant that they had to distance themselves from the historic past, which was the main source of their inspiration, and throw themselves into the themes of Soviet modernity, among which the Tselina Campaign was the most pressing.⁴⁰

The Union of Writers of the Soviet Union was far from being an independent organization. It was established in 1932 in order to involve writers in promoting the

dorogu," *Partiinaia zhyzn' Kazakhstana* 9, 1960, 34; *Itogi Vsesoiuznoi perepisi naseleniia 1959 goda. Kazakhskaiia SSR*, 135.

³⁹ Gorshkov, M. "Uskorit' sooruzhenie kinoteatrov," *Narodnoe khoziaistvo Kazakhstana* 9, 1960, 44–45; "Kino — shirokuyu dorogu," *Partiinaia zhyzn' Kazakhstana* 9, 1960, 34.

⁴⁰ *Sovetskii Kazakhstan* 10, 1954, 102-114.

cause of building communism; the same decree, which approved the creation of the Union, dissolved all previously existing writers' organizations in the USSR. The writers were to become the Party's envoys who could appeal to different audiences in their native languages and through various genres. The First All-Union Congress of Soviet Writers (Moscow, 1934) formulated the main method of Soviet literature — Socialist Realism that was followed by most Soviet writers until the collapse of the Soviet Union.⁴¹

This approach to reflecting upon reality rejected individuality as such, replacing it with a “socialist individuality” which, as writer, Maxim Gorky, formulated at the first all-Union congress, “can develop only under the conditions of collective labor that has set in front of itself the ultimate and wise goal of liberating the working people of the entire world from the power of capitalism that distorts people”.⁴² The protagonists of such literature were portrayed as “active builders of the new life”, and literature itself served the “new cause — the cause of socialist construction”. At this congress, the Communist Party set the task for writers, which the latter tackled for almost seven decades to follow — “the ideological remaking and upbringing of working people in the spirit of socialism”. The “veracity and historical concreteness of the literary depiction” was of secondary importance in handling this task.⁴³

At the Second All-Union Congress of Writers (Moscow, December 1954), the Central Committee of the CPSU called on writers to adhere to the tasks of Socialist Realism and create “vivid and artistically expressive characters (*obrazy*) that would serve as an inspiring example for millions of readers”. Kremlin ideologues demanded of writers, on the one hand, not to embellish Soviet reality and not to cover up the “contradictions between development and difficulties of growth”, and, on the other hand, not to tolerate a “distorted” and “slandorous” depiction of Soviet society.⁴⁴

⁴¹ Cornwell, *Reference Guide to Russian Literature*, 55.

⁴² *Stenogramma Pervogo Vsesoiuznogo s'ezda sovetskikh pisatelei*, 17.

⁴³ *Ibid*, 4.

⁴⁴ *Vtoroi Vsesoiuznyi s'ezd sovetskikh pisatelei*, 7-9.

CHAPTER 5. PLOUGHING UP THE LITERARY TSELINA

Earlier, in spring 1954, when the “attack on the tselina” began, the Union of Soviet Writers of Kazakhstan (as its official title went) started to dispatch their members to the “New Lands” with the task of creating literary pieces celebrating the “feat of the Soviet people”.⁴⁵ Writers were supposed to “search for heroes” who – under the Party’s leadership – went through deprivations and sacrifices to do good for the whole nation. These heroes had to be endowed with “typical” qualities that were supposedly inherent in Soviet men and women. The mobilization campaign presented the Virgin Lands Campaign primarily as a struggle to increase Soviet wheat production and feed the country. Although, from around 1957 on, the Tselina Campaign was also about animal farming and rural construction, the slogan “Bread for People”, which also implied better working conditions because crop production was better mechanized and better paid, was more powerful to mobilize the workforce.

The Alma-Ata congress was to make sure that Kazakhstani writers understood their propagandistic tasks well. It lasted five days and was chaired by a presidium that included leaders of the CPK (the First Secretary, Ponomarenko, the Second Secretary, Brezhnev, and their deputies, Karibzhanov and Tazhiev), senior officials of the Kazakh government (the Chairperson of the Presidium of the Supreme Council, Undasynov, and the Chairperson of the Council of Ministers, Taibekov), the head of the delegation of Soviet writers (writer Gribachiev) and the Chairperson of the Writers’ Union of the Kazakh Republic (writer Mustafin). Ponomarenko voiced the main concern of the Party. He was reported saying that Kazakh writers had broken away from modern life and, in order to catch up, they needed to be at the edge where the conflicts between the old and the new were emerging: in kolkhozes, sovkhoses, industrial enterprises, construction sites and, most importantly, in the Virgin Lands.⁴⁶

⁴⁵ In September 1954, the Union of Writers of the Kazakh SSR comprised 129 members. *Sovetskii Kazakhstan* 10, 1954, 102-114; The Archive of the President of the Republic of Kazakhstan (APRK), f. 708, op. 29, d. 1384, ll. 58-60.

⁴⁶ *Sovetskii Kazakhstan* 10, 1954, 102-114.

In his speech, Gabiden Mustafin, who, as were most of the Union's members, was a communist himself, duly reconfirmed writers' support for the Party's cause: "Our most honorable task is to create in all its greatness and splendor the image of a Soviet man who showed the world unprecedented heroism, dedication in work for the good of the fatherland."⁴⁷ Another leading figure in Kazakh literature, writer Gabit Musrepov took the lead in reproaching the local writers who, in his view, "failed to become heralds of this great cause", meaning the VLC.⁴⁸ Earlier that year, Musrepov addressed poets with a similar criticism: "Everything that has been published on this subject [the VLC], is labored, unconvincing, [and] insincere."⁴⁹ At the congress, Musrepov pointed out that Kazakh authors needed to improve not only their writing mastery, but also the ideological level of their works, both in line with Socialist Realism.⁵⁰ However, for, at least, another five years, local authors, as it was admitted at the Fourth Congress of Writers' Union of Kazakhstan, generally failed to create the image of the "heroic contemporary" (*geroicheskogo sovremennika*) and, instead, gravitated towards reflection about the past.⁵¹

Mustafin and Musrepov, together with Muqanov and Auezov, came from the first post-revolutionary generation of writers and were considered classics of Soviet Kazakh literature. They were among few native writers who had survived several rounds of purges of intellectuals in the Kazakh SSR and were – either willingly or as a survival strategy – engaged in conveying the Soviet modernization narrative to their readership. For example, Mustafin, in his novels *Shyganak* (1945) and *Millioner* (1948), advanced Kazakh peasants to supporters of the collectivization of rural Kazakhstan. In these pieces, which for a long time were part of the school curricula in Soviet Kazakhstan, Mustafin makes Kazakhs understand that they "shouldn't fall behind life" and wish to "cover the whole world with kolkhozes and throw the seeds of kolkhoz life even onto the moon."

⁴⁷ *Pravda*, 17 September 1954, 2.

⁴⁸ Musrepov, *Cherty epochi*, 87.

⁴⁹ *Ibid*, 60.

⁵⁰ *Ibid*, 88.

⁵¹ "Vsie vnimanie — geroicheskomu sovremenniku," *Sovetskii Kazakhstan* 5, 1959, 106–113.

Ideological settings. Sholokhov and Auezov

Two figures were especially important to giving greater credibility to the Alma-Ata congress in the eyes of both the writers' community and readers — Mikhail Sholokhov and Mukhtar Auezov. While the VLC was taking shape, Sholokhov worked on the second volume of his famous novel, *Podniataia tselina* ("Virgin Soil Upturned"), which was subsequently published in 1959. The first volume that tells a story of collectivization in the Don steppe (Southern Russia), was published in 1932 and, as of May 1955, had been reprinted more than 130 times in 45 languages, including Kazakh.⁵²

Podniataia tselina was considered, as *Pravda* wrote in 1955, "a reference book for those who build socialism in the countries of people's democracy". The same article claimed that Sholokhov's novel was providing "invaluable support" to those who were leaving their towns and heading to the Virgin Lands.⁵³ Kazakh propagandists saw the novel as an exemplary work about changing the consciousness of Russian peasants during the years of the First Five-Year Plan and expected that local authors would tell about the anticipated transformation of the Kazakh countryside in an equally influential way.⁵⁴

The preparations for the writers' congress was marked by Mukhtar Auezov's return to the Kazakh capital. As mentioned earlier, he had to reside in Moscow for one-and-half years — under the auspices of the Union of Writers — avoiding arrest in Kazakhstan. The danger of arrest arose after *Pravda* published an article in January 1953 (or before Stalin's death), accusing Auezov of "nationalist perversions" that allegedly appeared in his works (the first instance being in his novel *Put' Abaia*,⁵⁵ for which he actually received the Stalin State Prize in 1948).⁵⁶

⁵² *Pravda*, May 24, 1955, 2.

⁵³ Ibid.

⁵⁴ *Sovetskii Kazakhstan* 2, 1955, 101.

⁵⁵ Abai Kunanbaev (1845 — 1904) was a Kazakh poet, enlightener and philosopher who is considered a founder of Kazakh written literature and Kazakh literary language.

⁵⁶ *Pravda*, 30 January 1953, 3.

Some explanation is required here as to why the literary work, which had been distinguished with such a significant award, became the grounds for persecution only five years later. Before and during the Great Fatherland War, the Soviet government encouraged authors in national republics to explore ethno-national themes⁵⁷ and to depict historical (often pseudohistorical) figures. Employing the images of *batyrs* (Kazakh epic heroes whose images were loosely based on historical figures) proved particularly instrumental for boosting the moral of Kazakh soldiers as well as mobilizing providers for the war front.

However, after the war Soviet agitpop narrowed the circle of historical characters which could be portrayed in positive light. In particular, those who had been inscribed in Russian history as oppressors had to be removed from history and literary narratives in national republics whereas the “progressive” role of the Russian people and the Communist Party had to be emphasized.

In January 1947, the Central Committee of the Communist Party of Kazakhstan adopted a resolution that put the *Zhdanovshchina*, a Soviet policy of tight state control of art that led to the new round of purges of intellectuals, in motion in the Kazakh Republic.⁵⁸ Zhumaliev, who headed the Kazakh Literature Department of the Kazakh Pedagogical University, fell one of the victims of the *Zhdanovshchina*: in 1953, he was sentenced to a 10-year term for “malefic school textbooks on Kazakh literature” (rehabilitated in 1954).⁵⁹ His co-author, Sabit Muqanov, was accused of “political short-sightedness”, but evaded arrest.⁶⁰

The repercussions of the 1947 resolution were quite evident in the early 1950s. In February 1953, *Sovetskii Kazakhstan*, a press organ of the Union of Writers of Kazakhstan, claimed that Auezov, together with Muqanov, “in fact, slandered Abai,

⁵⁷ Ubiria, *Soviet Nation-building in Central Asia*, 156.

⁵⁸ Postanovlenie “O grubyykh politicheskikh oshybkakh v rabote Instituta iazyka i literatury Akademii nauk Kazakhskoi SSR.” Stepanov B., “Ob ideologicheskikh oshybkakh rabotnikov obshchestvennykh nauk,” *Bol'shevik Kazakhstana* 1, 1947, 34–47.

⁵⁹ Zhaksalykov, *Syn stepei*, 166-167, 183; Medeu S., “Neobuzdannyy istorik,” *Prostor* 4, 2010, 31, 47.

⁶⁰ *Pravda*, 26 December 1950, 2-3.

linking his name with the oppressors of the people, Kenesary and Shamil', as well as with the reactionary akyns Shortanbai, Dulat and so on".⁶¹ This attack resulted in ousting Auezov, who had already been once placed on a parole for "praising the pre-revolutionary life and [pre-revolutionary] lifestyle of the Kazakh people",⁶² from the university where he had taught, as well as from the Institute of Literature and Language where he had headed the folklore department.⁶³ In June 1953 (or after Stalin's death, but before the party leadership of the Kazakh Republic was replaced), when Auezov was already in Moscow, *Kazakhstanskaia pravda* condemned Auezov for the "idealization of the feudal-patriarchal past," "smoothing class contradictions in the Kazakh pre-revolutionary aul" and "not show[ing] the struggles of the exploited masses" in *Put' Abaia*.⁶⁴

This situation, in which a person could be persecuted in the Soviet periphery but not in Moscow, like in the Auezov case, was, perhaps, peculiar to the way how the *Zhdanovshchina* manifested itself in the Kazakh Republic. It was easier for some authors to be published in Frunze (the capital of the neighboring Kyrgyz SSR, present-day Bishkek) or in Moscow, because censorship authorities there seemed to interfere less with writers than they did in Alma-Ata.⁶⁵ Some contemporaries assigned the retreat from this repressive practice to the role of the former Soviet Minister of Culture, Panteleimon Ponomarenko, who, as we remember, in February 1954, was appointed to the post of First Secretary of the CPK. In his term, which turned out to be short, Ponomarenko defended the persecuted intellectuals and was in general on good terms with the writing community.⁶⁶ In this sense, the assignment of

⁶¹ "V soiuzhe sovetskikh pisatelei," *Sovetskii Kazakhstan* 2, 1953, 7-9.

⁶² *Kazakhstan, Natsional'naia entsiklopediia*, 1: 300.

⁶³ Anastas'ev, *Mukhtar Auezov*, 368.

⁶⁴ *Kazakhstanskaia pravda*, 21 June 1953, 2.

⁶⁵ Shchegolikhin I., "Dnevnik pisatel'ia 1953 – 1957," *Prostor* 1, 2009, 72; Yessenberlin, *Mysli*, 350.

⁶⁶ For example, see the memoirs of Dinmukhamed Kunaev who led the republic from 1955 to 1986, holding at different stages, the posts of First Secretary of the Central Committee of the CPK and Chairman of the Council of Ministers of the Kazakh SSR: Kunaev, *Ot Stalina do Gorbacheva*, 81-82, 96-98.

Ponomarenko to the Kazakh Republic at the time Kazakh when writers were expected to ensure public support for the VLC, was farsighted.

Auezov's participation in the Alma-Ata congress was a clear sign of reconciliation with Soviet Kazakh ideologues. As the first Kazakh writer ever awarded with the State Stalin Prize, he gave a welcoming speech before top officials opened the event.⁶⁷ From then on, his duty was to support the "countrywide cause" by creating images of "modern heroes" in the Virgin Lands, and Mustafin's speech made it clear: "[I]t is our right to ask every writer: how has he helped the countrywide cause? This question can be, with a special emphasis and within a special right, addressed to Mukhtar Auezov. We have every right to demand from Auezov that he create images of contemporary heroes with the same affection and proficiency with which he created the image of Abai."⁶⁸

Soon Mukhtar Auezov created one of the first literary pieces ever written about the VLC, the short novel *Tak rozhdalsia Turkestan* ("So Turkestan was Born"), and also became a herald of the "new order" in press.⁶⁹ This novelette was one of his few works about Soviet modernity. Later on, this short piece grew into the novel *Plemia mladoe* ("A Young Tribe")⁷⁰ that was, as Auezov had intended, to "capture [...] the heroic deeds, boundless inspiration [and] spotless purity of Soviet people".⁷¹

"Land of Untold Wealth." Auezov's Tselina

Auezov's novelette originally appeared in the Kazakh language: it was published in the magazine *Ādebiat zhāne iskusstvo* ("Literature and Art") at the end of 1955. About a year later, *Novyi mir*, a literary journal of the Union of Writers of the USSR, offered

⁶⁷ *Sovetskii Kazakhstan* 10, 1954, 102-114.

⁶⁸ *Sovetskii Kazakhstan* 10, 1954, 104.

⁶⁹ *Pravda*, 30 April 1955, 2; Auezov, *Sobranie sochinenii*, 5: 333-337, 534-541.

⁷⁰ It remained unfinished because of the author's death in 1961. It was first published in 1962 in Kazakh (as a separate book) and in 1965 in Russian (in the magazine *Druzhba narodov*).

⁷¹ Auezov, *Sobranie sochinenii*, 5:334.

this piece to its Russian-speaking audience. It came defined as an essay, which was, perhaps, to give the impression that it was a documentary piece.

In his narrative, Auezov shows an almost idealistic picture of the emergence of a grain sovkhoz called *Turkestan*. This fictional farm supposedly became a generalized image of the new state farms, which the author visited during his field missions to the Virgin Lands.⁷² The plot develops in southern Kazakhstan — the writer shifted the geographical focus from the epicenter of the campaign to its periphery, to the south of the Republic, where, unlike in the northern regions, ethnic Kazakhs formed an absolute majority. The southern regions did not play an important role for the VLC in terms of scale (if compared by hectares under cultivation), but, without a doubt, were critical in terms of coverage by propaganda to ensure that the Kazakh-speaking population embraced the cause.

He draws images that will become typical for subsequent literary works about the Kazakh tselina. Hospitable collective farmers living in “primitive conditions” embrace newcomers who carry knowledge, technology and culture (“These settlers will show you a lot, not only how to plough the land, but also how to build houses, treat the sick, take care of the kids. They will change the lighting, heating [and] your everyday life for the better.”). Together they set up a state farm. Newcomers pay respect to local Kazakhs — they consult with the elders (*aksakaly*) about the best time to start ploughing and the best place to dig a reservoir for collecting scarce water, and the elders give them their blessing.

Since such contacts are maintained through an interpreter, the sovkhoz director, who has been assigned to the tselina from Moscow, promises to learn the Kazakh language. The author also makes use of the tradition of local people to move in spring from mud huts to yurts; thanks to this, the newcomers are provided with temporary accommodation.

It is unlikely that in the Kazakh SSR there was even one example of a state farm being built in one year, especially in the first year of the campaign. However, this happens

⁷² Auezov, *Sobranie sochinenii*, 4: 691-692.

in Auezov's novelette. Thus, the author made his readers to contemplate what had not actually been created yet: "[b]y the end of the season of bad roads (*rasputitsa*), the electric light illuminated the dwellings of the new settlers with joy", a foundation pit was dug for a water reservoir, "[m]ore and more new houses popped up", and "[s]uch nice houses have not been seen in this area yet". "A small town was rising in the steppe", which was to become "the center of socialist culture".

The housing issue is a crosscutting topic in Auezov's story. It is part of the general unpreparedness of the Kazakh countryside for new people that sparked early conflicts between true patriots and those who are not ready for the hardships of a rough beginning ("they broke away from our society"). Local farmers vacate their shabby huts — with earthen floors and missing glass in window openings — and move to yurts. Thanks to this, the newcomers are provided with temporary accommodation. This is not only a sign of hospitality, but also a favor in exchange for the sovkhos director's promise to build them new houses, a school, a club, a communal bath, a hospital, and even a cinema theatre. The state of neglect of the old kolkhoz is a good background to present the dream image of a "new model village".

The author places a great emphasis on the natural environment and climatic conditions that not only appear unfamiliar to the settlers, but also create additional challenges for them. As the narrative explains, that winter (of 1954) was the coldest in 30 years, and, upon arrival, the newcomers had to endure especially cold weather. When the sun comes out and spring inevitably arrives, "joy [turns up] in people's hearts" and the place "suddenly seemed warm [and] dear to the new settlers".

Describing how the steppe changes with the onset of the campaign, Auezov resorts to a technique which, having originated in Central Asia folklore, had rooted in Soviet culture. Just like in the modernization narrative of the 1930s and 1940s where towns and industrial sites turn into flourishing landscapes,⁷³ in many literary works about the tselina and, especially, in poetry, the steppe — first pictured as old, deserted,

⁷³ Justus, "Vozvrashchenie v rai: sotsrealizm i fol'klor."

sleeping and even dead —transforms, thanks to the “labor struggle” with nature and the past, into a hospitable expanse in which a lot of work is done, laughter and songs are heard, an “internationalist friendship” is forged, the “order” is established, and the land itself becomes young and fertile.⁷⁴ So it happens in Auezov’s imagination, the “enigmatic”, “cold” and “alien” steppe, into which the tselina conquerors arrive, soon becomes their home, the “dead region” comes to life and turns into a “land of untold wealth”.

To sum up, Auezov’s early tselina work presents the VLC as a civilizing mission, and the notion of usefulness (*pol’za*) is employed to show how beneficial the intervention will be for the locals rather than for the newcomers. This goes in contrast, for example, to the main message of the movie *Pervyi eshelon* (“The First Echelon”, M. Kalatozov), which was released on the Soviet screens around the same year. In this cinematic narrative, Kazakhs appear only episodically, and an uninformed viewer would actually not realize that the plot unfolds actually in the Kazakh steppe. Thus, the movie’s message “to populate the tselina forever” sounds unambiguous and implies that it was supposedly empty of people before the Tselina Campaign. In Auezov’s tselina, Kazakhs not only are prominent, they also reap the immediate benefits of the VLC. The Kazakh steppe not only serves as a contrasting background for anticipated transformations but also becomes a shared feature of the emerging tselina identities. This – at first sight – canonic piece of Soviet literature contains something what reads as a veiled critique of the collectivization drive of the 1930s. The moment in which Auezov has farmers leaving shabby huts in favor of a brief return to dwelling in yurts could be the author’s hint that an entirely new start is required.

⁷⁴ For example, poem *Pesnia o milliarde* (“A Song about the Billion”) by Tair Zharokov, poem *Na tseline* (“In the tselina”) by Dikhan Abilev, poem *Ty raduesh’ serdtse druzei* (“You rejoice friends’ heart”) by Khamid Ergaliev. - *Sovetskii Kazakhstan* 9, 1958, 32-33; poem *Poriadok!* (“Order!”) by Olzhas Suleimenov. – *Sovetskii Kazakhstan* 12, 1959, 60-62; poem *Ia – Kazakh!* (I am Kazakh!) (1966) by Zhuban Moldagaliev – Moldagaliev, *Ya - kazakh!* 349-387.

Giving the Steppe a "Socialist Soul." Muqanov's Tselina

Auezov's literary rival, Sabit Muqanov, focused his attention on the northern regions and, in particular, the Kustanai province where he was born. He devoted two works to the VLC. His collection of essays, *Na tseline v rodnom kraiu* ("In the Tselina in [my] Homeland"), was first published in Kazakh: in *Ādebiēt zhāne iskusstvo* and the republican newspaper *Sotsialistīk Qazaqstan*.⁷⁵ In 1955, the collection was released as two separate books in Russian: one was published in Alma-Ata, the other in Moscow.⁷⁶ Two years later, his novel about the tselina, *Stepnye volny* ("Steppe Waves") came out in three consecutive issues of the literary magazine, *Sovetskii Kazakhstan*.⁷⁷ Although two publishing houses, one in Alma-Ata and one in Moscow, had it in their release plans,⁷⁸ the novel never transcended into a book.

In January 1958, Muqanov was publicly criticized for producing an "artistically and ideologically defective novel." According to the party magazine, *Partiinaia zhyzn' Kazakhstana*, *Stepnye volny* presented a distorted image of Soviet reality by showing its negative characters and phenomena too prominently. These distortions supposedly included corrupt local officials, too many hooligans and drunkards among the newcomers and too few ideologically upright figures. This all together, as one critic wrote, turned into the "dark picture which supposedly emerged in the virgin lands starting from the first days of the new settlers' arrival".⁷⁹ No surprise that propaganda was not interested in showing any deeper conflicts in how the Communist Party introduced the VLC and how the local population perceived it. It was eager to convey a much smoother picture of a uniform society, which would

⁷⁵ APRK, f. 708, op. 29, d. 1384, l. 58.

⁷⁶ *Na tseline v rodnom kraiu* - in Alma-Ata, *Rastsvetai, rodnaia step'* - in Moscow. Both translated into Russian by writer F. Morgun.

⁷⁷ Translated by writer D. Snegin. *Sovetskii Kazakhstan* 1, 1957, 5-58; 2, 1957, 43-83; 3, 1957, 9-68.

⁷⁸ *Pravda*, 19 May 1957, 3; Doyle, *Iurii Dombrovskii*. 36.

⁷⁹ Khafizov A., "Net, eto ne pravda zhyzni," *Partiinaia zhyzn' Kazakhstana* 1, 1958, 72-76. See also: "Recent Literature in Central Asia," 257.

contribute in the regime's other efforts to create an internationalist culture in the Virgin Lands. Thus, Muqanov's novel banning was virtually unavoidable.

There was one more aspect in which this novel diverged from the propaganda mainline and which was not raised in the criticism against Muqanov: his attack on distant herding as a feudal remnant. I address it in the respective part of this analysis.

Muqanov, as well as Auezov, came from the first generation of Soviet Kazakh writers, and, according to Kudaibergenova, many of them were "willingly engaged in Soviet modernization narrative without viewing it as an imposition from above." He, as one of the "leading figures in establishing the early Soviet canon of modernizing discourses of the new Kazakh literature,"⁸⁰ understood the political currents well and, besides Auezov, was the only one from the early cohorts of Kazakh writers who managed to evade the Stalinist purges. Although he had been "one of the Kazakh writers who actively participated in the struggle against bourgeois nationalists,"⁸¹ or, in other words, took part in the persecutions of his colleagues, he, nevertheless, was among the first who sensed warming in the political climate after Khrushchev's Secret Speech. As I show in the previous chapter, Muqanov stood up to defend the Kazakh language which the regime would previously see as manifestation of Kazakh nationalism and be fast to punish.

In both his works (a collection of essays and a novel), Muqanov tries to instill two ideas in his readers. First of all, he presents the Tselina Campaign as an inevitable development in the sequence of events triggered in the Kazakh steppe by the October Revolution. Secondly, he firmly introduces a thought that the "excess" and unused land of Kazakh collective farms should serve the Soviet people. In his narrative, local Kazakhs begin to push forward the idea of putting "excess" land under plough even before the actual decision was made by the Communist Party, and take an active part in the campaign after it starts. Muqanov emphasizes the historical determinism and legitimacy of the campaign by making use of numerous Kazakh

⁸⁰ Kudaibergenova, *Rewriting the Nation in Modern Kazakh Literature*, x, 21.

⁸¹ Musrepov, *Cherty epokhi*, 42-43.

proverbs and a pompous, ideologically heavy-handed style of narration which was to stress out the folk spirit of the Tselina Campaign and the monumentality of anticipated changes.

The narrator ascribes all the failures of the early years of the campaign to local authorities while leaving the Party's central leadership and the Soviet government flawless. The author generally diminishes (compared to Auezov's depiction) the role of nature; it is replaced by the Party (and the Soviet government) that "took care of everything."⁸²

In the scenes of ploughing, housing construction and building various public facilities (clubs, schools, kindergartens and so on), the new settlers from Russia come to the forefront – they become the organizers of work and give a "socialist soul" to Muqanov's homeland.⁸³ He presents the tselina settlers as curious about their new environment ("We want to know the history, geography, economy, culture and art of the republic, to listen to good lectures on these themes. [...] Take, for example, these places [...]. They say that there were over-wintering stations (*zimovki*) of auls. Why did the auls leave these places, to where? Nobody told us about this.").⁸⁴ These questions remain unanswered.

Just like Auezov, Muqanov introduces elder Kazakhs into his narrative. They are grateful to Russians and the Soviet power for what they have brought into the life of steppe dwellers — from two-wheeled carts and matches to tractors and electricity.⁸⁵ The changes, which would not be possible in the Kazakh pasture without machinery and new people, turn these elders' life into joy and inspire them to live longer to see the "gold of a ripe harvest".⁸⁶

⁸² *Sovetskii Kazakhstan* 3, 1957, 67 ("Stepnye volny").

⁸³ Muqanov, *Na tseline v rodnom kraiu*, 61.

⁸⁴ *Ibid*, 53.

⁸⁵ *Ibid*, 39.

⁸⁶ Muqanov, *Na tseline v rodnom kraiu*, 40; *Sovetskii Kazakhstan* 3, 1957, 40 ("Stepnye volny").

Old Kazakh cemeteries, as a symbol of the past, appear in Muqanov's works under review, as well as in a later published novel about the tselina, Yessenberlin's *Prikroi svoim shchitom* ("Cover with Your Shield"; this piece is reviewed in the next part). While in Muqanov's essay a cemetery where his own parents are buried is left untouched, in Yessenberlin's novel a cemetery is destroyed "for the public good," that is, crop expansion.⁸⁷ In both cases, the anticipated harvest is to honor the memory of the ancestors: "If a thousand-hectare sea of wheat appears on these lands next year [...], and the grain stock of our people, confidently striding towards communism, increases by thousands, by hundreds of thousands of tons of grain, isn't this a great monument not only to my parents, but also to all our ancestors"⁸⁸ There is also a regret that those who "died for the Soviet power in their fight against enemies" will not see how "by the will of the party, life is transforming in the steppe land, which for centuries lay dead [and] useless".⁸⁹

Another conflict between the old and the new in Muqanov's literary tselina occurs in the perception of the change by the younger generations of Kazakhs, who are fully devoted to the Party's cause, and by older Kazakhs, who clung to the past. In *Stepnye volny*, former officials are occupied with plotting against each other and preserving the status quo, whereas younger Kazakhs are shown as straightforward, passionate and advanced individuals. An 18-year old female Komsomol member who decides to become a tractor driver and to join a tselina sovkhos becomes an example for her "backward" parents. The "young representative of the Kazakh people, who prior to the October Revolution lived in slavery and poverty" impresses newcomers with her knowledge — "without the slightest accent" — of the Russian language.⁹⁰ Young Kazakhs associate the tselina campaign with personal happiness, and, as Muqanov commented elsewhere around the same time: "In a socialist society, happiness and

⁸⁷ Yessenberlin, *Prikroi svoim shchitom*, 168-171.

⁸⁸ Muqanov, *Na tseline v rodnom kraiu*, 58.

⁸⁹ *Sovetskii Kazakhstan* 3, 1957, 67-80 ("Stepnye volny").

⁹⁰ *Ibid*, 27.

the personal life of every person are inseparably linked with their participation in public life, in the public affairs [that is] the building of communism.”⁹¹

In his juxtaposition of Soviet modernity and the past, Muqanov goes even further and apparently against the appeal to dramatically boost livestock production at all costs: Khrushchev gave his notorious speech already after the Writers’ Union of Kazakhstan’s journal published this novel. In *Stepnye volny*, distant herding is equaled to “Kazakh nationalism.” One of the protagonists, the young secretary of a district party committee, Zhandos sees “Kazakh nationalism” in promoting and practicing distant herding: “[A]dvocating and trying to implant nomadic cattle raising in our time means bringing grist to the mill of bourgeois nationalists.” He advocates crop expansion and feed-lot farming instead. Another feature of “Kazakh nationalism” reveals itself for Zhandos in “[u]nwillingness to resort to the help of new settlers in opening our rich land, or, rather, unwillingness to share this wealth with those who want to come to Kazakhstan from the fraternal republics”. A regional party leader, who is soon replaced by an appointee from Moscow, reacts sensitively to this accusation: for him, a former revolutionary and KGB officer, “in the modern Kazakh vocabulary there is no more offensive and dirty word than a nationalist”.⁹²

To summarize, in Muqanov’s tselina narrative, Kazakhs take up a proactive part in making use of steppe expanses, and the steppe makes sense for Muqanov the narrator and for his protagonists, on condition that it is beneficial for the Soviet nation. In contrast to Auezov’s literary grasp of the tselina, the focus of Muqanov’s works shift from local benefits to the common good. The accusations of “Kazakh nationalism” becomes Muqanov’s heavy weapon to crush any resistance to crop expansion. He clearly implies that any resistance to the campaign should be treated anti-Soviet. Although such a logic was within the propaganda mainline about the VLC, later artistic pieces, such as the novel, *Dom v stepy* (“A House in the Steppe”), by S. Zhunusov, the Kazakhfilm movie, *My zdes’ zhyviem* (“We Live Here”), by Sh. Aimanov

⁹¹ *Kazakhstanskaya pravda*, 24 January 1956, 4.

⁹² *Sovetskii Kazakhstan* 2, 1957, 56-67 (“Stepnye volny”).

and M. Volodarski, reinforced the internationalist notion of the tselina in a more positive manner.⁹³

“Second Revolution” in the Steppe. Yessenberlin’s Tselina

The regime pushed Kazakh writers to explore the tselina topic even after Khrushchev’s dismissal and the shift of state priority from crop expansion to the improvement of yields on existing ploughlands associated with his discharge from office. Until the collapse of the Soviet Union, writers were supposed to draw inspiration from this “unfading theme.”⁹⁴ Ilyas Yessenberlin’s novel, *Prikroi svoim shchitom* (“Cover with Your Shield”),⁹⁵ was one of the works in which the tselina was revisited. In 1974, it came out in Kazakh, and, a couple of years later, its Russian edition was released in Moscow.

Since the late-1950s, the range of social issues that could be addressed literally had broadened. The main reason behind that was the comparative liberalization of the political, social and cultural aspects of Soviet life under Khrushchev’s rule and, after his dismissal, a relative freedom to criticize the former leader and his approaches under his successor, Brezhnev. Thus, Yessenberlin’s depiction of the tselina, generally remaining within the Soviet modernization canon, differed from the earlier-told narratives by way of more open discussion.

Briefly about the plot: It develops around the state farm, *Altyn Arai* (“Golden Dawn” in Kazakh), which was created in the early years of the VLC by taking over the lands of two Kazakh kolkhozes. One of the farms is forced to move with its livestock southwards in order to free its pastureland for the wheat crop. The director of the state farm, Tleukabakov, — a Kazakh by ethnicity, a graduate of an agricultural

⁹³ Zhunusov’s novel was released in 1965 in Kazakh and 1968 it came out in Russian under the title *Dom v stepi* (“A House in the Steppe”). The movie, *My zdes’ zhyviem*, was produced by Kazakhfilm and released in 1957.

⁹⁴ Suleimenov, “Osvoenie tseliny”; Akhmetov, Z.A., “Khudozhestvennaia tselinnaia epopeia,” *Izvestiia Akademii nauk Kazakhskoi SSR, seriia filologicheskaiia* 2, 1984, 1–4.

⁹⁵ Originally published in Kazakh in 1974. Translated into Russian by writer Iurii Gert for The Writers Union of Kazakhstan’s journal *Prostor* in the same year. Yessenberlin, *Prikroi svoim shchitom*.

technical college and a war veteran — is one of those who set up the farm back in the 1950s. The sovkhos partorg, Ugriumov, assigned from Moscow, joins the farm in the late 1960s.

When the sovkhos farmers face dust storms and experience crop loss, they are instructed to sow additional areas to replace the lost crops. A conflict arises between the director and the partorg. Ugriumov supports the young agronomist, Khasen, who proposes measures to protect the soil, which will, on the one hand, improve yield per hectare, but, on the other hand, reduce sown areas. The partorg believes that “[t]he center’s guidelines are not a dogma” and that “[i]t is necessary to approach each hectare from a position of the real potential.” However, Tleukabakov, who is used to following the instructions of his superiors, believes that the land “should be squeezed [of] everything that it could give to the people” although he can already see that the “trusted land” turns into “treacherous dust”.⁹⁶ This conflict clearly refers to the actual state of affairs in the Virgin Lands in the period between 1954 and 1960, when there was a drive to put under plough as much land as possible which resulted in the loss of soil on vast expanses due to wind erosion. However, the imaginary conflict does not end up in the way it did in real life.

Having found no support at the local level, Khasen manages to reach the highest level of decision-making in the republic — the First Secretary of the CPK.⁹⁷ The head of the republic approves of Khasen’s proposal to combat soil degradation, and, in the same year, the state farm — to the surprise of the regional agricultural authority – not only meets target numbers, but even exceeds them.

According to an annotation to the 1976 edition of this novel, the combat against wind erosion is not only an agro-economic measure. It also stands for the “combat against unstable personalities, an uncompromising struggle with everything that is fundamentally alien to the Soviet way of life and socialist morality”.⁹⁸ One such

⁹⁶ Ibid, 33, 75-76.

⁹⁷ This fictional First Secretary’s name is Akylbek Akhmetzhanov. In Yessenberlin’s literary world, this character stands for the real political figure of Kazakhstan, Dinmukhamed Kunaev.

⁹⁸ Yessenberlin, *Prikroi svoim shchitom*, 4.

personality is a man with a dark past called Kachan. This character is portrayed as the epitome of an anti-Soviet lifestyle: Kachan comes from a *kulak* family, collaborated with the Nazis during the war and spent some time in a Soviet labor camp. He cuts his prison term by opting to go to the Virgin Lands and finds there his safe harbor, working as head of a sovkhos pig farm. In the eyes of the author, he exhibits such “non-Soviet” traits as dishonesty and jealousy. In the end, Kachan murders one the main protagonists (the sovkhos’s livestock specialist, Meruert). Although this violent conflict served to symbolize an ideological battle between the new and the old and to point to the internal enemy, it was, perhaps, also meant to imply social tensions the VLC brought to the steppe.

In his novel, Yessenberlin manages to put some inconvenient questions about the social impact of the tselina campaign. Just as in Muqanov’s essay, the question arises around what had happened to the Kazakh auls located in these places prior to the VLC. The narrative reveals that the kolkhozes either joined the new state farms or were pushed away with their cattle to the south, to less fertile land. Although the land suffered from large-scale ploughing (“the earth quaked and groaned”, dust storms began), Kazakhs “understood their happiness” because the tselina campaign became a “second revolution” for the steppe dwellers. This revolution manifested in “machinery” and “culture”: “The tselina means a house instead of a yurt, gas instead of dung, clothing like in a town, a hairdresser like in a town. A Palace of Culture worth two million rubles — you won’t find such in some towns....”⁹⁹ The author not only urbanizes the Virgin Lands, he also pastoralizes them: the sovkhos brings back sheep and horses that, in the actual course of events, were driven out during the initial years of the VLC.

Another question — do Kazakhs feel offended because “people of different ethnicities (*natsional’nostei*)” arrived and “intermingled” in their place? — arises from a conflict provoked by the tractor driver, Karabai. He opposes the transition to a new soil-conserving method of ploughing and in response to the explanation that if this approach is not introduced “the earth will die, the erosion will strangle it, the

⁹⁹ Ibid, pp. 15-16, 25, 38.

land will perish,” says: “It’s my land, I’m the owner here! [...] Why did you come here? Why was the tselina upturned? The land knew its master, it did not perish under him!...” In an attempt to answer this question, Yessenberlin resorts to a technique that was widely used in Soviet propaganda – appealing to a shared experience of war, which nurtured a unifying super-identity in Soviet subjects.¹⁰⁰ The sovkhos director answers: “When I – next to a Russian and a Ukrainian – carried out an attack, I did not look who was next to me: a Russian, a Ukrainian or a Kazakh. One thing was important for us: to defeat and destroy the enemy, it was one for all of us. Got it?.. And now we have one common cause, and we are also going on the offensive....”¹⁰¹ Thus, land becomes a shared property too: “if you are an honest person, your home is everywhere on Soviet soil.”¹⁰²

The third critical question raised in Yessenberlin’s novel is what will happen to the Kazakh language in the changing socio-political climate. In the novel, this question is asked by the old shepherd, Zykriia, who is illiterate and not a party member, but “wholeheartedly accepting of all changes”. His daughter, Meruert, answers rather evasively, but very much in line with the Second Program of the CPSU adopted in 1961: “Communism will be built on the full blossoming of national cultures. All the best the Kazakhs and other peoples have will remain, and the bad will die off, disappear”¹⁰³ Thus, the Kazakh language seems to be of importance as long as it serves the cause of building an internationalist society.

Yessenberlin is best known to the contemporary Kazakh reader for his “nationalist” narrative, that is the trilogy, *Kochevniki* (“Nomads”; published between 1969 and 1973). However, with his “socialist” content, like *Prikroi svoim shchitom*, he generally remains within the literary canon. He maintains the continuity of Soviet

¹⁰⁰ According to Carmack, “the narrative of militant Kazakh heroism [produced by Soviet propaganda during the Great Patriotic War] firmly inscribed the Kazakh people into the Soviet family of nations” and “nurture[d] an identity that combined Kazakh and pan-Soviet elements”. Carmack, “History and Hero-Making.”

¹⁰¹ Yessenberlin, *Prikroi svoim shchitom*, 38.

¹⁰² Ibid, 26.

¹⁰³ Yessenberlin, *Prikroi svoim shchitom*, 82-83.

CHAPTER 5. PLOUGHING UP THE LITERARY TSELINA

modernization narrative and inscribes the Kazakh tselina in it. However, introducing a number of problematic aspect diverges – at least, to some extent - Yessenberlin's novel from the canon. Having a more ideologically benign literary work was, perhaps, important for the author to remain relevant and in demand under the circumstances largely determined by Soviet ideologues.

Conclusion

Soviet Kazakh writers presented the Virgin Lands Campaign as a historically predetermined event that breathed life into the Kazakh steppe, cultured its inhabitants, bought up new heroes and set up the new order. Rural development, the vision of which was outlined in the Kazakh fiction of the 1950s and 1960s, implied that the steppe dwellers, who, thanks to the Tselina Campaign, reaped some benefits of their modernized living and elevated social status, had to pay for these changes by abandoning their land, some customs and even, possibly, their language. The conflict between the old (the Kazakh past) and the new (Soviet modernity) is the focus of the tselina narratives.

The steppe as a key imaginary in these narratives presents a paradox. While the steppe was actually put under plough, writers imagined its revitalization and blossoming. When the natural steppe actually shrank because of agricultural development, they wrote about its expansion – not only in breadth, but also upwards into the universe. The steppe transformed into the tselina. This transformation marked two shifts in the value of the Kazakh steppe in the eyes of Soviet propagandists: while the economic importance of the steppe shifted from sustaining itself to benefiting the Soviet nation as a whole, its ideological importance shifted from nurturing the Kazakh identity to the efforts to mold the Soviet internationalist identity.

Kazakh writers communicated the promise of a better life which, against the background of rough and turbulent beginning, must surely have precipitated the local aspirations for long-promised prosperity. At large, the tselina turned into a narrative of how the pledge to deliver progress and modernity pulled the Kazakh countryside out of backwardness and neglect. The Tselina Campaign was one of the most

successful and lasting Soviet myths that mobilized the village and fuelled economic development in the region. The literary narrative about the “attack on the steppe” was so powerful that the campaign is still referred to as an epic and celebrated as a feat,¹⁰⁴ and Kazakh writers contributed to creating this legacy by ploughing up their literary tselina.

¹⁰⁴ See, for example: “Osvoenie tseliny – grandiozniy proekt XX veka.” (An address of the President of Kazakhstan, Nursultan Nazarbayev on the occasion of the 50th anniversary of the Virgin Lands Campaign.) *Kazakhstanskaia pravda*, February 7, 2004, 1.

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After World War II, the Soviet Union did not embark on rural development beyond restoration efforts in the affected countryside. Although the modernization of society was central to the Soviet project from its early years, under Stalin the “cultural revolution” hardly engaged rural masses at large. It was only thanks to Khrushchev that peasants became part of the social contract.

Kalinovsky notes, “[i]t was only in the 1950s [...] that resources began to match these earlier ambitions” with regard to modernization/development.¹ However, it was more than “just” resources. Apparently, Soviet development strategies were limited or dictated by party leaders’ understanding of Marxist premises. My analysis shows that Khrushchev seized an opportunity to use them to justify wide-ranging development and, eventually, opened the door for investing in the countryside.

As Melvin explains, Khrushchev, “alone among the leadership of the 1950s,” understood that to improve agricultural production, it had to be modernized and to make this happen “the rural workforce would have to undergo fundamental changes too”. Thus, the “urgent task of raising the standard of living of the villager to that of the city dweller” became an imperative to drive state policy towards the rural population.² The VLC demonstrates how a program to increase the food supply to the Soviet urbanities turned into a drive to raise living standards in the countryside.

With Khrushchev consolidating his power as the Soviet leader and the anti-colonial rhetoric growing stronger again in the Communist camp, economically underdeveloped Soviet peripheries — Central Asia in particular — quite naturally became a target for Moscow’s developmental considerations. “Moscow needed to show it was overcoming colonialism at home to make its bid for leadership of the postcolonial world.”³ This re-orientation to its eastern perimeter, as Kirasirova

¹ Kalinovsky, *Laboratory of Socialist Development*, 18.

² Melvin, *Soviet Power and the Countryside*, 4.

³ Kalinovsky, *Laboratory of Socialist Development*, 267.

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derives from a case study from the 1960s Uzbekistan, was associated with “the new Union-wide search for legitimacy for Soviet power.”⁴

The VLC, although first envisaged as an agricultural intervention, turned into the first Soviet experience of broad-based rural development. It not only demonstrated how difficult and costly such a holistic approach could be, but also laid the foundation for a rural policy in the Soviet Union. For Western European governments, development aid to their former colonies was a “tool to maintain influence in former colonial regions or to promote business interests”⁵ while maintaining their agricultural and rural status. For the Soviet Union, as the VLC case vividly illustrates, while rural development served a political and economic purpose as well, the intention was to urbanise rural spaces and potentially afford them the welfare status of urban areas. What unites both trajectories is a paternalistic attitude, evident in post-colonial developmental relations as well as in communications between Moscow and Alma-Ata.

Khrushchev made living standards an important sphere for the Soviet Union to prove itself to its Cold War allies and rivals. As C. Unger sums up the debate about the post-WWII history of international development, the “implicit idea of catching up suggests that there was an understanding of developmental differences that gained importance in the context of an increasingly globalizing economy.”⁶ One such difference lay in how heavily the average diet was based on animal ingredients, which brought to light another difference — how foodstuffs were produced — and, in the absence of other incentives in the Soviet economy, the welfare of rural producers emerged as yet another field in which the Soviet state could take a lead. What was progressive by international comparison became revolutionary domestically. Launched as a battle for bread, the VLC seemingly evolved into a fight for the hearts of Soviet rurals. As Hale-Dorrell stresses, “[t]his [Khrushchev] decade saw perhaps

⁴ Kirasirova, *Building Anti-colonial Utopia*.

⁵ Unger, *International Development*, 100.

⁶ *Ibid*, 5.

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the largest and most sustained improvement in peasants' position of any period between 1917 and 1991."⁷

Once Khrushchev's agricultural program, of which the VLC was not only a large part but also a symbolic element, brought the countryside into the state's developmental considerations, it remained there until the Soviet collapse. Many interventions had a lasting effect or improved follow-ups in the Brezhnev era. As I mention in the introduction with reference to McCauley, the very fact that the VLC had failed in the eyes of Khrushchev's political opponents, ensured that agriculture, and rural areas together with it, would receive investments in the post-Khrushchev period. This feature of development — that it led to more developmental interventions even when it failed — is characteristic of the history of development in general: as Kalinovsky sums it up, "whatever the effects and failures of development intervention, development is notable for creating more development — a rationale for the expansion of expertise, institutional presence and new projects to improve on failed ones."⁸

The social contract offered by Khrushchev to the highly diverse village population was about relieving them of the excessive burdens of agricultural production and raising their living standard — through guaranteed wages, housing loans, public facilities, massively improved infrastructure and significantly increased social mobility — in exchange for loyalty and productivity. These welfare provisions were long awaited and provided political legitimacy for the rest of the Soviet period. In the Kazakh countryside, the VLC decade was, perhaps, the first instance when Socialist ideas of development gained credence among the rural population as a whole.

The state attempted to modernize agricultural production in the Kazakh countryside by radically altering the modes of labour organization. This produced significant effects in crop production while animal farming continued — at least, for the rest of decade — to rely mainly on nature, female labour on farms, and old-time herding

⁷ Hale-Dorrell, *Corn Crusade*, 230.

⁸ Kalinovsky, *Laboratory of Socialist Development*, 270.

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practices. Thus, for the most disadvantaged stratum of the rural population, livelihood patterns did not change dramatically. The fact that rural subjects became waged workers with improved access to electricity, health care, housing and education — which potentially could, and in many cases did, liberate villagers from heavy manual labour and their fate of remaining in a kolkhoz for the rest of their lives — radically changed the status of rural dwellers from that of the Stalinist period. However, many inefficiencies inherent to the Soviet economy slowed the progress considerably.

The state invested a significant amount of effort into the propaganda that brought about the tselina campaign. Scholars tend to look at these efforts through an entirely ideological lens. However, this dissertation shows that there were strong economic considerations as well. The internationalist policy of Soviet communists sought to make society more homogenous, which would reduce possible conflicts, thereby securing productivity. As Kalinovsky summarizes cases from Tajikistan in the Cold War era, “[t]he Soviet Union found ways to accommodate quite a bit of diversity, both formally and informally, as it sought a path to material prosperity and equality. Without those universal claims, there was nothing binding different groups toward a shared future.”⁹ The analysis of the propagandistic efforts, which constituted a large part of my dissertation, amply demonstrates how ideologues attributed the VLC with a “future-directed quality” and a “promise of progress,” two of the features C. Unger identified with regard to the post-war tendencies of development in international comparisons. These all fueled the transformation of the Kazakh countryside in the VLC decade and beyond. Kazakh literature was part of these efforts, with local writers and filmmakers adding credibility to the VLC in the eyes of the rural masses and inscribing the tselina campaign into Soviet mythology.

Why was a rural development component largely over sown — both by domestic and external observers — in the historic narratives of the VLC? M. Frey and C. Unger maintain that the history of international development has mainly been written as a history of ambitious modernization projects which, more often than not, seem to

⁹ Ibid, 278.

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have failed.¹⁰ Historic accounts of the VLC tend to fall in the same trap, focusing primarily on an agricultural scheme and leaving behind all the repercussions it produced in other spheres, including social and cultural ones. Frey and Unger name a number of factors that, in their opinion, “have led, until today, to a neglect of rural spaces in discourses and practices of development policies and their histories.” One of them is particularly relevant, in my view, to the general absence of the local, rural population in historical writings on the VLC, namely “the theoretical and practical imperative of development as industrialization.”¹¹ Thus, looking at this scheme exclusively from agricultural or ideological perspectives distracts observers from seeing the strong rural development component of it and its part in the wider developmental processes in the Soviet Union. The VLC case demonstrates that Soviet rural development is a promising field of historical inquiry, which has something to offer in understanding current trends and patterns.

Despite the fact that since its independence, Kazakhstan has been in the top 10 wheat exporters in the world,¹² the VLC as a Soviet legacy carries rather negative connotations in present-day Kazakhstan's public discourse. This makes instances that credit or resemble the tselina campaign more salient. The VLC lives on not only in public perception but also in material culture, including infrastructure elements, buildings, murals, and so on. Enthusiasts claim that the material heritage of the tselina should be preserved in order to create a space for public discussion of the Soviet experience and for learning of its lessons, as well as to pass over “a memory of the tselina” to the next generation.¹³

Curiously, the VLC continues to inspire Kazakh intellectuals and businesspersons in two — perhaps, unexpected for external observers — ways. Firstly, the Soviet period, of which the VLC was an iconic landmark, serves a contrasting background to what prominent film director and author Ermek Tursunov calls “cultural degradation” in

¹⁰ Frey, Unger, *Rural Development in the Twentieth Century: An Introduction*.

¹¹ *Ibid*

¹² FAOSTAT, *Rankings / Exports / Countries by Commodity, Item: Wheat, Years: 1992 - 2019*.

¹³ Khisanov R. *Ostorozhno, khleb idiet!*

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Kazakhstan today. "Our grandfathers built factories and plants. Our fathers [constructed] hospitals, schools, museums and theatres [...]. Today we are building restaurants, saunas, bazaars and supermarkets," says Tursunov who has never been known to be sentimental about the Soviet past.¹⁴ The current state of Kazakhstan, eroded by corruption and uncertainties ("the absence of ideology" as Tursunov calls it), makes domestic observers nostalgic about times past. Thus, the VLC, together with its successes and drawbacks, does seem to some Kazakhstanis today as a "cultural revolution" just as it did to writer Yessenberlin in 1974.

Another way in which the tselina legacy manifests itself in present public life is a belief in a grand master plan where the state has to play a decisive role. The recent example of this is an initiative called the Architects of the Future launched by businessperson Marat Abiyev. He and his more than 40 thousand followers are petitioning President Tokayev to assist them in acquiring five million hectares of arable land from the Problem Debts Fund for the production of various crops.¹⁵ Abiyev's vision is to create — with the help of foreign investments — the "biggest agricompany in the world" working as a franchise enterprise. This enterprise would have 1000 franchisees acting as "effective managers," 200 "machine-and-tractor stations," a training program and an extension center. Abiyev claims that profit is not the end goal: he promises to improve the living standard in rural areas (by building 100 schools, 100 hospitals, and 100 kindergartens) within 10 years and drive Kazakhstan to become one of the top crop exporters in the world within five years, and even to establish on the Kazakh soil a Food Security Fund for the rest of the world.

Although this initiative does not credit the VLC for inspiration, it sounds as ambitious as the VLC was and potentially holds many similarities. Just like Soviet propagandists who claimed that the VLC was historically predetermined, Abiyev says that the "inclination towards land cultivation for the common good, it seems, has been... in our genetic code."¹⁶ He also talks about his crop expansion scheme as the

¹⁴ Tursunov, *Kirpich*, 382; Dosym Satpaev's Auditorium KZ, *Kul'turnaia degradatsiia strany*.

¹⁵ The Development Fund of Agriculture, *Petition*.

¹⁶ Marat Abiyev: *TDFA spasiet nas ot ugrozy goloda mirovykh masshtabov*, Tengrinews.

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"predecessors' mission" which has to be pursued.¹⁷ Their motto ("With Belief in the Creator and a Bright Future") strongly resembles those from the communist past, with the Creator substituting the Communist Party. This indicates that what seemed to some researchers to have been a failure has the potential now to inform current ideas for rural and agricultural development.

A multidimensional retrospective in assessing the immediate and longer-term impacts made by the VLC can yield fascinating and profound insights into Soviet and post-Soviet trajectories of development. As my analysis shows, it is necessary to look retrospectively even beyond the VLC. Some of the developments, which today's scholarship attributes to the VLC and seen in rather a negative light, like the declining status of the Kazakh language, began in the preceding period, which my dissertation addresses only partly since it was not initially in its scope. Late Stalinism in Kazakhstan remains the least researched, historically, ethnographically and culturally. For a long time, scholars saw the Khrushchev period as a continuation of Stalinist policies. As long as the 1940s and early 1950s remain a blind spot, we cannot rightly identify and fully appreciate the changes put in motion by the VLC in the Kazakh steppe. Thus, the prehistory of the VLC could offer some answers to our inquiries about the VLC itself. My dissertation is one of a few attempts conducted so far to address the social history of Soviet Kazakhstan. This narrative is far from being complete: it needs more perspectives, more archival research, more case studies and, most importantly, a shift of the focus from industries to people.

¹⁷ The Development Fund of Agriculture, *Arkitektory budushchego*.

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