Frontiers of Violence: State and Conflict in Semirechye, 1850-1938

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Authorship Declaration

I hereby declare and confirm that this thesis is entirely the result of my own scholarly work except where otherwise indicated, and has not been submitted, either in whole or part, for a higher degree or qualification at this or any other university or institute.

Aminat Chokobaeva
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Abstract

In August 1916, the native nomads of southern Semirechye rose in a popular rebellion that reduced the colonial presence in the region to several beleaguered towns and settlements. While the rebellion claimed over 3,000 victims in the settler society, the punitive actions of the authorities led to a far greater loss of life among the native communities. Beyond the loss of life, the uprising had much broader implications. The decimation of the nomadic population, which had shrunk to less than two thirds of its pre-rebellion level, and the plans of the government to resettle the remaining nomads in the geographically isolated and resource poor area of Naryn suggest that the administration came to view the rebels as a potential threat not only to the well-being of the settlers, but also to the integrity and security of the colony at large. The rebellion had in effect engendered long-standing concerns among the Russian military and statesmen about the ability of the metropole to protect its borderlands and maintain sovereignty in the ethnically and religiously “alien” regions. Indeed, the then military governor of Semirechye, General Fol’baum, framed the rebellion in the strictly state-centred terms: “the situation” he said of the rebellion “could change so suddenly that the entire Russian enterprise will come to ruin in Semirechye.”

Placing the uprising of 1916 and the region of Semirechye, where the uprising was at its most violent, at the heart of the broader political history of Russian imperialism, this thesis examines the forms and strategies of state-building in the colonial context. Semirechye’s frontier position – on the border with the Qing Empire – and its ethnic diversity make it an ideal region from which to study the relationship between the centre and the periphery. At the same time, treating the uprising of 1916 as a point of rupture, which had ushered in the “continuum of crisis” that engulfed the Russian Empire during World War I and determined, to a considerable extent, the course and content of the early Soviet policies in the region, allows us to understand how certain conceptions of nationality became central to questions of state security and sovereignty.

Substantively, this study traces the political history of Semirechye from the early years of conquest and colonization in the second half of the 19th century until the beginning of World War II, which the region entered as a part of the Kyrgyz Soviet Socialist Republic. Organized around the cross-cutting themes of empire, state, and nation, this thesis advances the key proposition – that sovereign power is predicated on the control of territory and population. Crucially, this study demonstrates that both the imperial and later Soviet state sought to impose and consolidate its power over the region’s landscape and peoples through the establishment and use of institutions, policies, and practices targeted at the management and supervision of Semirechye’s natural and human resources. Furthermore, by arguing that both governments sought to fashion popular loyalties, create a productive labour force, and develop the economy for the purposes of national defence, this thesis highlights the critical continuities between the imperial and Soviet practices and ideas in governing the region.

By examining Semirechye as a zone of state formation, this thesis also illuminates the critical nexus of state-building and control over natural resources and foregrounds the relationship of asymmetry and dependence between the centre and the periphery accomplished through the seizure of the region’s vital resources – namely agricultural land and livestock.
In order to develop these arguments, the thesis draws upon approaches from history, political science, and anthropology. Based on archival research, this study contributes to current debates on colonialism and state formation.

Drawing attention to the security rationale of the state-sponsored programmes of nation-building, such as the national delimitation and the policies of indigenization, implemented by the Soviet administration, this study offers a departure from the long-standing view of ideology as the primary engine of the state-led national construction in Central Asia. Instead, this thesis argues that the “affirmative action” principles of the early Soviet regime were grounded in the efforts of the government to mobilize resources of the region to maintain the regime’s internal and external security. Consequently, the harmonization of the Soviet and ethnic affiliations under the rubric of Soviet nations allowed the Bolshevik leadership both to enforce the boundaries of the state and to mobilize the indigenous population for the task of nation and state-building.
Note on Transliteration

I have used the Library of Congress transliteration system for Russian and Kyrgyz language materials with some modifications. I have rendered è as io for Russian sources and where the phonetic spelling of native terms demanded, I have used j instead of dzh. Original quotations have been left unchanged as have been established English spellings of locations and persons.
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Introduction

This thesis emerged from a personal interest in the communal commemoration of the uprising of 1916 in the northern half of modern-day Kyrgyzstan, known before 1924 national delimitation of Central Asia as a part of Semirechye or Jeti-Suu (Zhetisu in Kazakh). The history of the uprising, or urkun (exodus) in Kyrgyz, holds a deeply personal connection for me, as my seven of my great-grandfather’s ten siblings and his mother perished during the uprising and the subsequent reprisals against the rebels by both the colonial authorities and the settlers. Beyond the obvious tragedy of the loss of life, what particularly troubled me was a virtual absence of communal remembrance of the events. Although often upheld in the official pronouncements as the foundational event in the modern Kyrgyz history and the ground zero of Kyrgyz statehood in ethnic as well as territorial terms, the rebellion of native nomads is not an event that attracts mass popular celebrations in a way that the Victory Day, for example, does. In more informal, family settings, too, urkun is rarely brought up. My own family is instructive in this respect; it was not until after I started my doctoral research, that my grandmother related her father’s story to me. But even as she did, the story she told me was frayed, fragmentary, and incomplete, indicating that communal histories of the uprising were being lost. But why were memories being lost in a culture that prides itself on its bardic tradition and oral history-telling?

The search for a potential answer to this question first pointed me in a familiar direction. Like many Central Asian historians of the region, I came to the conclusion that under the Soviet regime, communal memories that were at odds with official histories were silenced and eventually forgotten. Further research proved me partly wrong. While looking for both official and unofficial accounts of the uprising, I made a startling discovery that far from silencing the uprising, the Soviet historiography of the uprising of the 1920s celebrated and propagated this “movement of national liberation.” The extent to which the central government supported public commemoration of the uprising was truly astounding. The uprising was celebrated in the same way that the October revolution was; festivities were organized, brochures disseminated, books written, and theatre plays staged – all devoted to the subject of the rebellion. Even more intriguingly, the idea of the rebellion as the moment of national awakening, the first foray into independence, first emerged as a part of a state-sponsored campaign of development of national cultures. Put

1 Urkun is more properly translated as “panicky flight” than exodus, but as a term used primarily in referring to livestock herds, it may have negative connotations for many.
simply, the belief that the “national” uprising was the foundation of modern Kyrgyz statehood was shaped by Soviet rather than post-Soviet historians.

My fascination at coming across these largely overlooked materials soon gave way to more troubling questions. The very different tone and content of the early Soviet historiography of the uprising of 1916 and its shift to the dogma of class-based “friendship of nations” seemed particularly problematic. The tectonic change in national historiographies and Soviet official culture more broadly in the early 1930s presented an obvious conundrum. Looming even larger, however, was the choice of a destructive ethnic conflict as the cornerstone of “national culture” of Soviet Kirghizia. Having identified the changing national historiographies as a platform from which the Bolshevik leadership sought to rally support for Soviet power among the largely indifferent or hostile native population, I began to ask myself why and how Semirechye, torn away by the civil war from the empire’s metropole, became a part of Soviet Russia in the wake of the war. By the same token, the failure of colonial rule, exemplified most dramatically by the native rebellion that led to the deaths of more than 3,000 Russian settlers and signalled the beginning of the civil war, raised the question of the expediency of conquering and managing a far-flung colony. Thus, the question which my research eventually boiled down to was simple: why, and by extension, how was Semirechye incorporated into the Imperial and later Soviet Russia?

In broadest terms, this thesis investigates the logic and nature of Semirechye’s incorporation into the geographically large and ethnically diverse polity ruled from a single centre before and after the October Revolution. By examining the fundamental reconfiguration of the region and its pastoralist population in the course of the second half of the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, this thesis seeks to understand what this transformation reveals about the nature of the state and state-building. To complicate my argument, I analyse the strategies of state-building in the context of the imperial periphery and against the backdrop of cross-border challenges. In other words, I look at how the state was produced and constituted in the geographically distant, ethnically different, and politically contested borderland.

But why study Semirechye? There are at least two good arguments in favour of a Semirechye-focused study. Beyond the obvious personal attachment to the place I consider home – my home city of Bishkek stands on the north-eastern edge of the region – Semirechye presents an interesting case study of one of the fault lines of the “Eurasian
conquest empires” identified by Alfred Rieber. As a multi-ethnic frontier whose boundaries were “solely established by force” during the conquest, Russian Semirechye displayed all six distinguishing features of what Rieber describes as “complex frontiers.” Before and during the Russian conquest, Semirechye continued to be an area of rivalry for “political and economic domination” between “at least three polities,” including the Russian and Qing Empires and the Kokand Khanate. Because of this contest, Semirechye’s “border lines were frequently unclear, unstable, and porous.” Owing to its trans-border location, Semirechye was also an “area of trading and raiding by nomadic or semi-nomadic and settled populations even after…the incorporation of nomads into the imperial system.” At the same time, “large scale population movements resulting from warfare, invasions, migrations and colonization, both coercive and voluntary” meant that the Kirghiz and, to a lesser extent, Kazakh pastoralists of Semirechye were scattered “on opposite sides of state boundaries.” The “ambiguous loyalties” of the native nomads owed much to the colonial settlement of Semirechye, which the central government implemented in order to counter “the imagined and real threats to stability and security of the imperial order” and to “subdue the local populations.” The geographical location of Semirechye – at the crossroads of the nomadic Steppe and the oasis regions of Turkestan and on the border with the Qing China – makes it a unique vantage point from which to examine the cross-border dynamics of imperial state-building.

Despite its importance, Semirechye remains understudied. The dearth of research on Semirechye is all the more surprising given a relatively large – and growing – number of studies on the oasis regions of Turkestan and the nomadic Steppe. The few existing studies of Semirechye generally fall in the category of social history and ethnography. The contributions by Svetlana Jacquesson and Tetsu Akiyama examine the interactions between the colonial administration and the Kyrgyz pastoralists of Semirechye. Where Jacquesson explores the informal forms of resistance employed by the native communities in response to the land seizures by the colonial authorities, Tetsu Akiyama

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3 Indeed, Rieber explicitly identifies Eastern Turkestan and the Ili Valley in particular as one these fault lines. Although Semirechye was separated from Ili (Kuldja) by the Tian Shan mountains, the borders between the two were porous, allowing mass population movements. Rieber, 196.

4 Ibid., 178-79.

5 For excellent studies of the Steppe, see Virginia Martin, Law and Custom in the Steppe, Ian Campbell, Knowledge and Power on the Kazakh Steppe. For equally good studies of the sedentary Central Asia, see Alexander Morrison, Russian Rule in Samarkand,

examines the role of the native elites, known as *manaps*, in mediating between the colonial administration and the native population. As purveyors of influence and political power in the native society, manaps are also discussed in the work of Daniel Prior, Benjamin Loring, and Jipar Duishembieva.\(^7\)

In terms of time frame and geographical focus, my thesis comes closest to Duishembieva’s thesis on the transformations of the northern Kyrgyz society and oral culture between the mid-nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. Duishembieva’s work explores the emergence of the sense of collective national belonging among the indigenous elites of northern Kyrgyzstan. On the other hand, this thesis shares significant similarities with Benjamin Loring’s study of the Soviet state-building in Kyrgyzstan. Like Loring, I examine the critical junctures in the first two decades of Soviet power in Kyrgyzstan, including the land and water reforms of 1921-1922, national delimitation, and collectivization.

At the same time, my work departs from Duishembieva’s and Loring’s studies in significant ways. To begin with, in contrast to Duishembieva’s study, which focuses on the agency of the native elites, my work puts the state in focus. Adopting a state-centric perspective from the International Relations, I treat the state both as an actor and as an agent of change.\(^8\) Put simply, I look at the policies of the Tsarist and Soviet Russia on the region and its inhabitants to discern their implicit logic and their implications for the project of state-building. I furthermore situate the state in the broader context of interstate competition, which distinguishes my perspective from Loring’s. By looking at how cross-border developments shaped the domestic policies of the Tsarist and Soviet state in Semirechye, I point to the transnational nature of state formation.

Similarly, the longue durée approach to the history of Semirechye allows me to trace the crucial continuities between the Imperial and Soviet strategies and practices of domination and control. At the heart of my thesis, then, is an assumption of a “grand design” driving the Russian state’s conquest and integration of Semirechye into the Imperial and later Soviet polities. This grand design, I argue, constituted a set of policies implemented by the metropole, which were aimed at maintaining the cohesion of the state, protecting its borders, and cultivating the highly productive and loyal population. Put


shortly, the respective governments of the Tsarist and Soviet Russia sought to build competent states capable of providing domestic stability and maintaining external security.

Semirechye’s borderland position, its geographic proximity to the Qing China, and the highly mobile nomadic population with suspect loyalties and cross-border ties made it simultaneously an area of strategic importance and a source of constant security concerns. To eschew an overly deterministic approach to the history of Semirechye as driven by its geography, I provide a historiographic treatment of the concepts that guided the Russia’s expansion in the region to demonstrate that these concepts were shifting and contingent on a number of factors. Ultimately, this thesis aims to examine the ways in which the Tsarist and later Soviet Russia conceived of itself in relation to the native nomads of Semirechye and what implications this had for the region and its peoples.

As an exploration of the relationship between the centre and the periphery, this thesis contributes to the growing body of literature representing the “imperial turn” in the historiography of the Tsarist Empire and Soviet Union. While building on the insights derived from these studies, this thesis also makes a contribution to the field by highlighting the significance of the hitherto overlooked borderland to the imperial projects of the centre. At the same time, this thesis problematizes the division between the Tsarist and Soviet states by emphasizing the remarkable similarity between the practices of state-building of the Tsarist and Soviet Russia. Ultimately, as this thesis will demonstrate, both the colonial and Soviet Semirechye was shaped by the dynamic interplay of “historical circumstances…physical geography, warfare and cultural change.”

Central to this study is an engagement with the history of the uprising of 1916 in Semirechye, which provides a perspective “from below” through the examination of the native response to the state policies. The chapter on the uprising, thus, forms the centre of gravity in the thesis, linking the Tsarist and Soviet periods. I seek to provide a conceptual and chronological framework of Semirechye’s incorporation into the Imperial

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10 Rieber, 178.
and Soviet Russia. My primary archival sources come from the collections of the Kyrgyz State National Archive and the Manuscript Fund of the Kyrgyz National Academy of Sciences, as well as collections of documents published before and after the collapse of the Soviet Union.

Before I begin my discussion of the Tsarist and Soviet state-building projects in Semirechye, I would like to clarify several key concepts that I use throughout this thesis and that form the conceptual arch of the thesis. The first concept addresses the relationship between “empires” and “nations.” Drawing on Nick Baron and Alexei Miller, I suggest that empires are not necessarily antithetical to nations and, as Alexei Miller has convincingly demonstrated, can promote national identities. Nick Baron, on the other hand, argues that “empires” and “nations” are not “real things,” but ideas and concepts. Furthermore, both “empires” and “nations” employ “similar strategies of domination.”

In the final analysis, I understand both “empires” and “nations” to be forms of statehood, which have more in common than they have differences.

The second concept I engage with widely in this study is the concept of space. By space I understand two separate but closely related analytical categories. To begin with, throughout the thesis I analyse Semirechye as a borderland and as a zone of state formation where claims to sovereignty were made and challenged. Secondly, I draw on Tomohiko Uyama’s argument that Asiatic Russia was a “space for asymmetric interaction” to examine space as both a resource and a “place” marked by hierarchies and inequalities. That is, I contend that by appropriating the physical space of Semirechye through the redistribution of land to the Russian settlers, the state created a relationship of inequality and dependence between the designated core of the state and the periphery.

The third concept that I employ is the concept of population politics proposed by Peter Holquist. I understand population politics to be concerned with population as a

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14 For a good starting point to read more about borderlands, see I Gerasimov et al., “From the Editors: Probing the Limits of Historical Metanarratives: Imperial Boundaries,” *ibid.* 2003, no. 1 (2003).
social aggregate to be shaped and acted upon.\textsuperscript{16} In my analysis of the Tsarist and Soviet policies, I tie the conceptions of population, which emerged in the nineteenth century to security concerns of the Tsarist and Bolshevik Russia.

The fourth concept that I borrow from an edited volume by Jane Burbank, Mark Von Hagen, and Anatolyi Remnev is their definition of “power.” By “power” they understand “institutions and designs.”\textsuperscript{17} At its simplest, power can be understood as a network of institutions, practices, and concepts that informed the conquest and the governance of the region. To conclude, this thesis will examine the “configurations of territory, populations, and power” in the colonial and Soviet Semirechye.\textsuperscript{18} At the same time, it will also emphasize the perpetuity of violence in the project of state-building, be it Tsarist or Soviet, and conclude that the enormous loss of life in the period between the conquest and the consolidation of Soviet rule in the region is a stark reminder of the human costs of establishing sovereignty and securing borders.

A note of caution before I proceed further. I use both “Kyrgyz” and “Kirghiz” to convey the original spelling used in my sources. Rather brazenly, I also use the terms nomadic and pastoralist interchangeably. It would be more correct to say that the Kyrgyz and Kazakhs, whom I call nomads, in fact practiced transhumance – short-distance seasonal migrations while maintaining permanent winter camps. Again, I use the term “nomads” or “pastoralists” to stay true to the sources I use throughout the thesis.

This thesis is organized in a way that allows to highlight the state consolidation in the periphery by providing a chronological treatment of the Imperial and later Soviet aims and strategies as they related to the region and its population. By focusing on critical junctures in the history of Semirechye, such as its conquest, the native uprising of 1916, the civil war, and the policies of “socialist construction” in the first decade of Soviet rule, this thesis highlights the interventionist nature of state-making and the centrality of security concerns to state-building in the periphery.

Chapter one explores the emergence of the concepts of territory and population and their centrality to the conquest and integration of Semirechye with the Imperial Russia. It looks at how the intersection between security concerns of the Tsarist state, colonial bias, and the population politics led to the central government’s attempts to secure Semirechye by moving large numbers of Russian peasants into the colony. It


\textsuperscript{17} Jane Burbank and Mark Von Hagen, Russian empire: space, people, power, 1700-1930 (Indiana University Press, 2007), 5.

\textsuperscript{18} Baron, “New spatial histories of twentieth century Russia and the Soviet Union: Surveying the landscape,” 376.
argues that as the group of population whose lands were targeted for dispossession by the state, the nomads of the Steppe and Semirechye came to lose most.

Chapter two combines the macro- and micro-analysis of the native rebellion of 1916. By placing the uprising in the context of First World War and the mass mobilization of the population, this chapter explains the uprising’s high death toll and the decision of the central government to expel the surviving nomads into an isolated mountainous area of Naryn. Drawing on literature in anthropology, this chapter also highlights the contingent nature of the rebellion and its roots in perceptions of insecurity.

Chapter three examines the civil war in Semirechye. It analyses the practices of state-building in the colony far removed from the metropole to explain how the colonial state in Semirechye survived despite the continuing and intensified ethnic and agrarian conflict. In discussing the continuing dispossession of the native nomads and their marginalization under the Provisional and later Bolshevik governments, this chapter highlights the russo-centric nature of the policies that allowed the Bolshevik to regain control of the region.

Chapters four and five examine the key Soviet policies in Semirechye and later Soviet Kirghizia, including the land and water reforms of 1921-1922, the national delimitation of 1924-1925, the programme of regionalization in 1925-1926, and the collectivization of the native nomads. Both chapters demonstrate that the “development” programmes implemented by the Bolshevik state in Semirechye and later Soviet Kirghizia were not so much about development as they were about establishing and extending the state’s presence and control in the region. They show that depending on its objectives, the Soviet state employed both positive and negative policies to attract broad support or, conversely, to counter the potential threat. These chapters argue that in implementing these policies, the Soviet state sought to consolidate its grip on the population and territory of Semirechye. At the same time, these chapters argue that in significant ways, these policies arose in response to outside events and developments.

The concluding chapters sum up the findings and open new prospects for research into the uprising of 1916 by discussing the communal memories of the rebellion, which prompted my initial interest in the subject, which led to writing this thesis.
Chapter I

From Natural Frontiers to National Core: The Conquest and Administration of Semirechye

The conquest of Central Asia represented the last stage in the long and gradual process of Russia’s colonization of the grasslands stretching, as Willard Sunderland points out, from what is today western Ukraine to the republics of Central Asia. Central Asia occupied a special place in a state that ruled population as diverse as catholic Poles and shamanistic Buriats. In addition to being Russia’s last “true” colony and its latest permanent territorial acquisition before the revolution, Central Asia was also the site of the empire’s last instance of confrontation with the nomadic people, whose rebellion in 1916 signalled the end of the autocracy, which ruled the vast lands between the Baltic Sea and the Pacific Ocean for more than five centuries.

Russia was certainly no stranger to dealing with the nomadic peoples that haunted European imagination for centuries. In 1223, the Mongol armies defeated the armies of Kievan Rus’. The ensuing three centuries of Mongol lordship over the Russian lands came to be known as Mongol yoke. The yoke itself consisted as much of collaboration as of conquest and left lasting legacy of the extensive financial networks and taxation system. By the end of the fifteenth century, the crisis of succession in the Mongol Empire led to its weakening grip on the Russian lands.

The next two centuries saw a reversal of fortune as the Muscovite state absorbed the former dominions of the vanquished Golden Horde. In the late 1600s, Russia was the largest contiguous state in the world. Between 1581 and the late nineteenth century, Russia’s Asian territories had expanded at an average rate of 20,643 square miles of territory annually. Only 1,530,000 square miles large in 1584, by 1899 the Russian Empire had acquired the territory of 8,660,282 square miles.1 By the end of the 18th century, the Russian Empire bordered the Ottoman, Persian, and Chinese empires.2

Yet, Russia’s heady advance into Central Asia had its own logic and dynamics. Driven largely by the shifting geopolitical concerns of the Tsarist government, the conquest of Turkestan and the Steppe, as the settled and nomadic halves of Central Asia became known to the Russian military, sought to complete the process of consolidation

of the imperial state. How this process unfolded and what motivations and events guided the Russia’s expansion into the region are the subject of this chapter.

In the broadest terms, this chapter is an attempt to understand the grounds for and the mechanisms of the conquest of the mainly pastoralist regions of the Steppe and Semirechye by the Tsarist state. It does so by examining the conquest and administration of the Steppe region and Semirechye in the context of the concepts of territory and population outlined in the introduction.

In examining the conquest of the nomadic Central Asia against the backdrop of inter-state competition between the Tsarist Empire and the cross-border states, most prominently the Qing China, as well as regional powers, notably the Kokand Khanate, this chapter will argue that security and state-building in the strategically important borderland were the primary considerations of the empire’s statesmen. I draw on Alexander Morrison’s contention that the “desire for a firmly demarcated, secure frontier” guided the conquest of Central Asia to argue that the imposition of Russian imperial authority rule in the region constituted the expansion and consolidation of the imperial state. The empire’s officials, historians, and geographers saw the conquest of the Steppe in terms of self-preservation of the imperial state.

As a form of statecraft, the conquest enforced the boundaries of the growing state and centralized political rule, cultivating as the result the vision of a bounded and unified imperial space. As this chapter will demonstrate, this process was both complex and contingent on external factors. To begin with, the distance of the region from European Russia and its inhospitable terrain made the actual logistics of conquest difficult and costly. Furthermore, the efforts of the central government to project power over the nomadic lands by dispossessing and driving off their native inhabitants generated resistance of the nomads who raided the frontier settlements and rose in several violent rebellions.

Adding to the difficulties of overcoming native resistance and extending the state’s reach into what imperial administrators perceived as a lawless space were the attempts of the Qing China to counteract the growing presence of Russia in the borderland

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4 For a discussion of the difficulties of mounting military campaigns under the conditions of dependence on camel transportation and the implications of this dependence for the Russian invasion of India, see “Camels and colonial armies: The logistics of warfare in central Asia in the early 19th century,” Journal of the Economic and Social History of the Orient 57, no. 4 (2014).
it considered a part of its own sphere of influence and the disruptive behaviour of the oasis-based khanates of Turkestan seeking to restore their rule over the nomads.\textsuperscript{5}

The overlapping and disputed nature of loyalties in the Steppe borderland was a source of constant conflict and tension between the imperial state and the native society, further convincing the Tsarist military that stronger borders were necessary to defend the empire against outside aggression. Beginning from the eighteenth century, the imperial authorities built fortified lines consisting of fortresses, redoubts, and lighthouses along the frontier. These fortified lines anchored and defended the gradually advancing boundaries of the empire while simultaneously establishing the physical presence of the imperial state in the region. The stationing of permanent garrisons in the fortresses and the agricultural settlement of the frontier both facilitated the conquest of the Steppe and demanded further incursions into the outlying nomadic lands in order to prevent nomadic raids.

But the imperial administrators did not rely only on force; they sought knowledge of the region and peoples that inhabited it. The conquest of the Steppe brought the imperial state into increased contact and conflict with the pastoralist communities of the region, compelling the Tsarist government to collect and categorize information about their new subjects. At the same time, the territorial expansion of the empire necessitated the mapping of its new dominions. The emergence of the idea of territorial sovereignty – the conception of state as a unified and bounded political space – in the eighteenth century gave further impetus to projecting idealized visions of firm state boundaries onto the seemingly unbounded landscape of the Steppe. As representations of this imagined geography, maps politicized natural landmarks by rendering them into “natural frontiers” and legitimized the conquest as the imperial statesmen sought to move the boundaries of the state closer to these “natural frontiers.”\textsuperscript{6}

\textsuperscript{5} On the Russo-Chinese rivalry, see Sarah Paine, \textit{Imperial Rivals: China, Russia, and Their Disputed Frontier} (Armonk, New York: ME Sharpe, 1996). On the relationship between the nomadic Kazakhs and the Russian and Qing Empires, see Jin Noda, \textit{The Kazakh Khanates Between the Russian and Qing Empires: Central Eurasian International Relations During the Eighteenth and Nineteenth Centuries} (Leiden: Brill, 2016).

Similarly, the territorial expansion of the empire had a profound impact on the ways in which the imperial state sought to govern the newly conquered territories. In response to the challenges of governing the space with few apparent “natural frontiers,” the Tsarist state developed the “spatial view of government,” where territory became a subject of tools and practices that allowed the state to “deepen its conceptual and physical grip” on the region. The implications of this turn to forms of state-building based on territorial control were far-reaching for the native population of the empire’s new Asiatic frontier. The territorial conquest of the Steppe brought its peoples under more direct rule by the Tsarist government, portending their transformation into colonial subjects.

**The Rise of Territorial State**

As Christopher Bayly notes, “the expansion of knowledge was not so much a by-product of empire as a condition for it.” In the Tsarist Russia, this expansion occurred as a part of a transition to the new modes of governance under the government of Peter I in the eighteenth century. Willard Sunderland traces this transition to the rise of cameralist thinking in the pan-European context and the increasingly ambitious visions of the Russian elites of the place of their state in European politics. It is no by coincidence, Sunderland notes, that after the military victory over Sweden, Peter’s official title changed from tsar to emperor and Russia became an empire.

This change, as Sunderland points out, involved a profound transformation in the way the Russian elites understood the nature of the state and state power. Territorial space became simultaneously a “resource to be studied, managed, and exploited” and a “terrain to be shaped and moulded as the physical expression of state power.” In short, territory – understood by the Petrine establishment as both land and physical space – served as the basis and the source of state power. Sunderland distinguishes two stages in the transformation of thinking about territory from the emergence of a “new territorial order” during the Petrine and early post-Petrine periods to a period of “high territoriality”

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7 Sunderland, 53.
8 Christopher Alan Bayly and CA Bayly, *Empire and Information: Intelligence gathering and social communication in India, 1780-1870* (Cambridge University Press, 2000), 56.
10 Sunderland, 36.
11 Sunderland also adds that the Petrine establishment regarded territorial space also as a “symbol of national pride and a basis of national identity,” which I will discuss in the next chapter. Ibid.
in the late eighteenth century, which saw the consolidation of practices and ideas about this order.\textsuperscript{12}

Part of this process involved an unprecedented interest in defining, mapping, and cataloguing the empire’s territorial possessions. Maps helped the imperial military and bureaucrats to assert claims over contested territories.\textsuperscript{13} As visual representations of imperial power, maps were integral to the conceptual and physical conquest of space. Through maps, the imperial elites imaged and imagined the empire’s dominions. Geographic knowledge also provided the expanding state with tools of ordering and organizing the empire’s territory and peoples by defining categories of ownership.\textsuperscript{14} Put simply, by knowing territory, the empire’s military and administrators could act on it.\textsuperscript{15} Along with censuses and museums, maps, as Benedict Anderson argues, served as institutions of power.\textsuperscript{16}

At the same time, maps supported a more exclusive vision of the empire. Cartography divided the world into bounded and carefully delimited sovereign spaces, separated from each other by borders. As sites where states “stood face to” an enemy, borders became increasingly important to state-building.\textsuperscript{17} Borders simultaneously contained the empire and served as its defence lines. A heightened awareness of the significance of borders, which Sunderland aptly describes as “territorial consciousness,” was at once the result and the cause of the growing role of geography as a tool of statecraft and a scientific discipline in the service of the empire.\textsuperscript{18} In short, geography was one of the “knowledge-based systems of control and administration,” to quote Alexander Marshall.\textsuperscript{19}

\begin{itemize}
\item \textsuperscript{12} Ibid., 53.
\item \textsuperscript{14} The first cadastral survey undertaken by the government of Catherine the Great in 1765 and the territorial reforms begun ten years before the survey are a perfect illustration of this process. The survey was “designed to clarify land ownership in the countryside by drawing property lines and cataloguing the rural economic landscape through the compilation of tables and “economic notes,”” while the reforms “aimed to clarify the administrative space of the state by (a) creating a new territorial division based on a new space of provinces and districts (initially the \textit{namestichesno}, then the modern \textit{gubernii} and \textit{uezd}) that were smaller and had roughly uniform populations; and (b) extending this new structure into borderland areas that had previously been subdivided and administered according to local historical practice.” Sunderland, 48-49.
\item \textsuperscript{15} Ibid., 34.
\item \textsuperscript{17} Peter Sahlins, “Natural Frontiers Revisited: France’s Boundaries since the Seventeenth Century,” \textit{The American Historical Review} (1990): 1426.
\item \textsuperscript{18} Sunderland, 37.
\item \textsuperscript{19} Marshall, 184.
\end{itemize}
The history of Russia’s expansion into the Steppe and further into Turkestan is particularly illustrative of this dynamic. Before the Russian troops could advance, “military-scientific expeditions” were dispatched to survey and map areas suitable for conquest. These expeditions, according to the eighteenth-century statesman and ethnographer, Vasilii Tatishchev, were “extraordinary enterprises, usually involving troops, carried out by sea or across land, and placed under the command of a talented officer.” In addition to maps, explorers kept detailed logs and made detailed descriptions of surveyed lands and peoples that they encountered during their trips. Furthermore, if considered within the realm of possible, these expeditions would also attempt to impose Russian rule in new territories.

The first such mission to Central Asia was dispatched by Peter I in 1714. Consisting of 7,000 troops, including “two engineers, two merchants, and several naval officers” and armed with cannons, the expedition was entrusted with the dual task of exploring the upper reaches of Amu-Darya for gold deposits and convincing the Khan of Khiva to submit to Russian rule. Although a disaster in military terms – the head of the expedition Prince Alexander Bekovich-Cherkassky and his troops were slaughtered or sold to slavery – the expedition succeeded in collecting the topographic and geographic data of the eastern shores of the Caspian Sea.

The Russo-Persian war of 1722-1723, in which the Russian army pushed further into the Safavid dominions in the Caspian and the Caucasus in an attempt to thwart the Ottoman designs in the region, produced a well detailed map of “the Caspian Sea and the Uzbek land.” The map provided detailed drawings and descriptions of the main water ways, trade routes, and political borders of the region. Another map of the “Kirghiz-Kaisak Steppe” was compiled by General Major Iakov Bouver sometime between 1787 and 1794. The map recorded the territories of the Junior and Senior Kazakh Hordes (zhuz in Kazakh), the Karakalpaks, and the Khanates of Khiva and Bukhara. Another map published at about the same time was compiled by Ivan Liutov, the chief quartermaster...

21 Sunderland, 40.
22 Sunderland, 139.
23 Strictly speaking, the first mission to Central Asia was dispatched by Peter’s father, Tsar Alexis Mikhailovich. David Schimmelpenninck van der Oye, "Paul's great game: Russia's plan to invade British India," Central Asian Survey 33, no. 2 (2014): 144.
24 Ibid., 139.
25 Postnikov, Stanovlenie rubezhei Rossii v Tsentral'noi i Srednei Azii (XVIII-XIX vv.): rol' istoriko-geograficheskikh issledovanii i kartografirovaniia: monografiia v dokumentakh 67-68.
of the Orenburg corps. Liutov’s map provided information on the economy of the region, its borders, as well as its fortresses, towns, and trade routes.27

In 1797, Paul I established the Map depot, which became a central archive for the state’s collection of geographic and topographic maps. It also functioned as a special office for geographers and cartographers to compile and prepare maps for state intelligence.28 In 1812, the Map Depot had been replaced by the reformed Military-Topographical Depot, divided into six specialized branches, producing and compiling clerical, topographic, astronomical, and mechanical data as well as engraving and archiving this data.29

As the empire pushed further into Central Asia in the nineteenth century, the Depot produced more detailed and accurate maps. In contrast to the maps compiled by the eighteenth-century geographers, the maps produced by the Military-Topographical Depot used geodetic data, were properly scaled, and specified longitude and latitude values.30

Along with geographic data, the expeditions into the Steppe collected ethnographic and demographic data. In 1803, for example, Lieutenant Iakov Gaverdovskii, despatched to Bukhara as the head of an armed caravan, collected data on the nomadic Kazakhs he encountered during the trip. Gaverdovskii described the social structure of the nomads of the three zhuzes, their political organization, economy, and even the system of seasonal migrations.31 In 1809, translator Andrei Putintsev described the Kazakh legal system after his trip to Kuldja in Chinese Turkestan.32 In 1825, an armed expedition of 50 Cossacks, accompanied by military doctor Fadei Zibbershtein, reached Semirechye, where Zibbershtein collected data on the Kazakhs of the Senior zhuz and the Kyrgyz of the Bugu tribe.33 The first maps of Semirechye were compiled by the zoologist Leopold von Schrenk and naturalist Grigori Karelin between 1840 and 1843.34 Shrenk’s and Karelin’s maps, along with the extensive botanical collections, were soon followed by others. By the late 19850s, Russian military geographers, such as Alexander Vlangali, Mikhail Khomentovskii, and most famously, Piotr Semenov (Tian-Shanskii) and Chokan Valikhanov, had surveyed and mapped much of southern Semirechye, parts of the Tian

27 Ibid., 49.
28 Seegel, 72.
29 Ibid., 74.
31 Bekmakhanova, 49.
32 Ibid., 54.
33 Ibid.
Shan mountain range on the border with Chinese Turkestan, and the cross-border Ili Valley.35

An increasing demand for military intelligence on new territories and their population led to the further expansion and institutionalization of military geography in the second half of the nineteenth century.36 The exceptional importance the imperial military attached to knowing their new dominions and subjects in Asia was reflected in the 1866 decision of the Minister of War Dmitrii Miliutin to establish topographical sections staffed by 20-40 personnel in the new military districts of Orenburg, Western and Eastern Siberia, and Turkestan.37

Knocking on India’s Gates: Russia’s Conquest of the Steppe

By the beginning of the eighteenth century, Russia’s eastward expansion had brought it into close proximity to the lands of rival Junghar and Kazakh factions. The increased contact with the nomads of the Steppe and the gradual encroachment of the Russian frontier on their territories made Russian fortresses and garrisons subject to the frequent nomadic raids. Wary of the raids and the mounting hostilities between the Junghars and the Kazakhs and the threat that it posed to trade with Bukhara, which connected the Russian traders with the Mughal India, the authorities came to increasingly rely on the Kazakhs’ cooperation.38

Eager to establish the Russian presence in the Steppe and to find a reliable trade route with the Mughal India in the increasingly tumultuous Steppe, Peter despatched two military expeditions to Khiva and the Junghar territory. The first expedition, led by the unfortunate Bekovich-Cherkassky, ended in a disaster as the Prince and his men were taken captive or slain at the hands of the Khivans. The second expedition under the leadership of Lieutenant Colonel Ivan Buchholz ended less heroically. Although Buchholz returned to Saint Petersburg alive, he lost most of his 3,000-strong troops and faced harsh criticism, leading to his demotion.39

35 Postnikov, Stanovlenie rubezhei Rossii v Tsentral'noi i Srednei Azii (XVIII-XIX vv.): rol' istoriko-geograficheskikh issledovani i kartografirovaniia: monografiia v dokumentakh 228-34; Morrison, "Russia, Khoqand, and the Search for a "Natural" Frontier, 1863–1865," 171. 36 On the emergence of professional military intelligence in the imperial Russia, see Marshall; David Schimmelpenninck van der Oye and Bruce W Menning, eds., Reforming the Tsar’s army: military innovation in Imperial Russia from Peter the Great to the Revolution (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2004), 133-88. 37 Marshall, 184-85. 38 Khodarkovsky, 148. 39 Ibid.
Despite the failure of the expeditions, Peter was not deterred. Although the expeditions failed to deliver on Peter’s ambitions, they convinced him that the Steppe was “both the key and the gates to all of Asia” and that because the Kazakhs “were nomadic and unreliable people” they “ought to be under the Russian protection so that it is possible to establish through them communication with all the Asiatic countries” (chtob to’ko chrez ikh vo vsekh aziatskikh stranakh komonikatseiu imet’).  

In the following decades, Russia came knocking resolutely on these gates. The continued enmity between the Junghar and the Kazakhs presented the imperial government with a threat and an opportunity. Suffering defeat from the Junghars, between 1718 and 1730s, the Kazakhs of the Junior Horde sent several envoys to the Russian government with the request for Russian protection. In 1731, the Khan of the Junior Horde, Abulkhayir, swore allegiance to the Russian emperor.  

As the Russian envoy to the Kazakhs, Muhammed Tevkelev soon found out, however, the Kazakhs gave oaths of allegiance out of political expediency to offset the Junghar expansion and for the sake of “payments and presents” from Russia. To complicate things further, not everyone agreed to accepting Russian suzerainty; Abulkhayir had neither consulted many of his notables nor had full power over them. The lack of earnestness on the part of the Kazakhs was matched by the unwillingness of the Russian authorities to extend their new subjects protection against the empire’s other subjects.  

To keep their unruly new subjects in check and to reduce the government’s dependence on untrustworthy intermediaries – Abulkhayir’s lukewarm submission was duly noted by Tevkelev – he recommended building a fort on the River Or under the pretext that it was requested by Abulkhayir. The construction of the main fort and a chain of smaller fortifications would secure the trade caravans and ensure the compliance of the nomads by denying the nomadic communities access to their summer pastures and creating a sham Kazakh court consisting of de-facto hostages from among the native Kazakhs.

40 Ibid., 149; K. A. Suteeva, "Russkie voennye istoriki XIX v. o prichinakh i motivakh dvizheniiia Rossii na vostok (v Srednuiu Aziiu i izhnyi Kazakhstan)" (paper presented at the Pervye nauchnye chteniia pamiati E. M. Zalkinda, Barnaul, 2003), 104.  
42 Khodarkovsky, 154.  
44 Khodarkovsky, 155-56.
notables.45 A year after Tevkelev’s visit and recommendations, the government formed the Orenburg expedition headed by the Ober-Secretary Ivan Kirilov, who was tasked with developing the plan for the Fort Orenburg. In March 1734, Kirilov presented the proposal on “retaining the Kirghiz as Russian subjects and the ways of governing them (upravliat’)” and the ethnographic study of “the Kirghiz-Kaisak and Karakalpak hordes.”46

Kirilov endorsed Tevkelev’s recommendations. In presenting his arguments in favour of constructing a fortified line along the new frontier, Kirilov emphasized the military utility of the fortifications, which would secure the southern frontier of the empire by breaking up potential nomadic alliances or, conversely, preventing hostilities between the various groups and factions and their raids on Russian settlements, and advancing the frontier to the Junghar territory.47 At the same time, the fort would also strengthen the Russian claims to the region and restrain the appetites of the Junghars and the Persians.48

In practice, the Orenburg fort would continue the chain of fortifications that emerged along the nomadic frontier in the beginning of the eighteenth century. Orenburg was critical to the conquest of the Steppe, but a number of smaller fortifications had already been erected by the earlier expeditions. The first fortifications in the Steppe were built already in 1717 by the expeditions of Bekovich-Cherkassky and Buchholz, although only one of them, the Omsk fortress, was not destroyed by the nomads.49 The construction of the Omsk fortress was soon followed by the founding of the Semipalatinsk fortress in 1718, the Ust-Kamenogorsk fortress in 1719, and the Koriakovskii Forpost in 1720. By 1725, the Irtysh Line – so called because the forts were erected along the Irtysh River – included 7 fortresses that were guarded by 489 Cossacks. Between the 1730s and the 1750s, the Line extended in three directions, forming new lines of fortifications. To the West, the Yaik, Orenburg, Uisk, and Ishim Lines were formed; to the North, the Kuznetsko-Kolyvansk Line, and to the East, the Irtysh Line was extended in 1745.50 By 1755, the three Lines formed the Siberian Line, which stretched for 2,991 versts (about

45 Ibid.
47 Khodarkovsky, 156; Lobashkova, 205.
48 Khodarkovsky, 156.
49 To be fair, the three other forts were rebuilt later in the second half of the eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries when the Russian empire had conquered the region in its entirety.
50 Virginia Martin, Law and Custom in the Steppe: The Kazakhs of the Middle Horde and Russian Colonialism in the Nineteenth Century (Richmond: Curzon, 2000), 61.
3,190 kilometres) and consisted of 18 fortresses, 13 outposts, 31 redoubts, 23 stations, and 35 beacons.\textsuperscript{51}

The construction of the Lines – facilitated by the submission of Khan Ablai of the Middle Horde in 1740 – widened Russia’s presence in the Steppe and, as Michael Khodarkovsky argues, signalled its impending colonization.\textsuperscript{52} Reflecting on the role of fortresses and the fortified lines in the conquest of the Steppe a century later, the War Minister Dmitrii Miliutin recognized the significance of the fortresses in the Russian occupation of the Steppe and the “consolidation” (uprochenie) of Russian rule among the “nomadic tribes.”\textsuperscript{53}

The fortresses were indispensable to the conquest and administration of the new territories; they enhanced claims to the sovereign rule in the Steppe and provided a physical representation of the empire.\textsuperscript{54} By housing permanent garrisons, the fortresses projected military might and political power of the state on the new subjects. As sites of military defence, the fortresses marked and enforced state boundaries, punishing trespassers and policing the frontier zone.\textsuperscript{55} In substance, the fortresses established the state’s presence in the distant and “savage” borderlands, allowing the imperial government to “tame,” to borrow Sunderland’s term, the nomadic inhabitants of the Steppe.\textsuperscript{56} The presence of permanent troops likewise enabled the imperial administrators to secure the roads, levy taxes, and legitimize the conquest and occupation of the new territories.

Equally importantly, the fortresses paved the way for the colonization of the Steppe. A chain of settlements emerged behind the Lines, which supplied the garrisons with produce. To further support the colonization of the Steppe and where peasants were unwilling to move to the new frontier, the government resettled convicts. Beginning from the 1760s, the fortresses of the Siberian Line were resettled with convicts in addition to Cossacks and regular peasants. In autumn 1771 alone, for example, about 6,000 convicts were resettled behind the Line with 4,000 more expected to be resettled shortly.\textsuperscript{57}

\begin{thebibliography}{99}
\bibitem{51} A. A. Akishev, \textit{Ocherki kolonizatsii Pavlodarskogo Priirtysh’ia tsarskoi Rossiei} (Pavlodar: Kereku, 2008), 67.
\bibitem{52} Khodarkovsky, 158.
\bibitem{53} B. Dzhamgerchinov, \textit{Prisoedinenie Kirgizii k Rossii} (Moscow: Izdatel'stvo sotsial'no-ekonomicheskoi literatury, 1959), 132.
\bibitem{55} Virginia Martin notes that the “local Cossack authorities essentially treated the Siberian defence line as a formal boundary of the Russian Empire.” Martin, 62.
\bibitem{56} Willard Sunderland, \textit{Taming the Wild Field: Colonization and Empire on the Russian Steppe} (Ithaca and London: Cornell University Press, 2006).
\bibitem{57} Akishev, 21.
\end{thebibliography}
The growth of sedentary agriculture in the place of nomadic pasturelands rendered the landscape of the Steppe more familiar and pushed the state’s interior further into the nomadic territories. The construction of the fortresses and the emergence of colonial settlements prohibiting the nomads’ passage to rich pasturelands caused the justified anger among the Kazakhs, who responded with more raiding. In 1765, to protect the population of the Line from raiding, a “ten-verst tract” (*desiativerstnaia polosa*) was formed on the left bank of the Irtysh River.\(^{58}\)

By the beginning of the nineteenth century, a strong consensus emerged about the need to move the Line 100-150 versts further into the Steppe. Among the most fervent supporters of the new Line was the Governor-General of Orenburg, Vasilii Perovskii. The construction of the new Line, Perovskii argued, would accomplish two goals. Firstly, the expulsion of the Kazakhs from the *novolineinaia* (“new line”) area would protect the settler population from raiding. Secondly, the Line would separate the Kazakhs from the Bashkirs, thereby preventing the potentially dangerous contacts between the nomadic frontier peoples. The construction of the line was completed between 1835 and 1837. The new Line was 500 versts (533 kilometres) long and consisted of 5 fortresses, 15 redoubts and pickets surrounded by moats and ramparts with beacons.\(^{59}\) The Line added 435,000 dessiatines of the former nomadic lands to the Cossack landholdings.\(^{60}\) In the next two decades, the authorities moved the Line yet again, transferring more land to the Cossacks. In 1862, the new Governor-General of Western Siberia, Alexander Duhamel (Diugamel’) prohibited the settlement of Kazakhs within the 10-verst zone. “Significant improvements to the existing winter camps (*zimovki*)” were expressly banned to ensure “the removal of the Kirghiz (Kazakhs).”\(^{61}\)

**Defensive Conquest: The Russia’s Annexation of Semirechye**

Understandably, the discontent of the Kazakhs, who were forced off their lands, escalated, leading to more raids on the Cossack settlements, which in turn prompted construction of new fortresses and further advancement of the Line into the Steppe. Desperate to reclaim their lands or, at the very least, to be able to access the pastures, the Kazakhs rose in

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\(^{59}\) Bekhmakhanova, N. E. Formirovanie mnogonatsional’nogo naselenia Kazakhstana i Severnoi Kirgizii, 1980, p. 101


\(^{61}\) Akishev, 68.
several violent rebellions in the second half of the eighteenth and the first half of the nineteenth centuries. In 1773-74, some Kazakhs joined forces with the leader of the renegade Cossacks, Emel’ian Pugachev, in return for the promises of “land, water, pastures, arms and munitions, salt, grain, and lead.” The “Syrym rebellion” – over the Kazakhs’ right to use the pasturelands between Volga and Yaik – flared in 1782-83 and lasted until the death of its leader Syrym Batyr in 1799. Yet more rebellions, led by Isatai Taimanov of the Bukei Horde and Kenesary Kasymov of the Middle Horde, followed in the 1830s and 1840s.

Although undoubtedly bothersome, the nomadic rebellions provided the imperial authorities with a reason and an excuse to occupy more territories. The empire’s military justified the conquest of the “militant nomads,” whose “wild hordes” put Russian borders “in constant danger of raids” and threatened to “revive the horrors of Batu Khan’s invasion (of Russia),” as an act of self-defence.

In the second half of the nineteenth century, Russian advance began to encroach on the territory of the Khanate of Khiva. Claiming authority over the Kazakhs migrating between the Caspian Sea and the lower Syr-Daria, the government despatched a young ensign of the Orenburg Line Battalion, Ian (Ivan in some sources) Vitkevich, to the Kazakhs of Syr-Daria in 1835. Vitkevich’s task was to hamper any attempts of the Khiva and Bukhara khanates to spread influence among the Kazakh subjects of the empire and to impose their authority on the Kazakhs who had not yet submitted to Russian rule. Vitkevich’s report revealed the critical weaknesses of Russia’s position in the region. The “power and influence” of Russian rule, Vitkevich noted, “did not extend beyond the frontier line of Ural and did not command respect of either Kaisaks (Kazakhs) or the sedentary areas (oblasti) of Central Asia…Except for the Kaisaks who live near the Line, Kaisaks have not the faintest conception of their allegiance (poddanstvo).”

The British invasion of Afghanistan in the end of the decade sealed the Russian government’s decision to send a military expedition against Khiva. On the face of it, the expedition aimed to free the captured Russian slaves, but the records of the special committee, which convened in March 1839 to discuss the expedition, suggests that “beyond its stated principal aim,” the expedition had “another, still more important: to establish and consolidate the influence of Russia in Central Asia, weaken the long-

62 Khodarkovsky, 173.
66 Ibid., 113.
standing impunity of the Khivans, and especially that constancy with which the English government, to the detriment of our industry and trade, strives to spread its supremacy in those parts.”

Although the Khiva expedition never reached its destination, the Russian expansion into the nomadic territories continued.

The construction of the Kopal fortress at the mouth of Syr-Daria in 1847 brought Russia into confrontation with the Kokand Khanate, which claimed authority over the Senior Kazakh Horde and the Kyrgyz tribes of Semirechye. A “reasonably successful state,” the Kokand Khanate was “an aggressive, ambitious, expansionist rival to Russia”

Although relatively young, the Kokand Khanate was an ascendant power in the region. Beginning from the second half of the eighteenth century, the rulers of Kokand sponsored increased urbanization, the expansion of irrigation agriculture, and sought contacts with both India and China.

It had a regular army comprised of professional soldiers and conscripts who were trained to use gunpowder weapons, including muskets and siege cannons.

Like Russia, Kokand, too, sought to establish control of the nomads in both the Steppe and Semirechye and employed remarkably similar methods to achieve its goals.

By 1834, the Kokanese army had conquered the northern Kyrgyz and built a chain of fortresses that stretched for 500 versts (533 kilometres) and connected Tokmak in the north and Suzak in south.

Much like the Russian government, the Kokanese settled their fortresses with the sedentary “Sart” population, which supplied the garrisons. The largest fortress of Pishpek, for example, was home to 400 “Sart” households.

Although the increased competition for land among the northern Kyrgyz tribes and the pressure of the Kokand Khanate forced some of the tribes to request Russian protectorate, the Russian authorities remained deeply suspicious of the nomads. The shifting loyalties of the Senior Horde and the Kyrgyz and the presence of the Kyrgyz among the Kokand’s political elites gave the Russians a good reason to doubt their oath of allegiance. Compounding the concerns of the empire’s military was the reported interest of the Qing government in the Kyrgyz (dikokamennaia orda, “the wild rock horde”) of Semirechye and their attempts to “enforce claims to influence in the horde.”

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68 For a discussion of the reasons behind the failure of the expedition, see ibid.
69 “Russia, Khoqand, and the Search for a “Natural” Frontier, 1863–1865,” 172.
73 Ibid., 51.
74 Dzhamgerchinov, 139.
Russia’s commitment to conquering the region pursued several goals at the same time. Of prime importance was the defense of the vulnerable southern frontier against the depredations of the Kokand Khanate and the establishment of the fixed and well-defended state boundary in the Steppe. An ultimate solution lay, in the view of the empire’s military, in the Russia’s movement towards the “natural” frontiers, which at different times meant an imaginary string of lakes between the Syr-Daria and Lake Balkhash, the Kara-Tau mountain range and the River Arys.75 To do so, the military recommended to unify the New Line and the recently formed Syr-Daria Line, enclosing Semirechye within the Russian boundaries and capturing Tashkent.76 Advising St. Petersburg in January 1859, the Governor-General of Western Siberia, Gustav Gasfort, argued that by capturing the Kokanese fortresses of Tokmak, Aulie-Ata, and Suzak and connecting them with the fortress of Verny would give Russia “a firm state boundary” (tverduiu gosudarstvennuiu granitsu).77 This would put a check on the Kokand’s expansion and establish Russian authority over the Kazakhs of the Senior Horde and the Kyrgyz of Semirechye. The Minister of Foreign Affairs, Alexander Gorchakov, had further emphasized the suitability of Semirechye – “fertile, well wooded, and watered by numerous watercourses” – to the “regular colonization, which alone can prepare a future of stability and prosperity for the occupied country.”78

Of equal importance was Semirechye’s proximity to “Kashgaria (Chinese Turkestan), the vast and fertile (obshirnaia i plodonosnaia) province with a population of more than a million, separated from China and the English dominions in India by the Mus-Dag passage…and a relatively small, though mountainous, zone (prostranstvo); bordering with Afghanistan and the Kokanese domains in the west; and finally, adjoining a part of the disputed (sic, somnitel’nye) possessions of the Kirghiz (buruty) in the north,” which made “Kashgar important in a political sense for Russia as well as England.”79

Unlike the conquest of the Steppe, the conquest of Semirechye was swift, though beset by the return of the Kokanese troops, which rebuilt the destroyed fortresses and

75 Alexander Morrison, “Introduction: Killing the Cotton Canard and getting rid of the Great Game: rewriting the Russian conquest of Central Asia, 1814–1895,” Central Asian Survey 33, no. 2 (2014): 155. Svetlana Gorshenina contends that because the Russian boundaries were not fixed, but moved from one “natural frontier” to another, without being legally formalized until the 1870s, they were both “real and fictional” at the same time. Gorshenina, 106.
77 “Zapiska Komandira Otdel’nogo Sibirskogo Korpusa i General Gubernatora Zapadnoi Sibiri o neobkhodimosti zanitiaia verkhov’ev r. Chu i predvaritel’nykh k tomu rasporiazheniiam” 21/01/1859 RGVI A f. 483, op. 1, d. 51, II.4-5 ob. in Morrison, “‘Nechto eroticheskoe’, ‘courir après l’ombre’?–logistical imperatives and the fall of Tashkent, 1859–1865,” 156.
reasserted their rule over the Kyrgyz and the Kazakhs of the Great Horde. The conquest of Semirechye began with the capture of the Kokanese fortress of Taushubek in the north of Semirechye in 1851. Two years later, Russian troops led by the then governor of Orenburg, Vasily Perovsky, seized another Kokanese fortress, the Ak-Mesjid. The establishment of Verny – a fortified garrison town that would anchor the Russian line of defense into a “firm state boundary” – in 1854 made the conquest of the region all but inevitable. Between 1862 and 1864, the Russian forces captured the key Kokand’s fortresses in southern Semirechye, including Pishpek, Tokmak, Naryn, and Kurtka. Such a rapid advance towards the Qing borders alarmed both the Qing and European powers. In defending their new conquest, the imperial administrators invoked their civilizing mission. The rhetoric of Russia’s civilizing influence on the “half-savage” nomads was put to a particularly good effect by the Minister of Foreign Affairs Alexander Gorchakov in his infamous 1864 circular on Russia’s policies in Central Asia:

The position of Russia in Central Asia is that of all civilised States which are brought into contract with half-savage nomad populations possessing no fixed social organization. In such cases, it always happens that the more civilized State is forced, in the interest of the security of its frontier and its commercial relations, to exercise a certain ascendancy over those whom their turbulent and unsettled character make more undesirable neighbours. First, there are raids and acts of pillage to be put down. To put a stop to them, the tribes on the frontier have to be reduced to a state of more or less perfect submission. This result once attained, these tribes take to more peaceful habits, but are in their exposed to the attacks of the more distant tribes.

The State is bound to defend them against their depredations, and to punish those who commit them. Hence the necessity of distant, costly, and periodically recurring expeditions against an enemy, whom his social organization makes it impossible to seize. If, the robbers once punished, the expedition is withdrawn, the lesson is soon forgotten; its withdrawal is put down to weakness. It is a peculiarity of Asiatics to respect nothing but visible and palpable force; the moral force of reason and of the interests of civilization has as yet to hold upon them. The work has then always to be done over again from the beginning.

In order to put a stop to this state of permanent disorder, fortified posts are established in the midst of these hostile tribes, and an influence is brought to bear upon them which reduces them by degrees to a state of more or less forced submission. But soon beyond this second line, other still more distant tribes come in turn to threaten the same dangers and necessitate the same measures of repression. The State thus finds itself
forced to choose one of two alternatives, either to give up this endless labour and to abandon its frontier to perpetual disturbance, rendering all prosperity, all security, all civilization an impossibility, or, on the other hand, to plunge deeper and deeper into barbarous countries, where the difficulties and expenses increase with every step in advance,

Such has been the fate of every country which found itself in a similar position. The United States in America, France in Algeria, Holland in her Colonies, England in India – all have been forced, less by ambition than by imperious necessity, into this onward march, where the greatest difficulty is to know when to stop.  

A somewhat more prosaic reason was cited by historian Vladimir Dolinskii, who declared that Russia “must act decisively or renounce its possessions in Asia... enclosing the state within the boundaries of the early seventeenth century.” Another historian and the former Lieutenant General, Mikhail Terent’ev, put the logic of the conquest in even blunter terms: “Baring (obnazhenie) of the state borders,” he said, “amounts to the renunciation of self-defence (samozashchita), of one’s own political role.”

The Muslim rebellion (1864-1869) in the Ili region (Kashgaria) and the overthrow of the Qing administration brought the security concerns of the Russian military to the fore. On the one hand, the colonial administration of Semirechye was alarmed by the reported flight of the Russia’s Kyrgyz to Ili to join the rebels. On the other hand, the rebellion created the prospect of an independent Muslim state bordering the Russian domains in Turkestan. Certainly, the closure of the Russian consulate in Kuldja and Chuguchag, the assault on the Russian consul Konstantin Pavlinov in Kuldja, the suspension of trade, the influx of refugees, and the increased raiding of trade caravans boded ill for the security of Russian Semirechye and Turkestan in general. To make matters worse, Russian intelligence reports that after capturing Kashgar, Turfan and the Muzart passage, the leader of the rebels, Iakub Bek was going to capture Kuldja and seek

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80 Paine, 116-17.  
81 V. Dolinskii, Ob otnoshenii Rossii k Sredneaziatskim vladeniiam i ob ustroistve kirgizskoi stepe (St Petersburg1865), 8.  
82 Terent’ev, 322.  
85 Marshall, 71.  
86 Gorshenina, 123.
the protection and support of the British and the Ottomans in order to secure independence from the Qing China.87

These concerns led to the Russian occupation of the Muzart passage in 1870. The occupation of the passage – located 250 versts (266 kilometres) east to the Lake Issyk-Kul” was intended to “pacify the Kirghiz on both sides of the border,” and “to disunite (razobshchit’) Kashgar and Kuldja and to create an obstacle to the formation of a strong Muslim state.”88 A year later, in 1871, the Russian troops invaded Kuldja, killing 4,000 locals in the process.89 The Ili region was returned to the Qing China in 1881, a decade after the occupation. By that time, the Semirechye and its nomadic population was firmly under the control of the colonial government. By the beginning of the twentieth century, the government adopted colonization policies aimed at the simultaneous integration of Semirechye into the sovereign space of the empire and exclusion of its native population from the national body, which will be discussed in the second part of this chapter.

Settlement Battalions: The Colonization of Semirechye

The rise of cameralism and the growing ambitions of the Russian empire coupled with the search for the “firm state boundary” led to the conquest of the Steppe and Semirechye, bringing the nomadic Kazakhs and Kyrgyz into the empire’s fold. The merging of the two fortified Lines in the second half of the nineteenth century established the more intrusive state presence in the region and heralded the new intensified efforts of the central government to pacify and “tame” the nomads by turning them into sedentary farmers.

At the same time, the second half of the nineteenth century saw the emergence of the idea of modern citizenship. Judicial reforms, the introduction of new forms of local self-government, and serf emancipation put the empire’s subjects on a more equal footing in relation to the state.90 Not everyone, however, was included into the empire-wide civil order. The introduction of the legal category of inorodtsy in 1822 (“aliens,” literally persons “of different origin”) excluded the native population of the Steppe and Turkestan from the project of grazhdanstvennost’ (“civic consciousness”).91 The reason behind the

87 Ibid., 122-23.
88 TsGA RUz f. i-715, op. 1, d. 44(l), l. 1, 15, 132-133, d. 44, l. 328 in ibid., 125.
89 Ibid., 147.
exclusion was simple; beginning from the nineteenth century, the government began to identify more closely with the Russian nationality.\textsuperscript{92}

Like many of their European counterparts, the Tsarist elites engaged in conscious attempts to restructure the ethnically diverse empire along the national lines. The corollary of this process was that as the empire’s Russian subjects became more equal and integrated into the political life of the state, the native subjects of the empire were increasingly excluded and marginalized. Basing their vision of an ideal – and secure – state on the vision of a mono-ethnic political body, the colonial administrators of Turkestan viewed their native subjects with suspicion. In the view of the empire’s military and administrators, the “alien” makeup of the nomads of Semirechye and their mobility served as a proof of their inherent unreliability. In other words, they “imagined ethnicity to be a key predictor of political behaviour.”\textsuperscript{93}

To correct the potentially dangerous behaviour of the native nomads and to integrate the region more firmly into the empire, the central government began to resettle the “reliable” and “healthy” peasant population from Central Russia in the region. The establishment of the Resettlement Administration in 1896 and the Main Administration of Land Management and Agriculture (hereafter GUZZ) in 1905 signalled the beginning of mass agricultural colonization of Semirechye.

The resettlement of Semirechye achieved two goals at once. First, by resettling and arming peasant colonists, who formed “settler battalions,” the central government ensured the military security of the distant borderland region. Second, by concentrating the ethnically Russian population along the borders of the empire, the government sought to enforce and entrench the political boundaries of the state. Ethnicity thus emerged as the primary marker of state sovereignty.

The implications of these policies for the nomadic population of Semirechye were immediate and thorough going. To make space for colonial settlements, the authorities displaced the growing number of nomads, leading to a steep rise in ethnic hostilities. The ethnicization of conflict and, indeed, the imperial rule itself was among the chief reasons behind the destructive rebellion of 1916, which will be discussed in the next chapter.\textsuperscript{94}

To sum up, this half of the chapter looks at how the ideas of what constituted the “correct” form of governance in the ethnically diverse borderland intersected with the political

\textsuperscript{92} Werth, 170.
\textsuperscript{93} Reynolds, 148.
\textsuperscript{94} I borrowed the concept of the “ethnicization of imperial rule” from Tomohiko Uyama. See Uyama, 7.
currents of imperialism and nationalism in the 19th century to produce a model of governance, which excluded and marginalized the native population of the colony.

**Searching for the Ethnic Core of the Empire**

In common with the other European Empires, by the second half of the nineteenth century, the ideas of what Peter Holquist terms the realm of “social,” became more prevalent amid the empire’s military and administrators. The rise of military science concerned with “population politics,” including statistics, sociology, and ethnography, equipped the state with tools to act on this realm. Along with geographers and topographers, statisticians and ethnographers produced knowledge that was crucial to the government’s efforts at managing and controlling the subject populations. Like space before, peoples became an object that needed to be studied and shaped through active state intervention.

The Polish uprisings of 1831 and 1863 as well as Russia’s defeat in the Crimean War in 1856 further convinced the central government that borderlands harboured the treacherous and dangerous peoples, casting into doubt the loyalty of other ethno-confessional communities. In the wake of the Polish uprising of 1832, Sergei Uvarov, the Minister of Education, introduced the infamous triad of Pravoslavie-Samoderzhavie-Narodnost’ (‘Orthodoxy, Autocracy, Nationality’). The new military science began to classify the peoples of the empire by their degree of reliability (blagonadezhnost’). To increase a given group’s blagonadezhnost’, the empire’s military reasoned, it was necessary to dilute the population of the borderlands with the “Russian element.” By the second half of the nineteenth century, the concept of population as the key resource of the state was firmly entrenched. The 1874 Tsar’s manifesto, introducing universal conscription, emphasized that “the power of states is found not only in the number of forces, but pre-eminentely in their moral and intellectual qualities.” Similarly, textbooks produced for students in military schools in the decades before the First World contended that “man was, is, and remain the primary

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97 Berger and Miller, 321.

98 Remnev, 120.

99 Holquist, 114.
instrument of warfare” and that “an ideal population is a monoethnic population, with one
language.” By extension, the ethnically diverse population with little or no “Russian
element” in its midst was considered unreliable.

The belief in the inherent unreliability of minority groups of population was
formalized with the promulgation in the second quarter of the nineteenth century of the
new Statute on the administration of native Siberians. The so-called Speranskii’s statute
of 1822 – named after its author, the Governor-General of Western Siberia, Mikhail
Speranskii – permanently codified the diminished status and rights of the non-Russian
population of the empire, confining many of them to the role of “congenital and
apparently perennial outsiders.”

The fast expansion of the empire and the growing conviction that the empire’s
minorities were inherently unreliable gave rise to a complementary movement to define
the ethnic core of the empire. The search for this core produced the results that
disappointed many of the Russia’s statesmen. General Nikolai Obruchev, a leading
strategist of the period and the author of the 1885 memorandum “On the Basic Historical
Missions of Russia,” compared Russia to a comet with a poorly developed European
“core” and “a horrifying Asiatic tail, stretching from Tiflis to Vladivostok” that drained
the empire’s resources and moral strength. According to Obruchev, the establishment
of “a living and whole strictly national Russian body” was key to the empire’s health and
flourishing.

Mikhail Veniukov, the military geographer well familiar with Turkestan and
Semirechye, similarly saw in the establishment of a “national Russian body” a solution
to securing the volatile borderlands. To him, natural frontiers afforded little protection as
even the highest mountains could be crossed and the only stable frontier was the one
permanently occupied by “Russian bayonets” and peasant settlers. Colonization alone
could secure “durable peace (prochnyi pokoi) of the new lands.” A secure state – and
the one favoured by “public opinion” – was the one where “the people (narod), as the
ethnographic group” was coterminous (tozhdestvennyi) with “the state, as the political
group.”

100 Holquist, 115.
101 Yuri Slezkine, Arctic mirrors: Russia and the small peoples of the North (Ithaca and London: Cornell University
Press, 1994), 53.
102 Leonid Gorizontov, “The “Great Circle” of Interior Russia: Representations of the Imperial Center in the Nineteenth
103 Marshall, 68.
104 Marshall, 68.
105 Remnev, 119.
106 A. V. Remnev, “U istokov rossiiskoi imperskoi geopolitiki: aziatskie “pogranichnye prostranstva” v issledovaniiakh
Like Veniukov, the Steppe Commission convened to develop the suitable model of governance for the nomadic peoples of the empire’s Asian borderlands came to the conclusion that “the durable and strong binding of these lands to Russia forever and their gradual, organic merging with her can be the only goal of our administration in its Central Asian holdings.” According to Georgii Gins, the head of the Resettlement Administration, “Russian colonization was designed to secure the possibility of the Russian Empire’s “dual expansion” through the growth of the “imperial core” (imperskoe iadro) at the expense of adjacent borderlands.

Securing the Dangerous Frontier: The Settlement of Semirechye

Although, mass colonization of Semirechye did not become possible until the construction of the railway connecting central Russia with Central Asia in the beginning of the twentieth century, the gradual encroachment of the Tsarist empire on the nomadic Steppe was facilitated by the establishment of a legal-administrative system, which broke the nomadic land holdings into separate administrative units, promoted agriculture, and restricted nomadic migrations. The first statute, drafted by Mikhail Speranskii in 1822, effectively transferred the nomads’ land to the state by allocating land on the condition of its permanent “use,” which excluded pasturage. The 1868 “Provisional Statute on Administration in Ural’sk, Turgai, Akmolinsk and Semipalatinsk Oblasts” divided the nomadic lands into two types: winter pastures (zimovki), which remained the property of volost and aul (native village) administration, and summer pastures (letovki), which were marked as state lands “for communal use of the Kirghiz. The designation of letovki as state lands made it easy for the authorities to seize and redistribute these lands among the arriving settlers. Even before settlers arrived, the colonial administration established a special land fund, which could be distributed in future. The 1891 “Statute on Administration of Akmolinsk, Semipalatinsk, Semirechye, Ural’sk, and Turgai Oblasts” further restricted nomadic movement. Migrating outside of one’s uezd required proper attestation and special permission of the local authorities.

Semirechye emerged as a prime site for settlement. By 1867, Semirechye already had 13 Cossack stanitas with a population of 14,000. From 1868 till 1882, 29 new

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107 Remnev, 113.
109 Martin, 35.
110 Ibid, 39.
111 Ibid.
112 Ibid, 40.
settlements were founded in Semirechye with the total population of 15,000 peasants, and 7,000 officials and artisans in towns. Between 1868 and 1869, the military governor of Semirechye, General Alexei Kolpakovsky settled a few peasant families in the Vernyi uezd. When the province was transferred to the new Steppe governor-generalship in 1883, Vernyi was home to 36 peasant settlements with a population of approximately 2,500. The new 1886 Turkestan statute planned the creation of purely Russian cantons “with the development of colonisation” (s razvitiem kolonizatsii). Beginning from 1883, the governor of Syr-Darya oblast, General Nikolai Grodekov established 41 Russian settlements with a population of 16,000 along major roads, describing them as battalions and distributing some firearms. In 1891-1892, when severe famine hit the central and Volga regions of Russia, 1,792 families moved into Turkestan despite the temporary ban on settlement. The steady stream of settlers continued and, in 1897, the first national census found 23,000 mostly illegal settlers living in the Kyrgyz areas of Semirechye.

The creation of the Resettlement Administration in 1896 signalled a new intensive phase of colonization. By time the Resettlement Administration was established, a government survey of the previous year had already earmarked 48% of the area covered as “surplus” and thus available for resettlement. The task of colonizing Semirechye acquired a new sense of urgency by the end of the nineteenth and the beginning of the twentieth centuries.

A series of events, including the Kyrgyz participation in the 1876 uprising of Abd al-Rahman Aftabachi and the Andizhan uprising in 1898 attracted the interest of the oblast’ military administration. When in 1895, the Minister of War Piotr Vannovskii inquired with the oblast’s governors about the suitability of native militias for reconnaissance work, the special commission at the Ferghana oblast army headquarters, responded that Muslim militias should not be used in wars with coreligionists. The commission also drew Vannovskii’s attention to the fact that Kyrgyz and Kazakhs rebelled against Russia in the past and that they maintained ties with their co-ethnics in China. The commission’s members warned Vannovskii against “awaking the sleeping

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115 Nishiyama, 68.
116 Ibid.
militant tribe,” which constituted “a single Mongolian tribe and was once the core of large armies of Chingis Khan and Tamerlane.”

Intriguingly, another man fearful of the “yellow peril” was no other than Alexei Kuropatkin, appointed to the post of Governor General of Turkestan in 1916 to suppress the native rebellion. In case of a conflict with China, Kuropatkin reasoned, only the local Dungans would provide assistance to Russia. Other groups, including the Kyrgyz and Taranchi, would submit to the Chinese. Furthermore, the political influence of the Chinese Kyrgyz on Russia’s Kyrgyz could be most detrimental in the event of an invasion of Russian Turkestan.

Later expeditions to the Kyrgyz living on both sides of the border confirmed the suspicions of the colonial administrators. The trip of the Muslim officer Ravil Syrtlanov in 1909 to the Kyrgyz of China, of whom he counted 236,000 in the areas he visited, revealed that the Kyrgyz remained highly autonomous. Norms of Chinese administration did not apply to them, they were exempt from military service, and they skilfully played on the Chinese fears of Russia to extract privileges for themselves. From this, Syrtlanov concluded that the Kyrgyz held both the Chinese and Russian authorities in contempt and that in case of a Russo-Chinese conflict, the Kyrgyz would side with the likely victor and if Russia lost, they would attack the Russian rear and hamper cavalry reconnaissance.

In 1910, a year after Syrtlanov’s visit of the Chinese Kyrgyz, Captain Dmitrii Fedorov of the General Staff also identified the Kyrgyz as a politically unreliable group. In his view, the retention by the Kyrgyz of a strong and culturally impenetrable clan structure made them a potential threat. He advocated the colonization of Semirechye, whose composition of the population he found “unfavourable…from a military point of view, since “the Russian element comprised less than 50%.” Fedorov recommended colonizing Semirechye with “a Russian element” and suggested that officials pursue “an intensified colonization of the region by the Russian ethnicity, even if at the expense of the natives.”

In practice, the colonization in Semirechye had been underway for some time. A settlement region was formed in Semirechye in 1905. By 1910 the Russian population of Semirechye stood at 188,016, or 16% of the total population of Semirechye.

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118 Uyama Tomohiko, A Particularist Empire: The Russian Policies of Christianization and Military Conscription in Central Asia (na, 2007), 45.
119 Marshall, 96.
120 Ibid, 84-85.
121 Ibid, 184.
122 Holquist, 120.
123 Ibid.
124 Morrison, 394.
first decades of the twentieth century, Semirechye experienced the largest growth of Slavic population in Turkestan. By 1911, over 150,000 Slavic farmers settled among nearly one million Turkic nomads. Over 80,000 of them had settled in the Pishpek and Przhevalsk uezdy, among an estimated 325,000 Kyrgyz. Nowhere else in Turkestan, as Daniel Brower notes, did Europeans settle in rural areas in such large numbers.125

Table 1. Colonization in Semirechye (1884-1895).

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Settlements in 1884</th>
<th>Settlements in 1895</th>
<th>Cossacks in 1896</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>No.</td>
<td>Pop. (A)</td>
<td>No.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Vernyi</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>3,092</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Kopal</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>1,277</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sergiopol' (Lepsinsk)</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>6,494</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Jarkent</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Tokmak (Pishpek)</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>4,176</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Issik-Kol (Przhevalsk)</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>4,118</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>31</td>
<td>19,157</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Galuzo, “Agrarnye otnoshneniya”, p.206

Lest the Kyrgyz raid the Russian settlements, the authorities supplied the colonists with rifles. That the central government considered Semirechye as simultaneously critical to the security of the colonial state and exposed to potential hostility of the native population is best demonstrated by the fact that of 31,401 rifles distributed to the Russian settlers in Turkestan, roughly half – 15,282 rifles were concentrated in Semirechye.126

Like in the Steppe, the Statutes governing Semirechye facilitated the seizures of the nomads’ lands. The legislative act stipulating the rights of settlers to the colony’s lands was the article “On the use and ownership” of the 1868 temporary Statute. According to the article, settlers could rent the lands designated as winter pastures from

the local population. Summer pastures were open to settlement at the discretion of the administration and did not entail compensation to the native owners of the pastures. But the difference between the two kinds of pastures was often unclear; furthermore, the article 270 of the same Statute put the land occupied by nomads into a broad category of lands under “communal use”, which included winter quarters, summer pastures, and even cultivated plots. In spite of the regulations, the Resettlement Administration did not discriminate between the different kinds of pastures or fields and confiscated lands that they deemed most suitable for new settlements.

The presumably “scientific norms” employed by the Resettlement Administration to identify “unoccupied lands” were equally dubious. According to the norms developed by the 1896 Shcherbina Comission on the Steppe Region, nomads were entitled to 30 hectares of land, and farmers – to 6 hectares. Despite the seeming rationality of the mechanism of allocating land to settlers, these norms, according to Palen, proved useless and harmful. While the Steppe region consisted of flat lands with little water, where cultivation was principally of winter wheat on unirrigated lands, Semirechye boasted a varied terrain of valleys and mountains with plentiful water resources and milder climate, which allowed for irrigated agriculture and cultivation of high value cash crops such as peaches and cotton. The lands that the resettlement authorities declared as “excess” were in fact already occupied, irrigated, and cultivated by the former nomads. As the head of a Senatorial investigative commission, Konstantin Palen aptly observed, the resettlement officials’ system of norms “serves, as it were, as a title for the expropriation of private land rights, without granting to the population those guarantees, which by the law of expropriation it should enjoy.”

The fragility of the nomads’ claim to land was further revealed in the revised Steppe Statute of 1891, under which Semirechye was governed, even after it was returned to the Turkestan governor-generalship in 1897. The article 120 of the statute stated that “the land, occupied by nomads, remains in indefinite collective use of the nomads, on the basis of custom and the rules of this statute,” but “land, which appears to be surplus to

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127 On the technocratic ideology of the Resettlement Administration, see Peter Holquist, “”In Accord with State Interests and the People's Wishes”: The Technocratic Ideology of Imperial Russia's Resettlement Administration,” Slavic Review 69, no. 1 (2010).
129 Ibid, 19.
130 Holquist, “”In Accord with State Interests and the People's Wishes”: The Technocratic Ideology of Imperial Russia's Resettlement Administration,” 163-64.
requirements for the nomads, will come under the direction of the Ministry of State Properties.”\textsuperscript{131}

In the space of a few years, the newly arrived settlers built a chain of villages along the road from Tashkent to Verny. “From Karabalty (the city of Kara-Balta in today’s Kyrgyzstan) to Pishpek and further, to Konstaninovka, for 75 \textit{verst} (an old Russian unit of measurement, roughly equal to kilometre), the post stations are connected to each other by the continuous line of settlers’ villages; the entire Pishpek uezd is covered by a mass of villages” reported the native engineer Mukhamedzhan Tynyshpaev in 1910.\textsuperscript{132} These villages “fused into this one immense uninterrupted street through which ran the postal road.”\textsuperscript{133} The majority of these settlements were illegal and were built on the lands leased or simply seized from the Kyrgyz in breach of the legal norms established by the colonial regime itself. The military governor of the Semirechye oblast Aleksei Alekseev in his report to Nicholas II noted that “the Semirechye resettlement administration was forced, in the course of three years, to settle up to 40,000 unauthorized settlers primarily in Pishpek, Verny, and Przhevalsk uezds.”\textsuperscript{134} What governor Alekseev cryptically described as “valuable lands” were arable agricultural lands in the valleys. Unfortunately for the Kyrgyz, even the “poor quality” compensation lands they received were often inaccessible to them because Russian settlements cut through the traditional nomadic routes. The Kyrgyz found themselves in an impossible situation - they were deprived of their farming lands where they usually stationed for winter, and they lost access to their mountain pastures where they grazed their herds in summers. Despite many pleas of the native nomads and vocal concerns of some colonial administrators the expansion of the Slavic farmlands continued at the expense of the surrounding native population.

In attempt to secure their livelihoods, some of the Kyrgyz bargained with the colonial administration over their right to acquire land as settled farmers. For many of the Kyrgyz petitioners the sedentary status was the only opportunity to acquire legal rights to their land, and to escape the whims and abuses of clan elders seeking to keep clan property under their control. The largest number of nomads requesting settled status was found in Pishpek uezd, where the Russian settlement had developed most extensively for three

\textsuperscript{131} Morrison, ““Sowing the Seed of National Strife in This Alien Region”: The Pahlen Report and Pereselenie in Turkestan, 1908–1910,” 20.  
\textsuperscript{133} Paul Nazaroff, \textit{Hunted Through Central Asia} (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2002), 149.  
decades before the uprising. In 1906-1907 alone, 4,200 households (kibitkd) in Pishpek petitioned for their own land title. The majority of these requests were turned by the colonial administration, which viewed land ownership the prerogative of Slavic peasants, and argued that the Kyrgyz remained essentially nomads and had no claim to farm land and village organization. Even when the permission to settle was granted, the Resettlement Administration could legally claim the “excess” lands of the settling Kyrgyz. Depending on their arability, these “excess” lands cut through fields and pastures, thus leaving the Kyrgyz with scattered small plots of land, making proper farming impossible.135

In 1910, the Kyrgyz of the Vostochno-Sokulukskiaia volost of the Pishpek uezd officially transferred to sedentary farming, prompting the uezd authorities to seize 13,000 dessiatines of “unoccupied land” from them. That the lands were properly occupied, however, was documented by the earlier 1907 land commission, which described the land as “watered by blood and sweat of the Kirghiz” and listed “over two thousand winter camps, with good houses and gardens, bee hives, mills, clover fields, ancestral tombs, and sometimes mosques.”136 By 1914, the nomads of Semirechye lost 4,193,520 dessiatines of agricultural land.137

The Kyrgyz pastoral economy was in disarray and as the influx of settlers intensified so did the tensions between the two communities. Nomads and settlers viewed each other with suspicion. For settlers, the Kyrgyz were nothing but a nuisance and rivals in competition for land. The authorized land allotments were inadequate to accommodate the swelling numbers of new settlers and more land was seized from the Kyrgyz. Describing themselves as “the tsar’s people” – the faithful Orthodox subjects who provided soldiers - the settlers expressed a sense of entitlement to the land.138 With this conviction, which often proved true, they were inclined to squat illegally where no legal provision could be obtained. To placate officials in Petrograd, the colonial administration often turned a blind eye on this land theft and, over time, many of the illegal settlements acquired legal entitlements on the lands they occupied.

To lend weight to their demands, European settlers often descended to violence. In one of the more telling episodes, a group of illegal settlers armed with rifles and axes attacked Kazakhs whose lands they sought for settlement.139

135 Iusup Abdrakhmanov, Izbrannye trudy (Bishkek: Sham, 2001), 188-246.
136 Usenbaev, 33.
139 Nishiyama, 72.
With no room for legal redress, some nomads turned to the traditional ways of restoring justice by rustling cattle and organizing raids against Russian settlements. In his 1909 report on Turkestan, the newly appointed governor general Alexander Samsonov, stated that: “Lately, there were several incidents of bloody clashes between the Kyrgyz and Russian settlers. Therefore, we cannot call the Semirechie oblast with its significant Kyrgyz population, a region where calm is assured.”

Conclusion

This chapter traced the conquest of the pastoralist Steppe and Semirechie to the emergence of the conception of territorial sovereignty – the idea that states constitute bounded political spaces and that state boundaries form the protective fence. By highlighting rationale of the conquest of Steppe and Semirechie by the Russian empire, this chapter demonstrated how the idea of natural geographic markers separating one state from another legitimated the Russia’s subjugation of peoples that stood in the way of the Russian search for “firm state boundaries.”

As the next chapter will show, the attempts of the Tsarist military and administrators to increase the security of the new borderland by settling the colony with settlers from the ethnic “core” of the empire had triggered the gravest crisis of colonial rule in the region. In what perhaps was the greatest irony of the Russian colonization of Semirechie, the resettlement of vast numbers of Russian peasants in the region made it less, not more, secure. For several weeks in August, the rebellious Kyrgyz ravaged through the Russian settlements, pillaging and killing their inhabitants. The colonization of Semirechie had furthermore caused the mass mobilization of the native population, engendering the worst fears of the imperial military and administrators.

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140 RGIA f. 1396, op. 1, d. 8, k. 40, retrieved from Boris Mukhlynin, “История села Белоvodskoe,” http://belovodskoe-muh.ucoz.ru/publ/moi_ocherki/vosstanie_1916_goda_v_chujskoj_doline_chast_6_aja/2-1-0-203
When the Natives Went to War: The Uprising of 1916 in Semirechye

In August 1916, the native nomads of Semirechye rose in a popular rebellion that for weeks reduced the colonial presence in the region to several beleaguered towns and settlements. Although colonial authority was restored already in September 1916, the fragile balance between the settlers and the native population was profoundly shaken. The loss of life on both sides and the scale of the uprising, which claimed over 3,000 victims in the settler society, and up to 150,000 native nomads, or 42% of the ethnic Kyrgyz population of Semirechye, cast a critical reflection on the nearly seven decades of Russian rule. Born of the dislocation wrought on the region by the colonial rule and the World War I, the rebellion also attested to the profound transformation of the region.

By the beginning of the twentieth century, this transformation was obvious. The “geographical physiognomy” of Semirechye, which in the words of the colony’s first governor-general, stood the region apart from the rest of the empire, started to look more familiar to visitors from European Russia. Grain fields ripened where the nomadic herds previously grazed and a chain of Russian settlements stretched for 75 versts in an uninterrupted line connecting Verny, Pishpek, and Przhevalsk. The region’s ethnic “physiognomy,” too, was rapidly changing as three in five Russian colonists arriving in the last decade of the autocratic empire’s existence headed to Semirechye. Their influx, facilitated by the establishment of the Resettlement Administration in 1896, was in large part driven by the imperial state’s pursuit of security. The ethnic diversity of the colony and the “alien” faith of its population were utterly suspect in the eyes of the authorities.

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2 Thanks to the records kept by the colonial administration we know the exact number of the Russian victims. How many Kyrgyz were killed remains, however unknown; although some of the punitive expeditions reported on the number of “rebels” – including the non-combatant population – they killed, the information is patchy at best. It is possible to come to a rough estimate of the decline in the nomadic population by comparing the population statistics of the 1897 and 1925 censuses. The resulting number of 100-150,000 Kyrgyz (excluding Kazakhs) is an aggregate inclusive of the victims of violence and related starvation and disease. See G. Krongardt, "Demograficheskie aspekti istorii vosstanii 1916 goda v Kyrghyztane " in Vosstanie 1916 goda v Kyrghyztane (sbornik materialov nauchnoi konferentsi, povishshchennoi 75-letiiu vosstanija), ed. V. Ploskikh and J. Junushaliev (Bishkek: Ilim, 1993), 49-53.

3 Brower, 22.

The solution to this security conundrum was simple; where the loyalty of the native population was under question, the Russia’s “core” Slavic people were seen as the backbone of the Russian state. By settling the colonies with Russian peasants the government sought to project its power over the distant frontier. To this end, it funnelled thousands of new colonists into the region.

It was this herculean joint effort of the government and its Slavic subjects that the 75 versts of peasant huts and grain fields in the southern Semirechye attested to. Yet, it was the very same effort that unsettled the region. The more settlers the colony absorbed, the more tense the relationship between the colonists and the native nomads grew. The uprising of the latter – predicted by many of the empire’s own colonial administrators – came to be seen by most contemporary observers as an expected, if particularly violent, continuation of the entrenched animosities. They located the roots of this age-old hatred in the dispossession of the native farmers and pastoralists and the occupation of their lands by the Russian settlers. A fine example of such an argument can be found in a 1917 report by the Military Governor of Semirechye, Alexei Alekseev: “the seizure of some 200, 000 dessiatines of land over the past 10 years,” he argued, “ought to be regarded as [among] the chief reasons of the Kyrgyz discontent that led to an open rebellion.”

To a great degree, this view of the origins of the uprising in the enmity engendered by the nomads’ growing destitution transposed onto the social fabric of the ethnically segregated colonial society holds true to this day. An assessment of the uprising that I present in this chapter does not aim to refute this argument but rather to problematize and historicize it. I aim to place the uprising within the context of the World War I. I argue in particular that the native population experienced the economic dislocation on a scale comparable to the communities directly affected by the war. The strains of the war further reified the socio-economic arrangements within the colonial society making ethnic ties more salient and more important to group survival. Equally importantly, I see in the experiences of communal violence perpetrated and suffered by the native population of Semirechye the constitution of ethnicity and ethnic identity as the basis for mobilization.


Paraphrasing Patrick Wolfe, ethnicity of the rebels was made in the targeting and being targeted.\(^7\)

It is these experiences of victimization and practices of ethnic mobilization that I link to the violence of the uprising. I argue that the lethality of the uprising lay in the intersection of the total mobilization and the fear of destruction in the hands of the “enemy” group. Put simply, both parties to the conflict were driven in their actions by what they saw as a threat to their livelihoods and indeed their lives. The matter of perception is critical here. Although the threat posed by groups and individuals was often exaggerated, perceptions of the threat were real. That this threat was embodied by the aggregate group – rather than certain individuals – was the chief reason behind the indiscriminate targeting of the non-combatant, civilian population by both the rebels and the colonists.

Indiscriminate, gender and age blind, mass murder remains one of the more contentious issues in any study of the uprising. The scope and the depth of violence led many to conclude that the rebellion “was in a real sense a settling of accounts with colonists.”\(^8\) Yet, racial hatred alone fails to account for the highly systematized nature of violence. Military intelligence gathered during the uprising and the depositions of the native rebels suggest that the rebellion was not simply a crime of passion, but a premeditated assault on the settler communities. We therefore need to think of violence in broad social terms instead of viewing it as an extension of ethnic hatred. I argue that violence employed by the rebels was highly instrumental; the rebels sought to reclaim access to resources, primarily land, and assert political agency by destroying European settlements and killing and expelling the colonists.\(^9\) I also contend that, insofar as the rebels sought to destroy “all the Russians” their actions constituted ethnic cleansing.\(^10\)

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\(^7\) The original quote is as follows: “...a race cannot be taken as given. It is made in the targeting.” Patrick Wolfe, “Settler Colonialism and the Elimination of the Native,” *Journal of Genocide Research* 8, no. 4 (2006): 387-409, 388.

\(^8\) Brower, 161.

\(^9\) Indeed, some archival documents suggest that the rebels in Jizak, Semirechye, and other areas of Central Asia, sought to create a native state. In Jizak, for example, “the natives, unwilling to give workers, stopped obeying the Russian authorities and form of government (gosudarstveni stroi), separated from the Russian state, and declared the Dzhizak uezd an independent Dzhizak khanate.” “Ochet o sostoianii Turkestanskoj eparkhii za 1916 g. episkopa Turkestanskogo i Tashkentskogo Imkentitia Sviateishemu Sinodu, 14 iiulia 1917 g.” in Vostanie 1916 goda v Turkestane: dokumental'nye svidetel'stva obshchei tragedii (Moscow: Marjani, 2016), 288. Similarly, the Kyrgyz of Semirechye “having decided that Russia was weakened by the war, that Semirechye was devoid of defence, and that time has come to use the ruin to destroy the Russian rule in the region and to create a new Kirghiz khanate.” “Ochet o sostoianii Turkestanskoj eparkhii za 1916 g. episkopa Turkestanskogo i Tashkentskogo Imkentitia Sviateishemu Sinodu, 14 iiulia 1917 g.” in Vostanie 1916 goda v Turkestane: dokumental'nye svidetel'stva obshchei tragedii (Moscow: Marjani, 2016), 288. Similarly, the Kyrgyz of Semirechye “having decided that Russia was weakened by the war, that Semirechye was devoid of defence, and that time has come to use the ruin to destroy the Russian rule in the region and to create a new Kirghiz khanate.” “Ochet o sostoianii Turkestanskoj eparkhii za 1916 g. episkopa Turkestanskogo i Tashkentskogo Imkentitia Sviateishemu Sinodu, 14 iiulia 1917 g.” in Vostanie 1916 goda v Turkestane: dokumental'nye svidetel'stva obshchei tragedii (Moscow: Marjani, 2016), 288. Similarly, the Kyrgyz of Semirechye “having decided that Russia was weakened by the war, that Semirechye was devoid of defence, and that time has come to use the ruin to destroy the Russian rule in the region and to create a new Kirghiz khanate.” “Ochet o sostoianii Turkestanskoj eparkhii za 1916 g. episkopa Turkestanskogo i Tashkentskogo Imkentitia Sviateishemu Sinodu, 14 iiulia 1917 g.” in Vostanie 1916 goda v Turkestane: dokumental'nye svidetel'stva obshchei tragedii (Moscow: Marjani, 2016), 288.

\(^10\) In arguing that the Kyrgyz (and to a certain extent, Kazakh) rebels in Semirechye were intent on ethnically cleansing the colonists, I draw on the growing body of research into “subaltern genocide” – “genocides from below where subject populations seek the extermination of their oppressors.” Donald Bloxham and A Dirk Moses, eds., *The Oxford handbook of genocide studies* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2010), 315. Adopting the grassroots perspective
Similarly to the violence unleashed by the rebels against the government and the colonists, the violence wrought by the authorities and the settlers on the rebels and the native population at large had a purpose. I discern two stages – and two sets of intertwining goals – in the campaign of ethnic cleansing conducted by the authorities in response to the rebellion. I argue that the first stage of the violent suppression of the rebellion was a form of ethnic cleansing; rather than punishing the rebellious “elements” of the native population as was the case in the oasis areas of Turkestan, with the exception of the Jizak uezd, the punitive expeditions consisting of government forces and settler militias targeted the entire native population of Semirechy for summary liquidation. The second stage, however, sought not so much the wholesale destruction of the nomadic population as its elimination from the areas “where Russian blood was spilt” through relocation to the geographically isolated and resource poor Naryn uezd. 

This is not to argue that the two stages were in disagreement with each other. On the contrary, the forced removal of Semirechy’s pastoralists augmented and institutionalized the outcome of the ethnic cleansing of the native population, the destruction of property, and the seizure of native land. Thus, both should properly be seen as an integral – if particularly violent – component of the imperial project of nation and state-building in the context of the settler colony. 

The goal of the state-sponsored campaign of cleansing and displacement of the indigenous population was the creation of Russian Semirechy in both the territorial and ethnic sense.

To understand why the rebellion led to radical forms of repression or, put simply, to understand why the structural violence of colonial rule crystallized into a concerted effort by the settler society and the authorities to kill and drive off the nomads, I draw on the works of Ronald Suny, Mark Levene and others to argue that the ethnic cleansing of the native population by the government and the colonists in Semirechy was the result of a process that allowed us to disavow the state as the only possible perpetrator of genocide. Instead, as the studies of the “genocides by the oppressed” show, genocidal actions can be carried out by non-state actors and are often “highly fragmented, confederational and far from bureaucratic” in nature. Ibid., 319. For a survey of theories of subaltern genocide, see “Subaltern Genocide in Theory and Practice” in Nicholas A Robins and Adam Jones, eds., Genocides by the oppressed: subaltern genocide in theory and practice (Bloomington and Indianapolis: Indiana University Press, 2009), 1-24. For the case studies of subaltern genocide in the colonial context, see Nicholas A Robins, Native insurgencies and the genocidal impulse in the Americas (Bloomington and Indianapolis: Indiana University Press, 2005).

In my analysis of the “eliminatory” stage of the rebellion’s suppression I draw on Patrick Wolfe’s argument that “settler colonialism is inherently eliminatory” and that “the primary motive for elimination is not race (or religion, ethnicity, grade of civilization, etc.) but access to territory.” Wolfe, 387-88.

of heightened anxieties about the threat posed by the rebellious native population to the sovereignty of the state defined both in terms of the territory and the settler population of the colony.\textsuperscript{13} To approach the uprising from the rebels’ perspective and to examine why the rebels resorted to extreme violence and terror in their resistance to the colonial authorities, I build on Donald Horowitz’s suggestion that deadly ethnic violence involves “an amalgam of passion and calculation”.\textsuperscript{14} What unites both of these approaches is their suggestion that fear – and the concomitant anticipation of violence from the targeted group – provides sufficient motivations for the perpetrator to target this group for murder.\textsuperscript{15}

To provide a comprehensive account of the rebellion, its origins, course, and aftermath, I examine both the structural conditions and the contingent factors whose convergence set in motion the chain of events leading to the popular rebellion. I open the discussion of the uprising with an analysis of the socio-economic crisis brought about by the war. I then continue with the chronological account of the uprising paying particular attention to the phases in its development and expansion. I conclude the chapter with the analysis of Kuropatkin’s plan of the territorial division of the European and native population.

I draw on police reports, military correspondence, and depositions of witnesses and native participants of the uprising. To counteract potential bias in my analysis I examine several different accounts of the same events as well as native testimonies and oral histories. Two of my key native “witnesses” are the Russian-educated Kazakh administrator Mukhamedzhan Tynyshpaev and the Kyrgyz administrator of traditional elite \textit{manap} background Belek Soltonoev, a pioneering native historian and participant in the uprising.\textsuperscript{16}

\textsuperscript{13} Mark Levene’s contention that genocidal behaviour of imperial states at the turn of the twentieth century emerged as the result of “imperial anxieties” that their remote regions, their frontiers, would be used by “other powers…as potential launching pads from which to strike at the empire’s very own heartland” echoes Ronald Suny’s suggestion that the genocidal treatment of the Armenian population in the Ottoman empire was the result of the perceived “mortal danger” that the presumably “rebellious and seditious” Armenian population posed to the state’s survival. Mark Levene, \textit{Genocide in the Age of the Nation State: Volume 2: The Rise of the West and Coming Genocide} (London, New York: IB Tauris, 2005), 278; Ronald Grigor Suny, \textit{“They Can Live in the Desert But Nowhere Else”: A History of the Armenian Genocide} (Princeton and Oxford: Princeton University Press, 2015), XII.
\textsuperscript{14} Donald L Horowitz, \textit{The deadly ethnic riot} (Berkeley, Los Angeles, London: University of California Press, 2001), 32.
\textsuperscript{15} Suny employs the notion of “affective dispositions,” that is “deep sentiments like resentment, fear, anger, and hatred,” to uncover “the mental universe” of the participants in the genocide. Suny, 134. Horowitz, too, argues that “sheer physical fear may move those who are frightened to take violent action” and that “anticipated physical assaults, as perhaps the strongest instigation, would give rise to the strongest response, also likely to be physical, such as riot behaviour.” He also suggests that “the recurrent fear of being swallowed by those who are more adept at manipulating the external environment points to the utter helplessness underpinning the violence of those who feel backward.” Horowitz, 151-55, 82.
\textsuperscript{16} Belek Soltonoev can be credited as the author of the first book of Kyrgyz history written by a native historian in the modern tradition of history writing. Born in 1878, Soltonoev was educated in a Russo-native school in Karakol and an agricultural college in Pishpek. At the time of the uprising, Soltonoev was a volost head in the colonial administration.
The Storm Gathers

To canvass the discussion of the uprising and to set the background I propose to examine the social and economic disruptions caused to the colony by the war-time policies of the metropole.\(^\text{17}\) While the war affected everyone in Turkestan the regional and ethnic inequalities may explain the varying dynamics of the rebellion in the settled and nomadic areas of the region. Although the war corroded the native economy in general some native communities fared worse than the others. As such, burdens of the war were distributed unevenly between the settler and the native population and within the native society itself. The seizure of agricultural land in the nomadic areas made native pastoralists more vulnerable to the privations of the war. Furthermore, the ethnic division of labour – where nomads were dependent on settlers for grain – put the nomads in a particularly precarious position.

As one of the key grain-producing areas and a designated settlement area Semirechye attracted more settlers than any other oblast of Turkestan. By 1911, over 150,000 Russian farmers settled among nearly one million nomads. Over 80,000 of them settled in the Pishpek and Przhevalsk uezds, among an estimated 325,000 Kyrgyz.\(^\text{18}\) By 1916, the Russian settlers who made up less than a quarter of the Semirechye’s total population owned more than two thirds of the oblast’s land (23.8% and 67.3% respectively).\(^\text{19}\) Arable land – the most precious resource in the water poor region – was seized in quantities that made the pastoralist economy a doomed and quixotic enterprise. The livestock population that the nomads depended on for sustenance quickly dwindled. Unable to take up farming because agricultural land was diverted to colonists, or raise enough animals to trade for grain, the native nomadic population fell by 8-9% in the decade before the war, between 1902 and 1913.\(^\text{20}\)

The beginning of the war amplified the economic distress suffered by the native pastoralists. In an effort to raise war revenue the central government sought to draw on the human and material resources of the colony. This was accomplished through imposing

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\(^{17}\) For the discussion of how the war-time economic policies affected the economy of Turkestan see Marco Buttino, “Economic Relations Between Russia and Turkestan, 1914-1918, or How to Start a Famine,” in Transforming Peasants: Society, State and the Peasantry, 1861–1930 (Houndmills, Basingstoke: MacMillan Press, 1998), 194-209.

\(^{18}\) Iu. Abdrakhmanov, Vosstanie kirgiz v 1916 godu (Frunze: Kirgosizdat, 1933), 19-20.

direct and indirect taxation, requisitioning, and extracting raw materials produced by forced native labour. Between 1913 and 1915, the fiscal revenues in Turkestan grew by 66%.\textsuperscript{21} Land tax more than doubled as did the trade tax.\textsuperscript{22} New taxes were introduced, including a tax on exemption from military service of 1 ruble 84 kopeks per household.\textsuperscript{23}

Even more damaging to the native households were the frequent requisitions and forced donations. In 1914 alone, a million sheep were requisitioned from the nomads of Syr-Darya and Semirechye.\textsuperscript{24} The cattle and animal products supplied by the nomads of Semirechye the same year brought the metropole nearly 34 million rubles.\textsuperscript{25} Turkestan’s quantifiable contribution to the war effort amounted to: 40,899,244 poods of cotton; 38,004 square arshins of felt cloth; 3,109,999 poods of cottonseed oil; 229,000 poods of soap; 300,000 poods of meat; 473,928 poods of fish, 50,000 of castor; 70,000 horses, 12,797 camels, 270 carriages, 13,441 yurts; and, finally 2,400,000 rubles.\textsuperscript{26} It is safe to assume that while cotton came from the settled areas of the region, horses, camels, yurts, and cloth were sourced from the nomads. The nomads’ wool, animals, and yurts clothed, fed, and sheltered the empire’s soldiers.

While less quantifiable – and often unreported and unaccounted for – the contribution of the nomadic population to the war effort in the form of numerous and arbitrary donations was equally considerable. According to a group of native petitioners, the Kyrgyz of the Przhevalsk uezd had donated large sums of money on at least five separate occasions.\textsuperscript{27} Other, indirect, forms of taxation ranged from fixed prices on raw materials produced by the native population, such as opium, to the imposition of labour duty or forced monetary compensation of settlers in lieu of free labour.\textsuperscript{28}

Meanwhile, prices on staple foods increased many times. The arrival of 70,000 refugees and 200,000 prisoners of war by spring 1916 had further stretched the colony’s resources and upset the cycle of production and consumption; there were now more people to feed and fewer people to produce the food.\textsuperscript{29} The drought hit the main grain-
producing oblast of Syr-Daria driving the prices even higher. In 1916, the deficit of grain in Semirechye spiked to 22 million poods.\(^{30}\) As the food crisis loomed larger – discouraging colonists from selling grain – the frequent requisitions left the nomads with even fewer animals to sell to buy grain.

The war had in effect deepened the existing socio-economic cleavages between the ethnic groups and led to the increased salience of ethnicity. The association between ethnicity and access to resources had further eroded inter-ethnic ties and facilitated ethnic mobilization. The first incidents of ethnic conflict occurred in the sedentary areas of Turkestan, where the relationship of reverse dependency had prompted ethnic riots targeted at the native population whose perceived economic advantage became a rallying call for mobilization. Of particular interest to me is the series of food riots in the early months of 1916 in which the Russian population of the cities mobilized against the native traders. Started by the wives of the drafted Russian soldiers these riots reveal an emerging pattern of ethnic stratification and conflict.

The European population of the sedentary areas of Turkestan was mainly concentrated in cities and towns. The arid climate and the high population density of the Ferghana valley precluded the mass agricultural settlement of the kind found in Semirechye. At the same time, the demand for cotton produced in the oasis areas of the colony made Turkestan dependent on grain from European Russia.\(^{31}\) In more peaceful times, grain from the mainland was exchanged for cotton maintaining the colony’s balance of trade and feeding its people. The war upset this fragile balance as grain was diverted to serve the growing needs of the army. Very soon, grain shortages made themselves felt in the grain-poor areas of Turkestan setting off an unprecedented growth in prices that primarily affected the European population of the cities. To rein in the inflation, the government introduced set prices on staple foods and threatened to fine the offenders.

The artificially low prices and the continuing food shortages, however, discouraged the native farmers from selling their produce at the city markets. The policies adopted by the colonial authorities to protect the European residents of Tashkent backfired; facing prohibitive fines, the majority of traders simply shut their stalls, while the remaining traders continued to sell at the market prices. The deficit and the high prices particularly affected soldatki, the wives and widows of Russian soldiers at the front. In

\(^{30}\) Ibid, 102.

\(^{31}\) By 1913, cotton occupied 20% of irrigated land in Turkestan, in Ferghana oblast, cotton was planted on 36-38\% of the sown area on the eve of the 1917 revolution. Becker, “Russia’s Central Asian Empire 1885-1917?,” 242.
the conditions of the ethnically segregated colony, the precarious position of the soldatki, who were forced to survive on meagre pensions and allowances, soon translated into popular hostility towards the native population of the city. The persistent rumours of mounds of food concealed in the native quarters of Tashkent erupted into a series of violent pogroms against the native traders across the region.

The first incident of a so-called “women’s riot” (babii bunt) took place in Tashkent on the last day of February, 1916. Spurred on by rumours of potato hoarding by the native traders a group of women marched towards one of the markets. By the time the women reached the market they were joined by other angry European Tashkenters who converged on the market, looting stalls and beating the native traders. In mere minutes the market was devastated. As word of the pogrom travelled, crowds of European residents descended on six other markets in the city. The next day, the riots spread to still more markets. Fearing an escalation of disturbances, the authorities attempted to arrest a few of the women-leaders, but were rebuffed by the Russian factory workers and railway employees, who threatened a general strike if the women were not released and took hand grenades to a protest in defence of the women.

Similar—although considerably smaller—riots ravaged the markets of Cherniaev, Krivosheino, and Perovsk days after the first babii bunt in Tashkent. Fire was deliberately set alight in several market rows in the town of Aulie-Ata in Syr-Darya oblast. The authorities downplayed the extent of the damage and few, if any, compensations were paid. The ramifications of the food riots were, however, significant. Firstly, the ethnically targeted nature of the riots suggested a sharp rise in the settlers’ hostility towards the native population at large. Secondly, the leniency of the authorities in dealing with the protesters cemented the colonists’ belief that food could be extracted from the native population by force. Finally, the riots sent a signal to the native population that the administration protected the interests of European colonists at the expense of the native society.

32 Buttino, Revoliutsiia naoborot: Sredniaia Azia mezhdu padeniem tsarskoi imperii i obrazovaniem SSSR.
33 For a comprehensive account of the 1916 “women’s riot” in Tashkent and a discussion of changing gender relations in colonial society during the war, see Jeff Sahadeo, Russian Colonial Society in Tashkent, 1865-1923 (Bloomington and Indianapolis: Indiana University Press, 2007), 170-76.
34 Buttino, ibid, p. 60
35 Buttino, ibid, p. 61
36 Buttino, ibid, p. 61
“A Strike of Thunder”

The austerities of the war had certainly put a strain on the native society. This strain was made all the more difficult by the mobilization of the settler society, which placed increasing demands on the native farmers and pastoralists. Yet, the failure of the native society to openly protest or riot against the heavy toll that the war and colonial rule were exacting from the colony and its people in the first two years of the war indicate that the economic issues alone cannot account for the violence that gripped the region in 1916. It is therefore possible to say that the growing impoverishment of the native peoples created conditions for the conflict but did not cause it. An external impulse was needed and this impulse came from the central government, which was in dire need of manpower.

The announcement of the labour draft was the decisive factor in the escalation of ethnic violence in the region. It was, in other words, the beginning of the native rebellion proper. It is possible to distinguish two stages in the development of the initial phase of the rebellion in the wake of the announcement. The first stage saw the political mobilization of the native population, which engaged in peaceful protests and petitioned the authorities for exemption from the draft. The repression with which the administration responded to these protests constitutes the second stage in the emergence and escalation of violence. The roots of this repression were located in the military nature of the colonial rule, which remained outside of civilian purview and engaged in repressive practices that were inconceivable in the ethnically Russian provinces of the empire.

The labour draft of the native men – suspected of harbouring sympathy for the enemy and presumed lacking in patriotic spirit – was a desperate measure intended to plug a gaping hole left by the war in the draft-eligible male population. Despite drafting the only sons and physically unfit men, and dropping the minimum draft age by two years, the military was still short of a million labourers in the front. In May 1916, the Council of Ministers resolved to draft the *inorodtsy* of Turkestan for labour service. The Council expected to be able to draft at least 480,000 men aged between 19 and 43 from the colony; 250,000 from governorate of Turkestan, and 230,000 from the Steppe governorate. The numbers were calculated to reflect the number of native men of eligible age in every oblast and were further adjusted to ensure a sufficient labour pool in the cotton-growing areas of the region in both the current and the coming year.37 To compensate for the decrease in the number of workers in Ferghana and other cotton-sown

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37 “Razrabotka plana provedeniia mobilizatsii kirgiz voennymi vlastiami kraia, 2 iulia 1916 g.” in Ryskulov, 15.
areas of the region, the Council increased the quota that had to be fulfilled by Semirechye. In the end, the nomads of Semirechye had to furnish 60,000 workers, or 18% of the total male population of the oblast.

The decree was signed by Nicholas II on June 25. The first announcements of the impending draft were made in the first two weeks of July. Immediately, the panic set in. A native functionary compared the effect that the draft had on nomads to “a state not too dissimilar to that of cattle plagued by gadfly in the month of May, when, tormented by the intolerable pain, it jerks violently from side to side with its tail raised, and is unable to make out either pits or deep ravines that it can fall into.” Another official described the draft as “the thunder in clear sky.”

Rumours had spread that the natives were drafted for active military service, that is, that they were “taken as soldiers.” Still others believed that they would “dig trenches under the enemy fire” and that “this is the most dangerous work.” Seemingly eager to upset the Muslims, some of the settlers poured oil on the flames of their anxiety. “Out of mischief” some of the settlers “taunted Muslims into believing that they were being taken to the slaughter, while others figured that if Muslims will not furnish the workers, their land will be taken away from them in punishment and given to Russians.” Not a few colonists gloated about the extension of conscription to the natives, whose exemption from military duty was a frequent source of envy.

Equally unfortunate was the wording of the decree itself. Short and vague, it drafted native men for “the installation of defensive constructions and military communications in the area of active service by the army (v raione deistvuiushchei armii)” giving an impression that the draftees would be transferred to the combat zone. Individual announcements did even more to rouse the population. An announcement made by the military governor of Semirechye in mid-July stated explicitly that the natives

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38 Ibid., 20.
40 “Pamiatnaia zapiska o kirgizakh.” Ibid., 63.
41 “Protokol chastnogo soveshchaniia kirgiz.” Ibid., 57.
43 “Iz protokola doprosa mirovyom sud’ei 4-go uchastka Cherniaevskogo u. inzhenera M. Tynyshpaeva ob istorii vzaimootnoshenii rossiiskoi vlasti s kazakhami, 5-25 fevralia 1917 g.” in Koigeldiev, 106.
are being conscripted for trench works.⁴⁷ Some observers, including a group of Kazakh intelligentsia, put the blame on “semi-literate” native translators who were unfamiliar with the terminology of the draft and translated it “incorrectly and unclearly.” “In their interpretation,” the group concluded, “it appeared that the Kyrgyz were conscripted as “soldiers” and would be taken to the front without any prior training.”⁴⁸ As official announcements were made in Semirechye in mid-July more than one family decided to vote with their feet and crossed the border into China.⁴⁹

First Blood

If the nomads’ flight to China could be seen as passive resistance to the labour draft, the mass protests across the region signalled the beginning of the second, active phase of resistance. The first demonstrations took place mainly in the sedentary areas of Turkestan in the early days of July. Facilitated by the railway, the protests spread quickly across the region.⁵⁰ In the second half of July, 25 mass demonstrations took place in the Samarkand oblast, 20 in the Syr-Daria and 86 in the Ferghana oblast.⁵¹ The main targets of the crowds’ discontent were the native administrators in charge of drawing the lists. Crowds of Muslims sought out volost heads and forced them to destroy the lists of recruits.

The protests claimed their first victims on 4 July in the city of Khojent (now Khujand in northern Tajikistan) in the Samarkand oblast. A crowd of 3,000 protesters including many native women and children gathered in front of the city’s chancellery to demand the annulment of the draft. When a group of policemen attempted to disperse the crowd, the crowd responded by throwing stones forcing the policemen to retreat inside the building. Several soldiers arriving on the scene fired into the crowd, killing two protesters and wounding one. As the crowd surged, the soldiers arrested the leaders of the protest.⁵² The news of the disturbances caused grave concern in the colonial

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⁴⁷ “Iz protokola doprosa mirovym sud’ei 4-go uchastka Cherniavskogo u. inzhenera M. Tynyshpaeva ob istorii vzaimootnoshenf rossiiskoi vlasti s kazakhami, 5-25 fevralia 1917 g.” in Koigeldiev, 106.
⁴⁸ “Pamiatnaia zapiska o kirgizakh”; “Protokol chastnogo soveshchania kirgiz” in Chuloshnikov, 62, 58.
⁵⁰ A telegram of the acting governor-general of Turkestan, Mikhail Erofeev, to the Minister of War, notes that the rebels and “agitators” kept constant communication via the railway. “Telegramma vr. i. d. general-gubernatora Turkestanskogo kraia M. R. Erofeevu voennomu minister D. S. Shuavevui o khode vosstania v razlichnykh chastях kraia i merakh likvidatsii vosstania, 17 iiulia 1916 g.” in Piaskovskii, 64.
⁵¹ Kotiukova, 107.
⁵² “Telegramma voennogo gubernatora Samarkandskoi oblasti N. S. Lykoshina i. d. general-gubernatora Turkestanskogo kraia M. R. Erofeevu o vosstani v g. Khodzhente, 4 iiulia 1916 g.” in Piaskovskii, 103-04.
administration. Because of the size of Khojent and its location in the most populous oblast of the colony, protests that started in Khojent could travel quickly to other cities and settlements of the region. To nip the protests in the bud the authorities dispatched the punitive force of 200 soldiers and a Cossack cavalry squadron, and enforced martial law prohibiting the townspeople from going outside.

The first success of the authorities in suppressing the protests in the city proper was soon countered by the protests in the countryside. Where punitive forces moved to put down the protests new protests flared in the neighbouring towns and villages. On 5 July, the 2,000 strong crowd broke into the local administration in the town of Urgut and destroyed the lists. On the same day, a group of protesters attacked one of the punitive detachments at the Kuropatkino railway station. Two days later, on 7 July, the settlement of Dagbit became the site of new protests, and on 9 July, protests erupted in the settlement of Gazy-Iaglyk in the Kokand uezd. Within days, violent protests enveloped the entire Samarkand oblast.53

On 9 July the protests spread to Andijan. Here, crowds of townsmen and farmers armed with sticks and stones descended on the city’s administration but were thrown into disarray by the police and Cossacks. On 10 July, the protests moved to Margilan where the mob killed several native functionaries. The capital, Tashkent, plunged into protests on 11 July. The protest’s victims included 11 dead, 15 wounded, and 34 arrested. The oblast’s military governor, Nil Lykoshin, summarized the events as follows: “the agitation grew – fistfights and murders flared here and there, the blandishments and admonitions of the local authorities had no effect, nor were explanations trusted until, finally, all of these took the shape of an open rebellion against the Russian government.”54

What started as a protest in a single city soon grew into something that the government and its repressive powers could neither contain nor prevent. The attempts to pre-empt violence by dispersing protests and harassing their participants generated more protests. The emergence of disturbances in the areas where punitive troops were dispatched was not a coincidence. The use of repressive measures against the native population of the region generated more violence as the native society mobilized and responded in kind. Violence, in other words, begot more violence. This dynamic of violent interactions is also crucial to understanding how the rebellion moved from its

53 “Otchet i. d. voennogo gubernatora Ferganskoi oblasti P. P. Ivanova, general-gubernatoru Turkestanskogo kraia A. N. Kuropatkiny o vosstanii v Ferganskoi oblasti, 17 dekabria 1916 g.” in ibid., 253-60.
54 “Doklad Samarkandskogo voennogo gubernatora Lykoshina, dekabr’ 1916 g.” in Galuzo, 13.
initial stage of peaceful protests and flight to a later stage in which the native population engaged in what can only be described as ethnic warfare against the settler society.

A closer look at the events in the Samarkand oblast reveals a decisive moment in the rebellion – the events that took place in the city of Jizak between July 13 and July 25. Unlike the events elsewhere, the revolt in Jizak showed signs of organization. More importantly, the revolt in Jizak spilled over the geographic boundaries separating the native half of the city from its European quarters, where the majority of the rebels’ victims lived. The most significant difference of the incident in Jizak from similar events in other cities of the oblast was that the majority of victims in Jizak were Russian settlers, not native officials. Thus, the native protests in Jizak were significant in at least three respects: to begin with, it was the first time that the native peoples targeted the entire Russian population of the city, including women and children, and did not discriminate in their attacks between representatives of the state – officials, policemen, and soldiers – and civilian settlers; secondly, the repression that followed was similarly targeted at the destruction of the native residents of the city irrespective of their age and gender as well as the destruction of the city itself; thirdly, this was the first time during the conflict that the government employed the professional military in a highly organized and coordinated fashion to cleanse the area of its native population and replace it with Russian colonists. As such, the Jizak events both serve as a point of demarcation separating the two stages of the conflict and highlight the emergence of the violent extrajudicial mechanisms of suppressing the native protests.

The revolt in Jizak had a direct connection to the disturbances in Tashkent. On 12 July a meeting was convened in the market square of the native part of the city to draw up the draft lists. According to the official sources, the meeting was attended by a certain ishan (a religious figure) by the name of Nazyr Khodzha, who arrived from Tashkent hours before the meeting. Nazyr Khodzha informed the gathering of the revolt in Tashkent against the conscription. Commotions started in the crowd cutting the meeting short. The next morning a crowd armed with improvised weapons converged on the local administration to demand the surrender of the draft lists. A native bailiff, present at the scene, was killed after threatening the crowd with his revolver.\footnote{Sokol, 91.} Upon learning of the bailiff’s killing, a native dignitary informed the head of the uezd, Colonel Rukin, of the disturbances in native Jizak. Rukin promptly sent a detachment and rode out to the city.
Rukin was not alone. In addition to his native informer, Rukin was joined by the head of the district police Zotoglov, a native translator, and two native retainers armed with rifles.

Mid-way between the native quarters and the European part of the city, Rukin and his men crossed paths with an angry crowd heading towards the European city. Rukin attempted to calm the crowd, which grew increasingly agitated and surrounded Rukin and his small retinue. Apparently, the presence of armed retainers had further upset the crowd, prompting some of the protesters to drag one of the colonel’s native attendants off his horse in an attempt to seize his rifle. Rukin rushed to his attendant’s rescue, but was killed by one of the crowd’s leaders with a blow on the head. The crowd then overwhelmed Rukin’s men and beat them to death.56

The arriving detachment dispersed the crowd and blocked the road to the European section of Jizak. The retreating rebels launched a series of attacks on the railway stations along the stretch of railway connecting Jizak and the European settlement of Obruchavo. There, the rebels were joined by the native railway workers. The mobs armed with improvised weapons destroyed the railway lines, bridges, and telegraph lines. For three days, between 13 and 16 July, all communication between Jizak and Tashkent was cut. The rebels plundered the stations and killed the railway workers and their families. Altogether, 45 settlers – mostly men and older women – were killed and 75 young women and children taken captive.57 Many of the captives were raped repeatedly and forcibly converted to Islam. For a short time, the native city was in the rebels’ hands.

The small contingent of soldiers and Cossacks stationed in Jizak continued to defend the European part of the city, but a much larger force was needed to suppress the uprising. Although short of resources the administration was able to put together a small army of thirteen infantry companies, an artillery battery with six cannons, three hundred Cossacks, and three sapper companies under the command of Colonel Ivanov. Ordered to show “iron determination, resolve, and ruthlessness” towards “both those guilty of murder and disturbances and the local population, responsible to a certain degree, for the rebellion against the Russian rule,” the troops were to punish the “rebellious population” by “corporal punishment and execution” as well as “the destruction of their settlements.”58

56 “Postanovlenie sudebnogo sledovatelia Samarkandskogo okruznogo suda. 18 avgusta 1916 g.” in A. Shestakov, “Dzhizakskoe vosstanie 1916 g.,” Krasnyi arkhiv, no. 5 (60) (1933): 85.
57 “Postanovlenie sudebnogo sledovatelia Samarkandskogo okruznogo suda. 18 avgusta 1916 g.” in ibid., 86.
58 “Nakaz komanduiushchego voiskami Turkestanskogo voennogo okruga nachal’niku dzhizakskogo karatel’nogo otriada, 15 iiulia 1916 g.” in ibid., 91.
True to Ivanov’s orders “to shoot, to burn, and to seize household furnishings and agricultural tools” the punitive detachments “set upon the native settlements, setting fire to properties, shooting anyone in their way, raping women and committing all manner of atrocities. They burned the crops in the fields and carried off the harvested grain. The population fled to the cities and into the steppe, abandoning their farms. Famine ensued. Women fled leaving behind their children. Refugees starved in the distant steppes and in the towns.”

The brutality of Ivanov’s expedition underscored the efficiency of the well-armed and organized troops. The native part of Jizak ceased to exist; the members of the Duma investigation who visited the area in late August 1916 described the city as “totally destroyed.”

The suppression of the rebellion in Jizak set the precedent for the future campaigns of persecution against the native population, but the cumulative effect that it had on the native population was at odds with the kind of attitude that the authorities sought to cultivate in the native masses. As refugees from Jizak disappeared into towns and settlements the word of the Russian atrocities spread, fuelling discontent and driving the mass mobilization effort. Rather than pre-empting the spread of rebellion, the fear of punitive expeditions spurred further resistance. The more fearful of the punitive forces the native farmers and nomads were the more likely they were to organize themselves to offer resistance.

“The Reckless Rebellion of the Savage Nomads”

Nowhere was this organization more evident than in the rebellion of the native nomads in Semirechye. Convinced “to die here or kill all the Russians” the rebels launched a series of organized assaults on European settlements, killing and capturing in the process more than 3,000 colonists. The death toll that they inflicted on Russian colonists exceeded the number of soldiers the empire lost during the conquest of the region.

Ibid., 64.

The quote belongs to Alexander Kerensky, a member of the special Duma committee and the future head of the Provisional Government, which, as the next chapter will show, found the decision of the previous government to resettle the entirety of the Pishpek and Przhevalsk uezds with Russian colonists both acceptable and desirable. For the full transcript of the speech given by Kerensky to the Duma see “Rech’ deputata ot Saratovskoi gubernii A. F. Kerenskogo na zakrytom zasedanii chetvertoi Gosudarstvennoi Dumy (bez kupiur)” in S. N. Maltusynov, ed. Agrarnaia istoria Kazakhstana, konets XIX-nachalo XX v.: sbornik dokumentov i materialov (Almaty: Daik-Press, 2006), 1123-40. On Kerenskii’s trip to Turkestan, see Kotiukova, 111-12; T. V. Kotiukova, ””Vo imia istinnikh interesov gosudarstva…”,” Voeno-istoricheski zhurnal, no. 8 (2005): 60-63.

“Protokol doprosa s mirovym sud’ei 4 uchastka Przheval’skogo uezda svidetelia P. Chuvichkina o napadenii vosstavshikh na s. Preobrazhenskoe Przheval’skogo uezda, 28 oktiabria 1916 g.” in Kaptagay, 130.

With the exception of the failed expedition to the Khivan Khanate in 1839, in which about 2,000 men died of exposure and starvation before they could reach the Khanate, the heaviest casualties were borne by the Russian military in the
Similarly extensive was the damage that the rebellion had caused to the economy of Semirechye; fields were torched and trampled, entire villages were razed by fire; roads, bridges, and telegraph poles were destroyed. Some contemporaries attributed the lethality of the uprising to “the excesses of the crowd.” Yet, such an approach risks ignoring signs of careful planning and organization in the rebels’ actions. On the other hand, the underlying emotive factor of the rebellion, expressed in the resolve of the rebels “to die or kill,” is evident. Neither an outbreak of “passion,” nor solely the product of “reason,” the uprising was simultaneously a crime of passion, where the victims came to be seen as an immediate threat to the perpetrators, and a crime of purpose, where the perpetrators sought to remove this threat. To better understand the lethality of the uprising in Semirechye I propose to examine the interaction of “passion and calculation” as it developed in the course of violent engagements between the authorities and the nomads in the weeks preceding the uprising.

The emotional charge of the rebellion drew on fear. As an emotional experience shared across the ethnic divide fear prompted both the colonists and the nomads to resort to violence in response to the perceived threat. Yet the violence was neither spontaneous nor was it the nomads’ immediate response. A coordinated attack requires planning, negotiation, and organization, and, critically, intentions. Intentions are not spontaneous, they crystallize in the process of reflection. The physical assault on the settler society – or the uprising proper – was the concluding stage of resistance which, in its primary stage, took less violent forms. For the rebellion to begin in earnest a series of increasingly violent interactions between the natives and the colonists had to occur. The use of force by the administration to quell peaceful protests and to implement the labour draft led to popular mobilization of the native communities.

The spatial dynamics of the rebellion was also a significant factor in the escalation of violence; the geographical terrain of Semirechye contributed to both the fast diffusion of the rebellion and a high casualty rate among the colonists and the rebels. The distinctive pattern of agricultural colonization in Semirechye – facilitated by the area’s mountainous landscape and the construction of the road from Verny to Przhevalsk – meant that the distances between the settlements tended to be short. The proximity of the settlements to each other permitted the rebels to travel from settlement to settlement before the news of the rebellion could reach the neighbouring settlements or the authorities. The course of the two assaults on the Geok-Tepe fortress. Altogether, nearly 1,000 Russian soldiers died fighting against the Turkmen inhabitants of the fortress.

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63 "Pamiatnaia zapiska o kirghizakh" in Chuloshnikov, 65.
64 Horowitz, 522-67.
concentration of the settler population in a relatively compact area also meant that the rebels could kill more colonists in a shorter period of time. On the other hand, the predominantly Russian population of Semirechye’s cities and towns prevented the emergence of large-scale protests characteristic of the sedentary areas of the region. The largely European makeup of the Semirechye’s largest cities is also a likely explanation for the failure of the local administration to notice the warning signs of the growing tension.

The official announcement of the draft was made in Verny, Pishpek, and Przhevalsk in the first half of July. Official sources and witness testimonies suggest that the initial response to the draft was panicky flight across the border. The first crossings into China began, according to the native translator of the Przhevalsk uezd administration, Tulembai Diusebaev, immediately after the announcement of the draft in Przhevalsk uezd on 13 July. The majority of those fleeing were young unmarried men of draft age. The first exodus was followed days later by the flight of native farm hands who “under various excuses” left their Russian employers. By the end of the month, the exodus of the nomads to China took on a more organized form; families and entire clans crossed the border. Some observers noted the sudden rush of Kyrgyz buyers at the local markets and the steep rise in prices on horses and staple foods. Horses in particular fetched 4-5 times the regular price.

Not everyone was able or willing to leave their animals and farms and move across the border. Naturally, apprehension about the draft and discontent with the mounting pressures and demands of the administration grew. Like in the sedentary areas of the colony, the natives’ anger was at first directed at the native administrators responsible for drawing up the lists. Fearing for their lives, some of these administrators approached the colonial authorities with the request for protection. Less than two weeks after the announcement in Przhevalsk, on 23 July, native volost administrators informed the head of the uezd, Colonel Ivanov, that their native constituencies threatened to kill them if they

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65 In the Przhevalsk uezd the labour conscription was made public on 12 or 13 July. In the Verny, Djarkent, and Pishpek uezds the announcement was made earlier.
66 “Protokol doprosa svidetelia Tulembaia Diusebaeva o polozhenii v Przheval'skom uezde Semirechenskoi oblasti v iulture 1916 g. – posle ob"iavleniia tsarskogo ukaza o mobilizatsii, 21 sentiabria 1916 g.” in Piaskovskii, 354.
67 “Raport chinovnika dlia poruchenii Turkestanskogo raionnogo otdeleniya fungmeistera nachal’niku Turkestanskogo raionnogo otdeleniya M. N. Volkovu o vosstaniii v Przheval’skom uezde i g. Przheval’ske, 30 dekabra 1916 g.” in ibid., 397.
68 “Protokol doprosa mirovym sud’ei 4-go uchastka Przheval’skogo uezda svidetelei – zhitelei sel Semenovki i Grigor’evka o nachale vosstaniia i rasprave vosstavshikh s zhiteliami etikh sel, 11 noiabria” in Kaptagaev, 149-50.
69 “Protokol doprosa mirovym sud’ei 3 uchastka Przheval’skogo uezda perevodchika Przheval’skogo uezdnogo pravleniia T. Diusebaeva o sobytiiakh vosstaniia v uezde, 21 sentiabria” in ibid., 78.
gave the authorities the lists of eligible men. They pled with Ivanov to put them into prison to both ensure their safety and to put an end to rumours that they were in cahoots with the administration. Ivanov refused the request.

Ivanov’s dismissal of the native administrators, most of whom belonged to a small group of native elites, is the likely explanation for the elite’s participation in and leadership of the rebellion. According to the dragoman of the Russian consulate in Kashgar, Georgii Stefanovich, “in virtually every volost the volost heads were the leaders of the revolt.”

A comparison of the lists of Ivanov’s native supplicants, produced by Duisebaev, with that of the uprising’s principal leaders confirms Stefanovich’s claim; with the exception of the Ulakhol volost head, the administrators of eighteen other volosts led the uprising in their respective volosts.

At about the same time individuals emerged from among the nomads who opposed the draft and called on their communities to protest against it. The majority of these “agitators,” as they were referred to by the colonial administration, were of humble background, but enjoyed a degree of popularity with local communities and were known as baatyrs – individuals of military prowess proven in daring exploits against enemies. Several of such baatyrs that figure prominently in police reports and witness depositions are Uzak Saurukov (Saurykov in contemporary Kazakh historiography) and Jamanken Mambetov of the Verny uezd and Alimkul Taubaldin (Alymkul Tabaldin in contemporary Kyrgyz sources) and Egemberdi Sarykov of the Pishpek uezd. Wary of potential disruptions to the draft, the administration targeted these men and their supporters for arrest. In the second half of July, the authorities seized dozens of people suspected of agitation against the conscription. On July 17 alone, 34 “agitators” were arrested as leaders of the rebellion and murdered in prison. Taubaldin was far more fortunate. Not only did he evade execution at the hands of the punitive expeditions, he also joined the Bolsheviks during the civil war and lived well into his nineties.

70 “Iz sudebnogo dela po Przheval’skomu raionu, Sbornik 1937, p. 31, Protokol doprosa svidetelia Tulembaia Diusebaeva o polozhenii v Przheval’skom uezde Semirechenskoi oblasti v iiule 1916 g. – posle ob’avleniia tsarskogo ukaza o mobilizatsii, 21 sentiabria 1916 g.” in Piaskovskii, 355.
71 “Iz dokladnoi zapiski dragomana rossiiskogo general’nogo konsul’stva v Kashgare kollezhskogo sekretaria Stefanovicha o volneniakh sredi kirgizov Semirechenskoi oblasti i o begstve ih v kitaiskie predely, nachalo 1917 g.” in Mambetaliev, 102.
72 For the list – incomplete by his own admission – given by Diusebaev, see “Protokol doprosa svidetelia Tulembaia Diusebaeva o polozhenii v Przheval’skom uezde Semirechenskoi oblasti v iiule 1916 g. – posle ob’avleniia tsarskogo ukaza o mobilizatsii, 21 sentiabria 1916 g.” in Piaskovskii, 355. For the complete list of the uprising’s leaders, see TsGA RZh, f. 461, op. 1, d. 1888, l. 63 available at Sheishekanov, Turdubek. “Sagaly Almataev kotorulush bashynda targarndaryn biri,” accessed 20 January 2016, http://www.azattyk.org/a/urkun_kyrgyz_chine_family_history/27708761.html.
73 Saurukov, Mambetov, and Sarykov were arrested as leaders of the rebellion and murdered in prison. Taubaldin was far more fortunate. Not only did he evade execution at the hands of the punitive expeditions, he also joined the Bolsheviks during the civil war and lived well into his nineties. “Raport i. d. nachal’nika Dzharkentskogo uezda Semirechenskoi oblasti M. A. Fol’baumu o vystupleniakh kazakhov, uigur i dungan protiv mobilizatsii na tylovye raboty, 1 avgusta 1916 g.” in ibid., 329. “Raport chinovnika dlia poruchenii Turkestanskogo raionnogo okhrannogo otdeleniia Lungmeistera nachal’niku Turkestanskogo raionnogo okhrannogo otdeleniia M. N. Volkovu o vostanii v Przheval’skom uezde 1 g. Przheval’ske, 30 dekabria 1916 g.” in ibid., 399. “Raport nachal’nika Pishepskogo uzdana F. G. Rymshhevicha i.d. voennogo gubernatora Semirechenskoi oblasti A. I. Alekseevu o khode vostanii v uzde i o merakh k ego podavleniiu, 28 noyabria 1916 g.” in ibid., 387.
arrested in 3 volosts of the Verny uezd.\textsuperscript{74} Often, the arrests were made during the official announcements of the draft. Anyone who voiced their disagreement with the draft or expressed their doubts was at risk of being arrested. At Ivanov’s announcement in Przhevalsk, one of the attending Kyrgyz was arrested after remarking that “the Kyrgyz will perish if they are sent to the labour army. In such a case, death at home would be preferable.”\textsuperscript{75} On 17 July, Ivanov dispatched Diusebaev to arrest an agitator in the area of Karkara.\textsuperscript{76}

The wave of arrests failed to quell the discontent and angered the native society.\textsuperscript{77} The deployment of armed police, Cossacks, and, occasionally, soldiers to arrest the popular leaders and break peaceful protests had further alienated the nomads.\textsuperscript{78} A report of the scribe of the Al’dzhanskaia volost of the Dzharkent uezd, Komarov (full name unknown), to the police head of the Narynkol area, suggests that a decision was taking shape at the volost level to resist the draft. At a meeting with the volost representatives, the attendees “unanimously declared…that they did not wish to implement the draft” and maintained that “they would die here, at home, not on foreign soil. Even if all of them were executed, they did not wish to work and would not give a single man.”\textsuperscript{79} The crowd then forced the scribe to yield the lists of the drafted and demanded that the administration not detain the volost heads. Reporting on the same incident, the head of the Dzharkent uezd, Nikolai Stupin, noted the resolve of the crowd to resist “to the last and kill anyone who assisted in the conscription.”\textsuperscript{80}

Similar instances of resistance to the draft were reported in other volosts of the oblast. On 7 July, the Dungans of the Dungan volost in the Dzharkent uezd told Stupin that they “would rather die” than become labourers.\textsuperscript{81} As tension was mounting, numerous communal meetings and gatherings were called by the native administrators and popular leaders to discuss the draft. Between 7 and 8 July, for example, such meetings were held in the areas of Issyk-Ata and Kegety, and the Dzhail’myshevskaia, and

\textsuperscript{74} Sokol, 118.
\textsuperscript{75} Usenbaev, 107.
\textsuperscript{76} “Iz sudebnogo dela po Przheval’skomu raionu” in Ryskulov, 30.
\textsuperscript{77} In fact, the Kazakh administrator, a railway engineer by education, Mukhamedzhan Tynyshpaev, drew a direct connection between the arrests and the later disturbances: “In all the aforementioned areas (Verny, Pishpek, and Przhevalsk uezds) or in their vicinity the most serious events arose as the consequence” of the arrests. See: “Iz protokola doprosa mirovym sud’ei 4-go uchastka Cherniaevskogo uezda inzhenera M. Tynyshpaeva ob istorii vzaimootnoshenii rossiiskoi vlasti s kazakhami, 5-25 fevralia 1917 g.” in Koigeldiev, 108.
\textsuperscript{78} Although no mass protests took place in Semirechye, smaller peaceful protests did occur. One such Kyrgyz-Dungan protest in Przhevalsk was broken up by police on 4 August. Usenbaev, 108.
\textsuperscript{79} “Raport pisaria Al’dzhanskoi volosti Dzharkentskogo uezda Komarova nachal’niku Narynkol’skogo uchastka A. Podvarkovu o nevozmozhnosti sostavleniia mobilizatsionnykh spiskov, 11 iiulia” in Piaskovskii, 324-25.
\textsuperscript{80} “Raport i. d. nachal’nika Dzharkentskogo uezda N. N. Stupina o vystupleniakh kazakhov, uigur i dungan protiv mobilizatsii na tylovye raboty” in ibid., 329.
\textsuperscript{81} Ibid, p. 328
Chemalganskaia volosts. The meetings were well attended; over 5,000 men and women gathered on 10 July in Ul’konzas. Crucially, because the meetings took place outside the cities and towns they went largely unnoticed by the authorities, allowing the local communities to establish a popular base for the rebellion. The decision to resist “coercion by the administration” by taking “violent and hostile measures…against the government and the Russian population” was reached in the course of negotiations within and between the volosts. A description of one such assembly – on the eve of the uprising – between the Atekinskaia and Sarybagishevskaia volosts is given in a deposition of a native Pishpek resident, Mulla-Sufi Konushpaev. According to Konushpaev, the first call to arms against the authorities came from Alimkul Taubaldin, who “vehemently agitated” against the draft and took an oath, along with 100 other men of the Atekinskaia volost, to “die fighting the Russians” in early August. The meeting of the Ateke and Sarybagish (Sarybagysh) Kyrgyz took place on the day of the uprising, immediately after the first attacks of the Sarybagish Kyrgyz on the neighbouring Russian settlements, on 7 August. The dignitaries (or “honourable persons,” as they were known in colonial parlance, included figures as diverse as native administrators, community elders, popular leaders, and religious figures), of the two volosts gathered on the bridge over the Kebin river and, after an exchange of vows, proclaimed the brother of the Sarybagishevskaia volost administrator, Makush Shabdanov, their khan.

The assemblies solidified opposition to the draft and ensured the cohesion of the future rebel army; here, agreements were reached, oaths of loyalty given, and sacrificial...
horses slain.\textsuperscript{88} As the popular consensus for armed resistance to the draft took shape, the initial spur of mobilization, triggered by the flight to China, gave way to comprehensive mass mobilization of the native society. The would-be rebels raised an army by drafting men in each volost and forming military detachments led, as a rule, by their respective heads (who, as has been noted above, were often in the service of the colonial government). Women, too, were not spared the mobilization. Their role in the native protests was remarkably similar to that of the Russian women in the food riots half a year earlier. A few administrators noted their presence at the sites of the workers’ registration. From what we know, there were no women in combat, but their indirect participation included cheering on men going into battle and keeping watch over the captives.\textsuperscript{89}

Although the capacity for violence, engendered in the mass mobilization of the native society, was fully realized in the course of the rebellion, it did not in itself cause the rebellion. The transition from mass mobilization to mass violence occurred in the course of increasingly violent clashes between the native communities and the authorities. The threat perception that the punitive forces represented to the nomads was crucial to the escalation of violence. The repressive measures taken by the administration in response to the attempts of the native communities to negotiate the terms of the draft or evade it by fleeing galvanized resistance to the authorities and the colonial society at large. Animated by fear and a collective sense of victimhood and persecution, the rebels sought not so much to right the injustices of colonial rule as to simply survive.

Numerous petitions and depositions convey the sense of desperation and entrapment prevalent among the Semirechye’s nomads. In explaining their flight to China – though carefully avoiding the subject of the rebellion – the Kyrgyz of the 8 volosts of the Przhevalsk uzde indicate that the administration threatened them with execution if they failed to furnish eligible men. The execution of the arrested Kyrgyz in the Przhevalsk prison confirmed their worst fears.\textsuperscript{90} A pointed remark by a native judge to the scribe Komarov that the authorities are mistaken in thinking that “the Muslims can be conscripted like sheep taken to slaughter” lends weight to the sense of apprehension among the nomads about the meaning of the draft and the intentions of the government.\textsuperscript{91}

\textsuperscript{88} “Protokol doprosa mirovym sud’ei 3 uchastka Przheval;skogo uezdnogo pravleniia T. Diusebaeva o sobytiakh vosstaniiia v uezde, 21 sentiabria” in Kaptagaev, 76-69.
\textsuperscript{89} The presence - and role – of native women in the protests in the sedentary areas of Turkestan was noted by many Russian administrators. See, for example: “Otchet i. d. voennogo gubernatora Ferganskoi oblasti P. P. Ivanova, general-gubernatoru Turkestanskogo kraia A. N. Kuroptkinu o vosstanii v Ferganskoi oblasti, 17 dekabria 1916 g” in Piaskovskii, 255. “Raport politsmeistera “tuzemnoi” chasti g. Tashkenta A. Mochalova i. d. nachal’nika g. Tashkenta S. O. Kochanu o nachale vosstaniiia v g. Tashkente, 11 iiulia 1916 g.” in ibid., 263.
\textsuperscript{90} “Kopiia prosheniia kara-kirgiz Przheval’skogo uezda na imia rossiiskogo konsula v Kul’dzhe” in Ryskulov, 150.
\textsuperscript{91} “Raport pisaria Al’dzhanskoi volosti Dzharkentskogo uzde Komarova nachal’niku Narynkol’skogo uchastka A. Podvarkovu o nevozmozhnosti sostavleniia mobilizatsionnyh spiskov, 11 iiulia” in Piaskovskii, 325.
That the anxieties about the perceived impending massacre at the hands of the colonial government were central to the mobilization of the native population is further evidenced in the telegram of the acting Governor-General of Turkestan, Mikhail Erofeev, to the Minister of War, Dmitrii Shuvaev, informing him that “at one of the Kirghiz meetings in the Semirechye oblast, speakers claimed that Russians want to pick the healthiest element (sic) from among the Muslims and send them to the theatre of war before the Russian soldiers, where Russian and German troops will decimate them, thereby achieving the goal conceived by Russians of destroying the Muslim population.”

The festering discontent of the nomads reached a point of no return in early August. The first violent clashes between the authorities and the nomads happened in the Lepsinsk uezd between 24 July and 1 August, when a border patrol attempted to detain families crossing the border.93 The Kazakhs opened fire in response. Two incidents that followed in the wake of the events in Lepsinsk uezd mark the beginning of the rebellion proper with attendant violence and targeted assaults on the settlers. What makes these incidents particularly noteworthy is the presence of two conflicting accounts, by a native administrator, the Kazakh engineer Mukhamedzhan Tynyshpaev, whom we will meet again in the next chapter, and a Russian scribe, Petr Driupin. Although markedly different in their reading of the events both accounts highlight the role of fear in the rise of violence. Read against each other, these two accounts offer an insight into how both groups interpreted each other’s motivations and how they acted on them. They illustrate that the rebellion was as much a spontaneous response to the perceived threat, against which a defensive action had to be taken, as an act of organized resistance.

According to Tynyshpaev, the first incident took place on 3 August in the Kyzylboruk (Kyzylburovskaia) volost in the eastern part of the Verny uezd, where the assistant head of the uezd, Khlynovskii, accompanied by the district police captain Kulaev and fifteen soldiers and policemen, took several Kazakh dignitaries hostage in an effort to force the volost to produce the lists within five hours.94 After approaching Khlynovskii on at least three different occasions with the request to release the arrested and to delay the draft the crowd grew increasingly impatient. In what seems to have been an attempt to disperse the crowd, Khlynovskii fired into the air; mistaking it for a signal to shoot, his men fired into the crowd, killing two Kazakhs. As the angry crowd surrounded the station

in response to the shooting, one of the protesters, armed with a hunting rifle, killed a policeman. A punitive expedition consisting of a Cossack cavalry squadron and a half-company was despatched to the area on the same day.95

The second incident occurred in the Botpaev (Botpaevskaiia) volost of the Verny uezd three days later, on 6 August. The trigger in this case were the machinations of the native volost head who used the occasion to include only the Kazakhs of the rival party in the lists. Seeking justice, the aggrieved party approached the district police captain Gilev. Gilev, however, sided with the volost head who claimed that the rival group was plotting to revolt. To put down the disturbances, Gilev led a group of 20 policemen against the rival party in the area of the Samsy station. The arrival of armed men in the volost alarmed its native population, which gathered in a large crowd. What happened next mirrors the earlier events of the Kyzylboruk incident. Angered by the presence of armed policemen, the agitated crowd of locals surrounded Gilev and his men forcing them first to retreat and then to fire into the crowd, killing twelve Kazakhs.

Driupin’s version of events diverges from Tynyshpaev’s at one critical juncture; in his reading of the precipitating events, Driupin focuses on the precedence of the nomads’ hostile actions and the premeditated nature of the attack and fails to mention the hostile actions of the colonial administrators, such as the arrests of the Kazakh dignitaries. According to Driupin, Khlynovskii’s visit to Kyzylboruk volost was prompted by the reports of the refusal of the volost to furnish the labourers. To ensure the timely submission of the lists Khlynovskii arrived in the volost on 1 August, two days earlier than suggested by Tynyshpaev. Here, he ordered the native volost head to convene a meeting the next day to produce the lists. Despite the orders no one showed up for the meeting on 2 August. The same evening, the district police captain Skliuev (Kulaev in Tynyshpaev’s deposition) arrived with ten soldiers and two policemen (three men short of the fifteen men in Tynyshpaev’s account). Apparently, Skluiev was acting on the reports of a native conspiracy to “massacre the Russians” at night, which in fact did not happen. The meeting was convened the next day, on 3 August. Sometime after the meeting commenced, a group of crying women threw themselves at the men compiling the lists but was led away. When the women rushed forward a second time, a group of mounted Kazakhs armed with spears and sticks rode out of the nearby forest and opened fire, killing one of the soldiers and wounding another. Khlynovskii and his men returned fire, but the crowd only grew thicker. As the Russians retreated they abandoned their

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95 “6 avgusta 1916 g., telegramma voennogo gubernatora Semirechesnko oblasti M. A. Fol’bauma general-gubernatoru Turkestanskogo kraia N. A. Kuropatkinu o nastroenii naseleniia oblasti” in Piaskovskii, 371.
belongings, which momentarily distracted the crowd and gave them a chance to cross the river and escape.\footnote{62}{“Pokazaniia svidetelia sel'skogo pisaria P. Driupina” in Ryskulov, 78-80.}

Driupin concludes his deposition with Khlynovskii’s allegation that on 8 July, nearly a month before the events in Kyzylboruk and Botbaevo, “all the more or less influential Kyrgyz” of the Kyzylburovskaya (Kyzylboruk) and Siugatinskaia volosts held a council and resolved not to provie the workers “even if they have to die for that.”\footnote{96}{Ibid., 79.} Contrast this with Tynyshpaev’s contention that both incidents were “caused entirely by the actions” of the colonial administrators, namely Khlynovskii and Gilev, and his conclusion that “the identical actions of the administration’s representatives led to identical results: 1) Khlynovskii came to the peaceful kyzylboruktsy with a detachment and provoked an assault; 2) Gilev came to Samsy with a detachment – the Kirghiz (Kazakhs) attacked the detachment.”\footnote{97}{Ibid., 79.} It is inescapable that both Tynyshpaev and Driupin seek to assign guilt, but where Tynyshpaev points an accusatory finger at the authorities, Driupin holds the natives to account.

The question then boils down to who started the conflict. Both Tynyshpaev and Driupin attempt to answer the question by establishing the sequence of events, where the aggrieved party is forced to respond to the threatening actions of the offending party. It is ultimately of little relevance who fired the first shot. What these two accounts clearly demonstrate is the importance of perceptions and emotions in the conflict. Both testimonies highlight the shared nature of fear. The nomads were intimidated by the soldiers’ guns, but so were the soldiers intimated by the large crowds. The violent clashes like the ones above escalated into a self-perpetuating cycle of violence where the violent suppression of protests by the authorities led to further disturbances thereby triggering a new wave of repressions.\footnote{98}{A report – written, in all likelihood, by Tynyshpaev – based on interviews with the natives of the neighbouring Aueliatinskii uezd of the Syrdar’inskaia oblast is particularly illustrative of these dynamics: rumours of summary executions of innocent Kyrgyz of the Pishpek uezd who took no part in the rebellion prompted the Kazakhs of the Aulieatsinskii uezd to flee. When the authorities resorted to force and threats to make the Kazakhs return, they responded with attacks on the Russian settlements. “Spravka, sostavlenaia iz rasprostrov zhitelei Aulieatsinskogo uezda dlia voennogo gubernatora Syrdar’inskoi oblasti A. S. Galkina, 30 sentiabria” in Kotiukova, 228-29.}

Tynyshpaev’s testimony stands out in particular because it succeeds in grasping the contingency of the conflict. His moment-by-moment account of the first violent engagements between the authorities and the nomads offers a clue into the motives, interests, and fears at the heart of the conflict. He traces the turning point in the escalation of violence to the flight of the terrified Kazakhs of the Botpaevskaia volost into the
neighbouring Pishpek uezd between 6 and 7 August. Fleeing from a punitive expedition consisting of a Cossack sotnia, one infantry company, and a settler militia, groups of Kazakhs destroyed the telegraph, plundered the station and rustled cattle.\textsuperscript{100} In pursuit of the fleeing Kazakhs, the expedition seized and executed several Kazakh coachmen near the station of Otar.\textsuperscript{101} The now rebellious nomads of Botpaevskaia responded in kind, killing sixteen and taking thirty five settlers captive.\textsuperscript{102}

The flight of the Kazakhs to the Pishpek uezd between 6 and 7 August triggered a series of events culminating in the launch of concurrent attacks on the settlements and the siege of the city of Tokmak. The fleeing Kazakhs soon reached the Pishpek uezd. The arrival of panicky Kazakhs in the Pishpek uezd spread further panic among the Kazakhs of the Dzhanyshevskaia (Dzhanysskaia in Tynyshpaev’s account) and Chumichevskaia volosts (of the Pishpek uezd), who “fearing that the punitive detachments will come after their Botpaevskaia kin” fled to the Atekinskaia and Sarybagishevskaia volosts. From there, the rebellion spread and became increasingly violent.

One of the reports suggests that the runaway coachmen told the Kyrgyz of the Sarybagishevskaia volost about the transport of weapons dispatched by the administration from Verny to Przhevalsk.\textsuperscript{103} On 7 August, a patrol set up by the Kyrgyz in the Boom gorge, between the Pishpek and Przhevalsk uezds, seized the transport of about 200 rifles and 3,000 cartridges.\textsuperscript{104} Some witnesses of the rebellion observed that the seizure of weapons “served…as a signal and an instrument of transition from the passive resistance…to the active, murderous one.”\textsuperscript{105} The timing of the first attack against a Russian settlement, hours before the seizure of weapons, gives reason to believe that the uprising would, in any case, reach its murderous stage, but it helps to explain the relative success of the rebels and their resolve.

\textsuperscript{100} “6 avgusta 1916 g., telegramma voennogo gubernatora Semirechesnkoj oblasti M. A. Fol’bauma general-gubernatoru Turkestanskoj kraia N. A. Kuropatkinu o nastroeniia naseleniia oblasti” in Piaskovskii, 333.
\textsuperscript{101} Usenbaev, 84.
\textsuperscript{102} “Dokladnaia zapiska i. d. voennogo gubernatora Semirechesnkoj oblasti A. I. Alekseeva general-gubernatoru Turkestanskoj kraia A. N. Kuropatkinu o prichinakh i khode vosstaniia v oblasti, pozdnee 1 noiabria 1916 g.” in Piaskovskii, 372. The punitive expedition caught up with the Botpaevskaia rebels on 10 August; the Cossack sotnia, led by Cossack captain (khorunzhii) Aleksandrov, “wiped out three native villages (auls) to the last man, burned down the camps, and rustled the cattle” setting, according to the military governor of Semirechye, Mikhail Fol’baum, an example of “exemplary actions” for other punitive expeditions. “Telegramma voennogo gubernatora Semirechesnkoj oblasti M. A. Fol’bauma lepsinskomu, pishpekskomu, kopal’skomu i dzharkentskomu uezdnym nachal’nikam ob “obraztsovoi” rasprave karatel’nogo otriada khorunzhego Aleksandrova s vosstavshimi kazakhami, 14 avgusta 1916 g.” in ibid., 662-63.
\textsuperscript{103} There are alternative explanations as to how the Kyrgyz learnt about the transport of weapons. Belek Soltonoev, for example, relates that the rebels learnt about the transport after one of the Shabdanov brothers dispatched a messenger to his volost upon seeing a cart loaded with rifles depart from Pishpek. Belek Soltonoev, Kyrgyz tarykh: tarykhı ocherkter, vol. 2 (Bishkek: Uchkun, 1993), 66.
\textsuperscript{104} “Protokol doprosa svidetelia I. A. Potselueva, 21 sentiabria 1916 g.” in Ryskulov, 47.
\textsuperscript{105} Ibid.
The next day, on 8 August, a group of armed Kyrgyz attacked the post office at the station of Jal-Aryk. From 8 August the uprising unfolded in all volosts of the Pishpek and Przhevalsk uezds. The rebels launched a series of concurrent and carefully coordinated attacks against the settlements and the punitive forces. On 12 August, about 1,500 rebels engaged a Cossack sotnia, 70 soldiers, and 350-strong settler militia in a battle in the environs of Tokmak. During the battle the expedition nearly lost a machine-gun to the rebels and was forced to retreat to Tokmak. The rebel army quickly swelled as more Kyrgyz joined the rebellion. On 13 August 5,000 rebels besieged the city of Tokmak, which was cut off from the authorities in Verny and Tashkent for nearly two weeks between 13 and 22 August. The city was able to repel the attacks thanks in no small part to the said machine-gun. The rebels in contrast were poorly armed; one of the eight volosts that laid siege to Tokmak, for example, had only seven rifles. Siege was also laid to the large settlement of Preobrazhenskoe, which became a safe haven for the refugees from neighbouring settlements. The siege of Preobrazhenskoe lasted from 10 to 29 August. On 28 August, the arriving punitive expedition lifted the siege and forced the rebels to retreat.

The pattern of attacks was identical across the two uezds. Groups of rebels armed with sticks, axes, pikes, and a few rifles rode into settlements, killing men and older women and rounding up women and children many of whom, including children, were then raped and killed or taken captive. Horses were often stolen before the attack to prevent the victims from fleeing. Similar precautions were taken by the rebels to minimize their losses during the attacks. Houses were put to torch to weaken the settlers’ resistance and to lure them out of their hideouts. Livestock was seized and fields trampled.

To prevent the administration from communicating messages to the punitive detachments and to hamper their movements, the rebels destroyed bridges and telegraph lines and poles, post offices and administrative buildings, railway stations and the railway

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106 Usenbaev, 86.
107 Ibid., 103-04.
108 According to Kushbek Usenbaev, some of the native accounts claim that up to 20-40,000 rebels gathered in the environs of Tokmak. It is likely that this number included the entire population of several uezds rather than the share of population that took part in the military activities. Ibid., 105.
110 Usenbaev, 110.
112 “Protokol doprosa ochevidtsa Kanata Abukina, 17 oktiabria 1916 g.” in Kotiukova, 224.
113 “Pokazaniia odnogo iz predvoditelei vosstaniia na iuge Semirechenskoi oblasti manapa Kanaat Abukina, dannye im sudebnym vlastiam, 5 noiabria 1916 g.” in ibid., 379.
itself. In battle, too, the rebels exhibited strong organization and coordination. At its peak, the rebel army had 5,000 active combatants.\textsuperscript{113} The rebels formed detachments headed by military commanders drawn primarily from among a group of volost heads. To distinguish between the individual formations each commander carried a banner. For the same purpose, many of the rebels wore metal badges.\textsuperscript{114} The rebels transmitted messages about the movements of the punitive expeditions by using lanterns.\textsuperscript{115} During shootouts with the Russian forces, the rebels dug trenches.\textsuperscript{116} Their resolve and daring was noted even by the colonial officials, who described them as reckless.\textsuperscript{117}

The damage inflicted by the rebels on the oblast was enormous. The hardest hit was the Przhevalsk uezd, where 94 settlements were destroyed and 5,373 farms burned and plundered. 1905 men and women were killed, 684 were wounded, and 1105 were taken captive. 90% of the settlers’ livestock was seized by the rebels.\textsuperscript{118} The material damages were estimated by the authorities to be as high as 20 million rubles.\textsuperscript{119} In the words of an Okhrana officer Iungmeister, the “wealthiest uezd in Semirechye had ceased to exist, only the city of Przhevalsk and the nearby settlements of Preobrazhenskoe and Teplokiunchinskoe remain.”\textsuperscript{120}

Nowhere did the all-out nature of the rebellion in Semirechye manifest itself more brutally than in the attacks on the Russian settlements. The violence that the rebels inflicted on their victims was cast by the colonial administration as a symptom of the nomads’ inherent barbarism.\textsuperscript{121} Implicitly, the colonial administrators denied any

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  \item \textsuperscript{113} “Vsepoddanneishii raport i. d. voennogo gubernatora Semirechenskoi oblasti A. I. Alekseeva Nikolaiu II o vosstani v oblasti v 1916 g., 4 marta 1917 g.” in ibid., 411.
  \item \textsuperscript{114} “Iz telegrammy i. d. nachal'nika shtaba Turkestanskogo voennogo okruga M. N. Mikhailovskogo voennomu gubernatoru Ferganskoi oblasti A. I. Gippiusu ob organizovannosti vosstavshikh na iuge Semirechenskoi oblasti – Iz Tashkenta v Skobelev, 26 avgusta 1916 g.” in Kaptauag, 45.
  \item \textsuperscript{115} “Telegramma general-gubernatora Turkestanskogo kraia A. N. Kuropatkina voennomu ministru D. S. Shurvaevu o khode vosstanii na iuge Semirechenskoi oblasti, 17 avgusta 1916 g.” in ibid., 28.
  \item \textsuperscript{116} “Iz telegrammy i. d. nachal'nika shtaba Turkestanskogo voennogo okruga M. N. Mikhailovskogo voennomu gubernatoru Ferganskoi oblasti A. I. Gippiusu ob organizovannosti vosstavshikh na iuge Semirechenskoi oblasti – Iz Tashkenta v Skobelev, 26 avgusta 1916 g.” in ibid., 45.
  \item \textsuperscript{117} “Vsepoddanneishii raport i. d. voennogo gubernatora Semirechenskoi oblasti A. I. Alekseeva Nikolaiu II o vosstani v oblasti v 1916 g., 4 marta 1917 g.” in Piaskovskii, 417.
  \item \textsuperscript{118} These numbers are likely to be exaggerated as settlers tended to over-report their losses in hopes of better compensation. “Vsepoddanneishii raport i.d. voennogo gubernatora Semirechenskoi oblasti A. I. Alekseeva Nikolaiu II o vosstiani v oblasti v 1916 g., 4 marta 1917 g.” in Kaptauag, 192.
  \item \textsuperscript{119} “Sekretno. Nachal'nik Turkestanskogo raionnogo okhrannogo Otdeleniia. Ot chinovnika dlia poruchenii Turkestanskogo raionnogo okhrannogo otdeleniia rotmistra ljungeistera. 30 oktiabria 1916 g.” in ibid., 169.
  \item \textsuperscript{120} Ibid.
  \item \textsuperscript{121} “Vsepoddanneishii raport i. d. voennogo gubernatora Semirechenskoi oblasti A. I. Alekseeva Nikolaiu II o vosstani v oblasti v 1916 g., 4 marta 1917 g.” in Piaskovskii, 417. The bishop of the Turkestan eparchy, Innokentii Pustynskii, described the rebels as “savage” and a “horde” at least a dozen times; “Otchet o sostoyanii Turkestanskoi eparkhii za 1916 g. episkopa Turkestanskogo I Tashkentskogo Innokentiia Sviateishemu Sinodu, 14 iulia 1917 g.” in Kotiuova, 300-37. The view of nomads as savage was neither novel nor limited to Russia. Defending the Russian conquest of Central Asia in the 1860s, the imperial Foreign Minister, Alexander Gorchakov claimed that “the position of Russia in Central Asia is similar to that of all civilized states which come into contact with half-savage nomadic tribes without a firm social organization.” Sabol, 35. Apparently, the Ottoman authorities harboured similarly suspicious attitudes towards the nomadic peoples of the empire. See Selim Deringil, “‘They live in a state of nomadism and savagery’: the late Ottoman Empire and the post-colonial debate,” Comparative Studies in Society and History 45, no. 02 (2003).
meaning to the rebels’ violence, and, by extension, to the rebellion itself. Yet, although extreme, the violence that the rebels used against the settlers was not grounded in the nomadic way of life. Furthermore, the systematic nature of the killings and the selective targeting of the victims on ethnic grounds was also characteristic of settlers’ actions. To understand the brutality of the rebels I propose to examine violence as a form of communications.

By teasing out the symbolic dimensions of violence we can understand the rebels’ intentions.

The violence that accompanied the attacks on the settlements was extreme and gender specific. Torture and public executions were common. Women were subjected to horrific sexual violence while men were forced to watch. A report by a member of the Turkestan Okhrana Department, Captain Iungmeister, describes torture inflicted on the Russian settlers in morbid detail: “[the rebels] cut off [the settlers’] noses and ears, severed joints, hands, and feet, and when only the torso would remain, would finish [them] off with an axe blow in the head. Women had their breasts and genitalia removed, 4-5 year old girls were raped in front of their mothers, while others were penetrated with sticks. Nursing babies were cut into pieces. I have personally seen a year and a half old toddlers with fractured heads. [I have seen] A woman with 6 stab wounds to the face. The Kyrgyz carried off young women and girls, some of whom were made into “wives” during their captivity, while others were passed around, servicing up to 50 Kyrgyz on some days.”

The use of violence in ethnic conflicts is well established; at its simplest, violence is the physical, visceral expression of power over the enemy group. The rebels sought to humiliate the enemy and to assert their control over the enemies’ bodies and the power

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There is a rich body of literature in the field of subaltern studies focusing on nomads as subjugated, “subaltern” subjects. See, for example, Subir Rana, “Nomadism, Ambulation and the ‘Empire’: Contextualising the Criminal Tribes Act XXVII of 1871,” Transcience Journal 2, no. 2 (2011).

To properly understand the symbolism of violence during the rebellion I rely on Nicholas A. Robins’ examination of the symbolism of violence in the anti-colonial rebellions in the Americas. Robins argues that “while most rebels left no written word of their sources of inspiration or of their goals, in many ways their actions were their written word.” See his chapter on “Atrocity as Metaphor: The Symbolic Language of Rebellion” in Robins, 143-64. For a discussion of violence as communication in the colonial context, see Jose Angel Hernandez PhD, “Violence as Communication: The Revolt of La Ascensión, Chihuahua (1892),” Landscapes of Violence 2, no. 1 (2012).

that these bodies represented. By raping the Russian women and killing their children the rebels sought to emasculate the Russian men. Violence in the hands of the rebels was the ultimate expression of power over the colonists’ life and death.

Still, there was more to the violence than the assertion of control. The violence of the rebels carried a potent symbolic message that they carved into their victims’ bodies. It reminded the colonists that their presence was unwanted. By removing women’s wombs and breasts and castrating men the rebels had taken away the settlers’ ability to procreate. By gouging out their eyes and hacking off their tongues, ears, and hands, the rebels robbed the colonists of the ability to see, speak, hear, and do. By severing their victims’ legs the rebels rendered the settlers immobile. In short, the rebels denied the colonists the right to be in the land that the rebels considered theirs. The rebels’ intention “to slaughter all the Russians” and their actions to that effect were in practice a form of ethnic cleansing targeted at the physical destruction of the settler society.125

The Making of Russian Semirechye

The settler society responded to the rebels’ violence in kind. The mobilization of the settler society ran in parallel to the native mobilization. The first telegram ordering mobilization – “if local conditions dictate so” – of “peasant and Cossack militias for self-defence and protection of the settlements by special night watches” was sent from Verny to Przhevalsk already on 2 August. Less than a week later, on 8 August, the oblast’s military governor, General Fol’baum, ordered the “immediate formation of militias.”126 Fol’baum’s later telegram reminded the punitive detachments to “…work in complete unity” with the militias, to “strike strong blows where there is danger,” and to “become masters of the situation.”127

At the same time, military forces were drawn from as far as Siberia. Despite the heavy losses suffered at the front the government diverted significant resources to suppress the rebellion. Not counting the settler militias, a total of 35 companies, 24

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124 My interpretation of rape and genital mutilation during the uprising of 1916 is consistent with the argument made by Robin May Schott that “the target in genocidal rape is not women as a group, but natality, as a fundamental condition of the existence of human groups.” Robin May Schott, “What is the sex doing in the genocide? A feminist philosophical response,” European Journal of Women's Studies 22, no. 4 (2015): 407.

125 According to the deposition by one of the leaders of the uprising, Kanat (Kanaat) Abukin, the Kyrgyz wished “to slaughter all the Russians.” See: “Protokol doprosa ochevidtsa, 17 oktiabria 1916 g.” in Kotiukova, 224.


Cossack cavalry squadrons, 240 mounted scouts, 16 field-guns, and 47 machine guns were deployed in Semirechye.\(^{128}\)

According to the most conservative estimates, the settler militias and the punitive detachments killed no less than 16,000 Kyrgyz and Kazaks. Many more died on route to China in the crossing that to this day is remembered as *Urkun* (exodus), the most traumatic event in the modern history of the Kyrgyz. Early blizzards, deep ravines and sharp cliffs, lack of grass, and heavy livestock losses, coupled with chaos and stampeding of animals and people killed more people than guns and cannons.\(^{129}\) Still more died in China and at home after the return to Semirechye over the course of the civil war. Out of the 164,000 refugees in China about 130,000 were Kyrgyz and 34,000 Kazakhs. By May 1917, 70,000 Kyrgyz and Kazaks starved to death.\(^{130}\)

Like the rebels, the punitive forces and the militias spared no spite for their Muslim victims. The official reports mention rape and torture of the native population in passing, although the Duma investigation into the uprising is far more vocal about the “marauding, rape, murders, and robberies” perpetrated by the punitive forces.\(^{131}\) A more detailed description of what awaited natives who fell into the hands of the settlers in the wake of the uprising is given in a handful of witness testimonies; a long-time resident of Przhevalsk, one Potseluev (who according to a report by an Okhrana agent took an active part in the plunder of the city’s Dungans), reports that the Dungans of Przhevalsk were “beaten with sticks and stones, stabbed with pitchforks, disembowelled with sickles and scythes.”\(^{132}\) According to another witness, “feeling ran high, and the Russians were so exasperated against the Kirghiz that even women gouged out prisoners’ eyes with pitchforks.”\(^{133}\) An account of the uprising by a native historian and petitions by the returning refugees paint a similarly grisly picture and confirm the systematic use of torture and rape by the colonists and the punitive forces. Some instances of torture perpetrated by the colonists included driving nails into victims’ bodies, stoning to death, pitchforking,

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\(^{128}\) Usenbaev, 119.

\(^{129}\) A well-equipped and provisioned expedition of the Cossack sergeant (*starshina*), Petr Bychkov, that set out from Semirechye in early December reached Chinese Turkestan in a week. When crossing the border from the Naryn uezd to China, the expedition nearly froze to death. Salvation came in the form of thirty bottles of pure spirit. For Bychkov’s account of their mission to Chinese Turkestan, see “Opisanie pokhod a komandira 1-1 Semirechenskoi kazach’ei sotni starshiny Bychkova v Kitai v mestechko Uch-Turfana za russkimi plennymi i skryvaiushchimisia na kitaiskoi territorii rukovoditeliami Semirechenskogo vosstaniia,” 15-28 ianvaria 1917 g.” in Mambetayev, 94-100.


\(^{131}\) “Stenogramma zakrytogo zasedaniia Gosudarstvennoi dumy, 31 dekabria 1916 g.” in Kotiukova, 360, 381.


\(^{133}\) Nazaroff, 150.
wrapping victims in wool or burying them in hay and setting them alight, setting dogs upon them etc.\textsuperscript{134}

If rape and murder are symptoms of a savage disposition, the punitive expeditions and settler militias were as guilty as their nomadic foes. The brutality of the settlers, remarked Jungmeister, matched that of the rebels.\textsuperscript{135} Taken aback by the atrocities committed by the punitive expeditions, some of the contemporaries searched for the roots of the brutality in the desire for vengeance. Beyond any doubt, many settler militias and returning soldiers saw their actions in terms of retribution. The violence against women and children struck a nerve with the authorities and the colonists alike. The grisly sight of mutilated burned bodies, many with visible signs of rape, made the guilt of the rebels all the more palpable in the eyes of the punitive detachments and their mission all the more justified.

There is as well a more sinister edge to the remark. While acknowledging the brutality of the colonists and rebels alike, the remark hints – perhaps inadvertently – at the similarities shared by the punitive forces and the rebels in their mode of action. As the earlier description of the actions of the punitive expedition in Jizak suggests, the punitive forces engaged in mass killing, plunder, and rape. None of these was incidental. The directives to kill and plunder, though not necessarily to rape, were not the personal initiatives taken by the leaders of the punitive forces or militias; they were given by the authorities.

Hatred therefore is a necessary but an insufficient component of the mass killing. A more comprehensive explanation is in order. The many similarities in the actions of the punitive forces and the rebels denote the affinity of goals. Like the rebels who attempted to cleanse the ancestral lands of the Russian colonists, the administration sought to cleanse the area of its native population. The campaign of suppression that the authorities conducted against the nomads of Semirechye was a concerted effort implemented by the military, aided by the civilian population, and overseen by the government.

Like the rebels, the authorities were motivated by fear. Their fear, however, was of a different order. Where the rebels came to view – in the course of the increasingly violent engagements with the state authorities – the Russian presence as a threat to their very existence, the administration thought of the rebellion in broader, state-centred terms. A telegram by the military governor of Semirechye, General Fol’baum, casts the rebellion

\textsuperscript{134} Soltonoev, 2, 73, 80.
\textsuperscript{135} “Raport chinovnika dlia poruchenii Turkestanskogo raionnogo okhrannogo otdeleniia Jungmeistera nachal’niku Turkestanskogo raionnogo okhrannogo otdeleniia M. N. Volkovu o vosstanii v Przheval’skom uezde I g. Przheval’ske, 30 dekabria 1916 g.” in Piaskovskii, 398.
as a disruption of the Russian state-building project in the region: “the situation can change so suddenly that the entire Russian enterprise will come to ruin in Semirechye.”

The rebellion therefore was more than simply an assault on law and order. As a group attack on the ethnic core of the state, the empire’s “Staatsvolk,” the rebellion constituted an attack on the integrity of the state and an attempt to sabotage its sovereignty. It was, in short, a state treason and was punished as one. The instructions to disregard civilian courts, and to court martial and execute the rebels for state treason attest to the view. While the native leadership was executed for state treason, the majority of the nomads, including men, women, and children were subjected to summary punishment. Fol’baum, for example, ordered the complete destruction of the entire native male population of the Atekinskaia and Sarybagishevskaia volosts.

The colonial administration of Semirechye also implemented a number of measures targeted at the destruction of the native population by indirect means. In addition to the mass executions, the punitive forces were instructed to “drive the rebels vigorously to the most forbidding localities where they will soon succumb to the cold,” to seize the rebels’ animals for “enormous numbers of cattle seized in many locations are a clear sign of the rebels’ defeat,” to “view the smallest of Kyrgyz groupings as a rebellion, and suppress it with peasant militias,” and to “strengthen the factionalism and to put the Kara-Kirghiz in the most unfavourable conditions.”

The scope of the punitive – or indeed exterminatory – actions was wide, but their goal was focused on a single objective; by forcibly moving large groups of nomads and seizing their livestock and grain the punitive forces condemned the natives to death by exposure and starvation.

Once the initial wave of violence against the nomads rendered Semirechye largely “clean” of its native population, the colonial government proceeded to legitimize and institutionalize the fait accompli of ethnic cleansing. The plan developed by the Governor General of Turkestan, Alexei Kuropatkin, in the wake of the uprising envisaged the

136 “Telegramma voennogo gubernatora Semirechenskoi oblasti M. A. Fol’baumu general-gubernatoru Turkestanskogo kraia A. N. Kuropatkina o vosstanii v oblasti i o pros’be vyslat’ karat’ nye voiska, 10 avgusta 1916 g.” in ibid, 337.
137 As a rule, the authorities court martialled and executed the captured participants of the rebellion for “state treason.” “Prigovor voenno-polevogo suda o kazni uchastnikov vosstaniia T. Karymshakova, B. Shavdambekova i B. Salman’dinova, 18 sentiabria 1916 g.” in Kaptagaev, 72-73.
138 “Otnoshenie general-ad’iutanta A. N. Kuropatkina v departament politisi o podvalesi sprotivleniia miatezhnikh ‘kirgiz’ v Semirechenskoi oblasti, 17 oktiabria 1916 g.”, GA RF f.1467, op.1, d.764, l.13 ob.
140 “Iz telegrammy Fol’baumu Kuropatkini” in Ryskulov, 83.
142 “Iz telegrammy Fol’baumu Kuropatkini” in Ryskulov, 83.
removal of 37,335 Kyrgyz and Kazakh households, or 190,000 men, women, and children, from the Pishpek, Przhevalsk, and Dzharkent uezds.\textsuperscript{143} The Przhevalsk uezd would be cleansed completely of its nomadic population. Altogether, the authorities expected to “recover” 2,510,361 dessiatines of land as the result of the removal.\textsuperscript{144} The remaining nomadic population would be resettled in the Naryn uezd adding to its original population of 60,000. By seizing the land from the Kirghiz “for the villainy they committed” and establishing in their place “the territory with Russian population isolated from the Kirghiz by ethnographic as well as geographic borders,” the authorities solidified and expanded the presence of the central state into areas where previously it had been limited.\textsuperscript{145} As a part and an extension of the ethnic core of the empire, Russian Semirechye would enforce and strengthen the boundaries of the state and thwart potential encroachments on the empire’s territory and sovereignty. The nomads – contained in the mountainous country of marginal agricultural value and fenced off from the settler population by mountains and a string of militarized Cossack settlements – would no longer present a threat and become a group of population from which the state could extract “millions of sheep for meat, wool, hides, etc.”\textsuperscript{146} All in all, we ought to think of the twin policies of the government of stripping Semirechye of its native population and “erecting a new colonial society on the expropriated land” as part and parcel of the territorial and ethnic consolidation of the state.\textsuperscript{147}

\section*{Conclusion}

We tend to think of mass mobilization and mass exterminations in connection with wars. Rebellions, on the other hand, are rarely seen as wars. What both the rebellion and its suppression demonstrate, however, is how the language of war permeated and justified

\textsuperscript{143} The pastoralists of Semirechye were not the only ethnic group to be displaced and expropriated for their presumed unreliability. Eric Lohr and Peter Gatrell, for example, examine the government policies towards the ethnic groups in the western war zone, including Jews, Poles, and Germans, who were subjected to forced removal into Russia’s interior. Eric Lohr, \textit{Nationalizing the Russian Empire: The Campaign Against Enemy Aliens During World War I} (Harvard: Harvard University Press, 2003); Peter Gatrell, \textit{A Whole Empire Walking: Refugees in Russia during World War I} (Bloomington and Indianapolis: Indiana University Press, 1999).

\textsuperscript{144} “Protokol soveshchaniia pod predsedatel’stvom general-gubernatora Turkestanskogo kraia A. N. Kuropatkina o pereseleнии kirgizov i kazakhov, priminavshih uchastie v vosstanii 1916 g., v Narynskii krai i o peredache ikh zemel’ russkim pere selentsam, 16 oktiaebra 1916 g.” in Piaskovskii, 685. Buttino, \textit{Revolutsiia naoborot: Sredniaia Aziia mezhdu padeniem tsarskoi imperii i obrazovaniem SSSR}, 74.

\textsuperscript{145} M. Pokrovskii, “Iz dnevnika A. N. Kuropatkina,” \textit{Krasnyi arkhiv}, no. 1 (20) (1927): 60. “Protokol soveshchaniia pod predsedatel’stvom general-gubernatora Turkestanskogo kraia A. N. Kuropatkina o pereseleнии kirgizov i kazakhov, priminavших uchastie v vosstanii 1916 g., v Narynskii krai i o peredache ikh zemel’ russkim pere selentsam, 16 oktiaebra 1916 g.” in ibid, 685. On the application of the “population politics” – state interventions in the social sphere for the purpose of shaping population – in the aftermath of the uprising of 1916, see Holquist, “To count, to extract, and to exterminate: population statistics and population politics in late imperial and soviet Russia.”

\textsuperscript{146} Pokrovskii, 61.

\textsuperscript{147} Wolfe, 388.
the objectives of the groups in conflict. To the rebels, the forced conscription and the violent repression of the protests constituted the declaration of war on the Muslims of the region. By the same token, their actions were in response to the belligerent intentions of the administration and were therefore entirely justified. In their depositions and testimonies the rebels speak of the war. An explanation that one of the rebels offers for the uprising is revealing: “We started the war with the Russians because they wanted to [forcibly] recruit us as soldiers and because we would be killed by Germans.”

A telegram of the head of the Turkestan military district, Mikhailovskii, corroborates this perception: “The Kyrgyz refer to the actual rebellion as the war.”

The administration too saw the rebellion as an act of war. The telegram of the head of the Kazan military district, Sandetskii, for example, insists that “there was no murder of Kyrgyz [Kazakhs] in the Turgai and Irgiz uezds. The forces…did not execute the Kyrgyz, but engaged in battle with the organized hordes, which assumed military formation and set as their aim the resistance to the state power, the destruction of the cities of the oblast, communication lines, and the telegraph.”

Perceptions, as I stated in the beginning of this chapter, are important. The perceptions of the war in Semirechye suggest that we ought to view the rebellion as an integral part of World War I. The war in Semirechye was a war on the domestic front brought about by the war fought on the foreign front. The rebellion in Semirechye was all the more eventful for they marked “the beginning of the civil wars that would both destroy and then reconstitute the Russian imperial ecumene.”

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148 “1 sentiabria – protocol doprosa Diushake Mamerbaeva” in Ryskulov, 62.
Chapter III

The Revolution Comes East: Civil War in Semirechye

Wars disrupt the social life of affected communities, they destroy economies and infrastructure, and erode the state and civil society institutions. In this respect, Semirechye was not an exception. The uprising left the oblast in tatters. The oblast weekly “Semirechenskaia zhizn’” (Semirechye’s Life) lamented that the uprising “shattered the economic foundations of the local population, arrested agricultural activities, and aggravated the burden of the nation-wide economic ailment.”1 Reporting to the Military Governor of Semirechye, Colonel Vladimir Kolosovskii had similarly remarked that the area from the Tokmak district of the Pishpek uezd to Naryn “bore the character of complete destruction…and utter desolation,” with “no attributes of regular peaceful life to be found.”2 The head of the Przhevalsk land surveying administration was equally pessimistic in his contention that “the uezd was so utterly devastated that it would not be able to recover within the next 8-10 years” and that the colonization of the Issyk-Kul valley had to be “started anew.”3

Yet, paradoxically, the rebellion did not bring the colonization of Semirechye to a halt. Although the sown acreage dropped as did agricultural productivity, Semirechye still produced more grain than it consumed (or was projected to consume) and received more Russian colonists than it could comfortably accommodate. So great in fact was the influx of new colonists into the oblast that in April 1917, the head of the Semirechye resettlement district (pereselencheskii raion) protested against the implementation of Kuropatkin’s plan and resettlement of the Ural’sk Cossacks in Semirechye for fear of discontent that it would cause among “the Kirghiz, the Cossacks, the long-term (starozhily) peasant residents, city residents, and colonists.”4

Nor did the rebellion and the two revolutions that followed in its wake cause the failure of the colonial state in the oblast.5 Although the civil war severed Semirechye’s

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1 Semirechenskaia zhizn’ No.1, 03.01.1917 in Boris Mukhlynin, “Istoriia sela Belovodskoe,” http://belovodskoe-muh.ucoz.ru/publ/v_d_leonskij_vospominaniya_otca_chast_1_aia_istorija_semi_akimenkovykh/1-1-0-145.
2 “Raport polkovnika V. P. Kolosovskogo voennomu gubernatoru Semirechenskoi oblasti A. I. Alekseevu o sostoiannii Pishpekskogo i Przheval’skogo uezdov posle vosstaniia i o polozhenii kirgizskogo naseleniia, bezhavshego vo vremia vosstaniia v Kitai, 3 noiabria 1916 g.” in Piaskovskii, 692.
3 “Vostanie 1916 goda v Chuiskoi oblasti Kyrgyzstana” in Boris Mukhlynin.
5 The colonial project was assessed as a failure by many contemporaries, including perhaps most famously Alexander Kerenskii in his Duma speech on the uprising of 1916. More recently, some scholars, most notably Daniel Brower,
ties with the metropole, the settler population maintained its dominance and preserved the colonial status quo. It is revealing that the two main contenders for power in the oblast – the self-proclaimed Bolshevik majority of soldiers and landless colonists and the White-leaning landowning Cossack minority – represented different strata of the colonial society. What united the colonists, Cossack and landless alike, was their opposition to the native nomads at whose expense they sought to advance their interests and survive in this war of all against all. What was Semirechye’s place in the Russia’s “continuum of crisis,” which practices and ideas informed the “colonial revolution” in the oblast, and how the native society responded to the challenges of the civil war and the continuing dominance of the settler communities are the questions that this chapter sets out to address.⁶

Picking up where the previous chapter left off, this chapter provides an overview of the civil war in the region and its specific trajectory in Semirechye; it examines the ways in which the uprising and its suppression affected the region and its population and shaped the political contours of the oblast during and after the civil war. In my analysis of interregnum Semirechye, I draw on Peter Holquist’s proposition to view “the violence of the Russian civil war…as the extension of state practices conceived in the nineteenth century and massively implemented in the course of the Great War.” I suggest that in the context of a settler colony like Semirechye, the civil war resulted in the continuation and intensification of the colonial state-building project. The settler society was primarily concerned with the preservation of the economic and political privileges it enjoyed under the previous regime and engaged in familiar practices of colonial state-building such as the extraction of labour and resources from the native population. To quote a Bolshevik functionary, Georgii Safarov, what had transpired in Turkestan under the guise of a socialist revolution was in fact a “colonial revolution” that is the revolution by the colonists, for the colonists.⁸

To understand how colonial state-building continued in the absence of central government, I focus on the development in Semirechye of what Peter Holquist describes as a “parastatal complex” – a “network of semipublic, semistate structures…in which society and state were tightly intertwined.” I argue that this complex emerged from the

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⁶ The term “continuum of crisis” was introduced by Peter Holquist to describe the period spanning the Great and civil War and the civil war in Russia. See Peter Holquist, Making war, forging revolution: Russia’s continuum of crisis, 1914-1921 (Cambridge, Massachusetts: Harvard University Press, 2002).
⁷ “To count, to extract, and to exterminate: population statistics and population politics in late imperial and soviet Russia,” 127.
⁸ G. I. Safarov, Kolonial’naya revoliutsiya: Opyt Turkestana (Moscow: Gosizdat, 1921).
⁹ Holquist, Making war, forging revolution: Russia’s continuum of crisis, 1914-1921, 4.
institutions of colonial administration as well as the practices of total mobilization employed by the authorities during the suppression of the native uprising and the methods of front warfare imported into the region by the returning Russian soldiers. These practices and institutions determined the ability of the settler minority to retain control over land as simultaneously the key resource in the war-ravaged colony and the state territory where colonial sovereignty was upheld.

In significant ways, the conflict in Semirechye arose from local circumstances. The dynamics of inter-ethnic strife established during the rebellion of 1916 carried over into the civil war. As in the uprising, land was at the heart of the conflict. At the same time, because the competition for land developed along the axes of ethnicity and estate, the conflict in Semirechye was simultaneously a civil war, which pitted the Cossacks against the majority of colonists, and an ethnic conflict, where the settler population competed for land with the native pastoralists.

Indirectly, the suppression of the rebellion in 1916 had also determined the outcome of the civil war in Semirechye. The distribution of arms to the settlers in the wake of the uprising and the return of soldiers from the front levelled the balance of power between the Cossacks and the peasants. The Bolshevik wager on the strong – the numerically superior, armed, and land-hungry peasants and soldiers – was critical to the recapture of the region by the Red Army from the Cossack armies.

In the longer term, the turmoil of the rebellion and its brutal suppression had also given rise to native political movements. The so-called “Semirechye question” served as the basis for political mobilization of native society and was key to the articulation of collective aspirations for national autonomy. The efforts of the indigenous elites to reclaim agricultural land lost to the settlers led them to frame the idea of national autonomy in both territorial and ethnic terms. At the same time, the ethnicization of the political landscape in the colony and the peculiar dynamics of the civil war in Semirechye resulted in the fragmentation of the indigenous movement along ethnic lines. Importantly, this realignment of the region’s indigenous political movements into ethno-territorial blocks at once reflected the existing administrative division and laid the foundation of the future ethno-centred republics under the Soviet leadership.

The most significant development of the civil war in Semirechye, however, was the fundamental demographic change triggered by the converging effects of food crisis, violence, and forced displacement. Between 1916 and 1920, Turkestan as a whole lost nearly a third, or 31.3%, of its nomadic population, whereas the Russian population of
the region grew by 12.9%. More than half a million nomads perished between 1917 and 1920. The implications of this change were profound; Semirechye had become more Russian and less nomadic in the course of the war.

Drawing on archival records, petitions, and secondary sources, this chapter will demonstrate that the conflict in Semirechye was one of the many instances of the civil war in the borderlands, which “exhibited particular features” and was “more violent and explicitly political…than in the ethnically Russian centre.”

“The Beggarly and Wretched Existence”: The Nomads in the Wake of the Uprising

The effects of the colonial rebellion rippled across the empire. Tested and battered by the rebellion, the colonial administration now faced the court of public opinion among Russia’s liberal circles. The first to respond to the reports of atrocities committed in the name of the empire was the State Duma. Ever abrasive, the reform-minded members of Russia’s ill-fated parliament saw the rebellion as one of many indications of the bankruptcy and corruption of the autocratic regime. They also saw in the rebellion an opportunity to point a public finger at the misguided and dangerous course that the country took under the Tsarist government. On Duma’s initiative, a hastily formed investigative commission despatched to Turkestan in mid-August, at the height of the uprising in Semirechye. Led by the increasingly popular Alexander Kerensky, who spent his youth in Tashkent, where his father was employed as a school inspector, and facilitated by the leader of the Muslim faction in Duma, Kutlu-Mukhammad Tevkelev, the commission spent two weeks in the region, but did not travel to Semirechye.

11 ibid.
12 Alfred J Rieber, ”Civil wars in the Soviet Union,” Kritika: Explorations in Russian and Eurasian History 4, no. 1 (2003): 138-39. Although Rieber qualifies only the first “revolutionary” period between 1905 and 1906 as “more violent and explicitly political in the periphery,” I believe his conclusion also applies to the civil war in Semirechye.
The speeches delivered by the members of the commission at a special Duma hearing in December the same year put the deficiencies of the autocratic government in blunt terms. The responsibility for the crisis in the colony, they claimed, lay with the administration whose “incorrect and illegal actions” incited the uprising. The litany of abuses listed by Tevkelev and Kerenskii at the two Duma hearings spoke in their view of the general malaise of the “crippled ("beschinnyi"), vindictive, and centralized autocracy.” It seemed obvious to most in the Duma that the age of autocratic government was over.

Kerenskii’s passionate critique of the Tsarist regime won him a standing ovation and strengthened his influence and reputation. Little, however, came out of the commission’s investigation. Earnest as it was, Kerenskii’s outrage served, for all intents and purpose, as an indictment of the government, not a proposal for resolution. The numerous pleas of the native petitioners from Semirechye and other areas in Turkestan beseeching the repeal of General Kuropatkin’s resettlement plan elicited a lukewarm response from the Duma. The fire of Kerenskii’s speech fizzled out to an anaemic recommendation warning Kuropatkin against making hasty decisions.

Whatever the personal inclinations of colonial administrators like Kuropatkin, who at times expressed some sympathy for the nomads, the government was neither willing nor able to alienate its Russian constituency in the tumultuous periphery. Hamstrung by the lack of funds and wary of potential disturbances in the settler society, the colonial authorities tolerated, if not indirectly encouraged, the redistribution of the nomads’ land and livestock among the settlers. First, it was seen as only fair that the colonists who lost their family members and livelihoods help themselves to the Kyrgyz property; second, the redistribution of land and livestock decreased the burden of compensation on the government; and third, it gave hope that the agriculture of the oblast would recover once the settlers put the nomads’ land and animals to good use. A great number of stock and land changed hands enriching in the process some of the settlers who “doubled and even tripled their property.”


15 Brower, 169.

16 Kotuikova, Turkestanskie napravlenie dumskoi politiki (1905-1917 gg.), 143.

17 “G. g. komissaram ot Vremennogo Pravitel'stva ot tatarskih soldat, nakhodящихся на военной службе, имеющих семью в селе Tokmak Semirechenskoj oblasti proshinenie, 8 mai 1917 g.” in Koigeldiev, 157; Nazaroff, 167. “Dokladnaya zapiska chlen Turkestanskogo komiteta O. A. Shkapskogo v Zemskoi otdel MVD o situatsii v Semirechenskoj oblasti, 27 iunia 1917 g.,” RGIA f. 1291, op. 84, d. 57, l. 3 ob.
Undoubtedly, the rebellion affected everyone in the oblast, but the nomads bore the brunt of the destruction. In the Verny uezd and five volosts of the Pishpek and Djarkent uezds, the remaining nomads harvested only a quarter of their sown fields. The worst affected were the Kyrgyz of the Przhevalsk uezd whose entire harvest was destroyed during the rebellion. Ten volosts of the Pishpek and Przhevalsk uezds and fourteen volosts of the Djarkent uezds retained a third of their herds, while the twenty volosts of the Pishpek uezd and nineteen volosts of the Przhevalsk uezd lost all of their livestock. According to their own estimates, the fleeing nomads lost three quarters of their property to the punitive troops and settler militias during the rebellion and the flight to China. Altogether, the Kyrgyz of the Pishpek and Przhevalsk uezds lost a million and a half head of sheep and cattle.

The Chinese authorities were equally inhospitable to the new arrivals who had to buy their way across the border with cattle, opium, and cash. Bad weather and lack of forage left little hope for the survivors who led “beggarly and wretched existence.” By January 1917, the refugees from Semirechye lost all of their cattle, 90% of their horses, and three quarters of the sheep that they took with them to China. In desperation, many of them sold their domestic implements, animals, and even their wives and children. The native delegates writing to the TurkTsIK (Turkestan Central Executive Committee, the Soviet administrative, executive, and legislative body formed in 1919), estimated that 4,000 women and children from Semirechye were sold in China.

Those of the nomads who did not cross into China or returned to Semirechye remained subject to the mobilization, which had triggered the rebellion in the first place. Of the planned 480,000 workers from Turkestan, the authorities were able to mobilize 123,205, a quarter of the projected number. In an attempt to minimize expenditures, the

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18 Iv. Chekaninskii, *Vosstanie kirgiz-kazakov i kara-kirgiz v Dzhetysuiskom (Semirechenskom) krae v iiule-sentiybre 1916 goda* (K materialam po istorii etogo vosstaniia) (Kyzyl-Orda: Izd-vo Obsch-va izuchenii Kazakhstana, 1926), 50. The fields were trampled and torched both by the rebels and the punitive forces and settler militias. Paul Nazaroff relates that the settlers “pulled down the buildings, hacked down the trees, dug up the gardens, cut the aryks” and razed the native villages “literally to the ground.” Nazaroff, 166.

19 Chekaninskii, 50-51.

20 “Zaiavlenie v Prezidium TurTsIKA ot Semirechenskih delegatov, 27 ianvaria 1920 goda” in Koigeldiev, 190.


22 Iz dokladnoi zapiski dragomana Rossiiskogo general'nogo konsul'stva v Kashgare kollezhskogo sekretaria Stefanovicha o volneniiakh sredi kirgizov Semirechenskoi oblasti i o begstve ikh v kitaiskie predely, nachalo 1917 g.” in Mambetaliev, 108.

23 “Doklad predsedatelia osoboii komissii, komandirovannoi v kazakhskii krai dlia okazaniia pomoshchi kazakh-skim bezhentsam oblastnomu naornomu komissaru o sostoiianii etogo voprosa” in Koigeldiev, 167.

24 “Protokol voiskovogo starshiny Semirechenskogo kazach'skogo soveta sredi kirgizov v Kitae, 7-21 ianvaria 1917 g.” in Mambetaliev, 92.


26 P. A. Kovalev, *Tylovye rabochie Turkestana v gody Pervoi Mirovoi voiny* (Tashkent: Gosizdat Uzbekskoi SSR, 1957), 82. The recruited labourers from Turkestan were often grouped together with prisoners of war.
government transferred the cost of mobilization onto the native population, which was required to clothe and deliver the workers to the drafting stations. The cost of a set of clothes could run as high as 100 rubles. Nor was the transportation provided for the drafted workers some of whom had to cross over 1,000 versts (a little over 1,000 kilometres) to reach the nearest station.27 Similarly, despite the promises of compensation for their labour, the administration demanded – as a cost cutting measure – that each worker be paid by his own community no less than 300 rubles. The Kyrgyz of Karabalty (Kara-Balta in Kyrgyzstan), for example, estimated that they spent between 300 and 400 rubles per individual worker. It had cost the 50,000 native families of the Aulieatinskii uezd 5,000,000 rubles to send 12,000 workers to the rear, none of which was paid for by the administration.28

The forced conscription of workers compounded the economic distress of the nomadic population. All the while, the tension between the native and the settlers built. Frequent settler attacks on the helpless nomads and continuing seizures of the nomads’ remaining livestock brought the native Semirechye to the verge of famine. Soon, in an ominous sign of what was to come, the streets of Pishpek became littered with dying Kyrgyz. Starving, the Kyrgyz “resembled walking skeletons” and “ate dogs, gophers, rats, and frogs.”29

The famine ravaging the native communities had not yet struck the settler society. Indeed, the beginning of the grain harvesting season, the flight of the majority of the nomads to China, and the arming of the peasants had given the settler society some reassurance that the authorities would be able to maintain the order. Even this semblance of order, however, collapsed when the news of the tsar’s abdication reached Turkestan. The period that began with the uprising and continued through the February and October revolutions and the ensuing civil war brought untold misery to the far-flung colony.

“Grief, Misery, and the Sea of Tears”: The Nomads Return to Semirechye

The demise of the ailing regime came perhaps sooner than anyone in the colony expected. As Marco Buttino cleverly put it, the February Revolution arrived in Turkestan via the

and treated accordingly. The new Murmansk railroad, for example, was constructed with prisoner-of-war labour and punitive battalions composed of Uzbeks and Kazakhs. Mortality on the project was immense: 25,000 of 70,000 men employed on the project perished. Holquist, ""In Accord with State Interests and the People's Wishes": The Technocratic Ideology of Imperial Russia's Resettlement Administration," 171.

27 “Iz telegrammy general-gubernatora Turkestanskogo kraia A. N. Kuropatkina voennomu ministru D. S. Shuvaevu o neobkhodimosti prisylki voinskikh chasti dlia podavlenia vosstania v Semirechenskoj oblasti, 17 avgusta 1916 g.”

28 Galuzo, 57.

29 S. Brainin and Sh. Shafiro, Pervye shagi sovetov v Semirech'e (Alma-Ata 1934), 38.
The news of the tsar’s abdication reached the colony in early March 1917, rousing the settler and the native population alike. Immediately, crowds gathered in the streets of the Russian quarters and the native city of Tashkent. The public’s response to the declarations of the new order was equivocal at best. While the Russian population took the news with caution, the native population grew more hopeful.

Indeed, the first actions of the colonial authorities in the wake of the February Revolution renewed hopes among the native elites for reconciliation and compromise. The new authorities ended the ill-conceived conscription of the native labourers and allowed those already mobilized to return. In attempt to cast off the image of a loyal Tsarist administrator, Kuropatkin commuted the death sentences of the participants in the uprising in March 1917. At the same time, he telegraphed the local authorities in Semirechye and instructed them to stop the persecution of the native nomads for the sake of “the speediest pacification of both the Russian and the native population, and for the revival of joint brotherly work.” The changes that followed the establishment of the Provisional Government, however, were bound to disappoint both the settler and the native society. On the one hand, the declarations of national equality endangered the colony’s status quo and the privileges of the settlers and alienated the colonial society from the new government. On the other hand, the inability – and the unwillingness – of the Provisional Government to deliver on the promises made to the empire’s minorities meant that the hopes of Turkestan’s native population quickly gave way to disillusionment and bitterness.

On paper at least, the new government held to the vision of a democracy. The legislation abolishing ethnic and religious restrictions was introduced in March 1917. In theory, the Provisional Government also extended election rights to the previously disenfranchised minorities and reserved a share of seats in local organs of administration for non-Russian representatives. In practice, the reservations about granting the native population of the colony franchise and equal representation rang as true for the Provisional Government and its regional representative body, the Turkestan Committee, as they did for the colonial administrators. The fear of renewed protests and the awareness of being a minority in the “sea” of natives pitted the liberal leanings of the new legislation

30 Buttino, Revoliutsiia naoborot: Sredniaia Azia mezhdu padeniem tsarskoi imperii i obrazovaniem SSSR, 95.
31 Kuropatkin pardoned 320 of the 340 sentenced rebels. Pokrovskii, 64.
32 TsGA RUz f. 1044, op. 1, d. 5, l. 5 in David Budianskii, Istoriiia bezhentsev-kyrrgyzov (1916-1927 gody) (Bishkek2006), 62.
against the fears of the local settler society. The distrust of the native population was reflected in the makeup of the newly appointed Turkestan Committee; of nine members only four were Muslim and even fewer – the Kazakh Alikhan Bukeikhanov and Mukhamedzhan Tynyshpaev – were natives of the region. The solution proposed by the Turkestan Committee was the familiar colonial maxim of governing the politically “immature” periphery with a firm hand. Vladimir Evpat’evskii, one of the five Russian members of the Turkestan Committee, had set the tone with the proposal to make a “significant departure from the all-Russian norm” and to concentrate administration in the hands of the Russian authorities appointed from above.°° Kuropatkin, too, had emphasized “the necessity of non-application of the principle of equality to Turkestan, lest Turkestan take a step back: the natives will have the majority of votes, and they will take everything into their hands, hands, which through our own fault, are not trustworthy.” In the same vein, Alexander Kerenskii, who only months ago had criticized the Tsarist government for the brutal treatment of the native population, agreed with Kuropatkin on the matter, judging that given “the unequal burden of responsibilities…the natives should not be given full rights.”°°°

The deep-running prejudice and the fear of being swamped by “the seven-million strong mass” (according to Kuropatkin) of natives successfully curbed the more democratic policies of the Provisional Government in the region. It was, however, the decision taken by the members of the Turkestan Committee in April 1917 to proceed with the plan proposed by General Kuropatkin to remove the native population of the Przhevalsk, Pishpek and in part the Djarkent uezds, that frustrated hopes of the native society for resolution.°°°°° The meeting convened in May the same year and chaired, among others, by Tynyshpaev, had decreed to ban the returning Kyrgyz from “taking up residence in the Issyk-Kul basin and in the areas of…lesser and greater Keben’ (Kemin in Kyrgyzstan) and Ak-Piket of the Pishpek uezd until the complete pacification of the peasants.”°°°°°° The physical separation of the two communities was deemed necessary to protect the Kyrgyz from “extreme hostility” of the settlers. Yet, resettling the refugees in the largely mountainous Naryn, where, in the nomads’ own words, “no land was suitable for grain cultivation” and where stock-breeding alone would not support “the mass of

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°° Budianskii, 65.
°°° Pokrovskii, 65.
°°°°° “Kopiia telegrammy iz Tashkenta ot 22 apreliia 1917 g. №1279” in Koigeldiev, 120-21.
°°°°°° “Protokol soveshchania sostoiavshegosia 4 i 6 maia 1917 g. v gor. Pishpeke po voprosu uregulirovaniia vzaimootnoshenii russkogo i kirizskogo naseleniia v Przheval’skom, Pishpekском i Dzharkentskom uezdakh, a takzhe o dunganakh” in ibid., 122.
people targeted for resettlement” would condemn the returning refugees to starvation.  

For the time being, it seemed that, though shaken by the uprising and the revolution, the colonial order in the region was preserved. 

In the scheme of things, the decision of the Turkestani Committee merely formalized the de-facto new occupation of the nomads’ land by the settlers who were prepared to defend their right to own it if necessary. The local authorities, too, considered the nomads the guilty party unworthy of owning the land in their possession before the uprising. The investigation of the Muslim Regional Committee (“Musul’manskii Kraevoi Soviet,” or Tukramus in Russian) concluded that that both the settlers and the local authorities found the presence of the Kyrgyz and Kazakhs untenable and downright intolerable. The solutions to the refugee crisis voiced by the peasants in conversations with the deputies ranged from forced displacement to mass murder. The majority of the respondents in Semirechye proposed “starving the Kirghiz to death by famine and famine fever (typhus).” Others thought that the Kyrgyz should be evicted into other uezds, or even into Siberia.”

The authorities were equally vengeful; the Przhevalsk Executive Committee convened every Sunday to discuss “how and to where to expel the Kirghiz and how to punish them.”

Despite the complaints and protests of the Tukramus, the Turkestani Committee could do little to ameliorate the plight of the nomads. The distance between Tashkent and Semirechye coupled with the general state of crisis in the colony invalidated any pretensions of Tashkent to authority in the oblast. Semirechye remained - and indeed often chose to remain – isolated from the authorities in Tashkent. Distrustful of the new government and wary of any potential confrontation with the native population, the colonial administrators of Semirechye acted on their own initiative and were indifferent to the demands and requests of the Turkestani Committee. The first executive organs of the new government replacing the colonial administration were formed in Pishpek and Przhevalsk already in March 1917, a month before the Turkestani Committee was

38 “Proshenie grazhdaninu General’nomu Komissaru Turkestanskogo kraia doverennykh ot 2,374 kibitok Atekinskoi i Sarybagishevskoi volostei Pishpekskogo uezda, Semirechenskoi oblasti Belka Soltanaeva i Dzhunusa Baidzhanova, 25 oktiabria 1917 g.” in ibid., 145.
41 In his report to the Ministry of Internal Affairs about the crisis in Semirechye, Orest Shkapskii, a member of the Committee and, like Tynyshpaev, one of Semirechye’s Commissars, cites isolation (“otorvannost’) of Semirechye from other oblasts of Turkestan and the Steppe Governorate and the absence of railway as the main reasons for the state of “anarchy” in the oblast. “Dokladnaia zapiska chlena Turkestanskogo komiteta O. A. Shkapskogo v Zemskoi otdel MVD o situatsii v Semirechenskoi oblasti, 27 iunia 1917 g.,” RGIA f. 1291, op. 84, d. 57, l. 2
Often, these executive committees ("ispolnit'nye komitety," hereafter *Ispolkom*) exhibited remarkable continuity with the colonial authorities that they replaced. In Przhevalsk, for example, the membership of the uezd *Ispolkom* was drawn entirely from the settler population of the uezd. Similarly, the Commissar of the uezd and later the oblast, Piotr Shebalin, was a junior supervisor at the Semirechye land resettlement party at the time of the uprising.

As the region whose settler population suffered most from the nomadic rebellion, Russian Semirechye had understandably received the news of the revolution and the declarations of national equality with hostility. To the settlers, equality with the Kyrgyz sounded the renewal of the ethnic warfare for land and water. It was a little surprise, then, that when the reports of the Russian consul in Kuldja (city in Chinese Turkestan) about the departure from China of “over 6,000 armed Dungans…intent on plundering Przhevalsk and Verny” reached Semirechye in early May, the peasants and townsmen of the oblast once again took to arms. The mobilization of the settler population triggered by the rumours of the impending return of the refugees followed the patterns established in 1916.

As during the uprising, in Semirechye, the authorities acted together with the settlers to maintain the existing order. On 8 May, 1917, the Przhevalsk *Ispolkom* ordered the immediate mobilization of the settler population and distributed 550 rifles to the settlers. These rifles came on top of the 8,000 rifles distributed – on Kuropatkin’s order – across the region in the aftermath of the uprising. As those most affected by the rebellion, the Russian population of the Pishpek, Przhevalsk, and Djarken uezds received proportionally more guns than any other oblast of Turkestan. The concentration of arms in the settlers’ hands facilitated what the local authorities perceived to be the task of self-defence and gave the settlers an advantage in the confrontations with the native population. It had also proven crucial to the survival and dominance of the settler society.

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42 Budianskii, 63.
45 In May 1917, for example, the Semirechye Cossack *Ispolkom* demanded an explanation as to why the Kyrgyz guilty of “violent assaults on the Russians, robbery, arson, murder, hostage taking, rape etc.” were amnestied. See "Postanovlenie tsentral'nogo voiskovogo Semirechenskogo komiteta o khode "kirgizskogo" vosstaniia i vozmescheniiia ubytkov ot nego, 15 maia 1917 g.", RGVIA f. 400, op. 1, d. 4639, l. 67.
48 Pokrovskii, 62.
49 Ibid.
at the time when the central state was largely absent from the region and could neither feed nor defend its colonists.

The 6,000 “armed Dungans” were in reality a ragtag mass of unarmed and largely defenceless refugees returning from China. Faced with the mass of refugees, the Przhevalsk Ispolkom ordered the immediate mobilization of soldiers, Cossacks, and settlers. To prevent the nomads from returning, the Ispolkom dispatched a Cossack regiment, several cavalry units and volunteer militias to the mountain passes through which the rebels had earlier fled into China. Instructed to force the returning nomads to surrender their arms and Russian hostages, the soldiers formed a cordon of military posts. Troops were stationed at the same mountain passes, through which the rebels had earlier fled into China.

How many refugees returned in spring and summer of 1917 is difficult to establish. According to David Budianskii, some 64,000 Kyrgyz and Kazakh refugees returned to Semirechye by May 1917. Native sources put the number of returned refugees as of July 1917 at 69,000. Whatever their number, the returnees soon found themselves in an impossible position. “The Russians received all the Kirghiz and gathered them in one place, neither allowing them into Russia nor back into China.” Squeezed between the forbidding mountains and the military posts, the refugees were an easy target for the soldiers and peasants who exercised their “right of the strong” turning the refugee camps into the site of what a group of native intelligentsia described as “a bloody bacchanalia.” Armed with cannons, rifles, pitchforks, axes, scythes, and stones, settlers and soldiers descended upon the nomads. Soldiers “formed groups of 20-25 men and stripped the Kirghiz of their cattle and other belongings…Peasants gathered in groups and rode around robbing and murdering the Kirghiz.” Lest the refugees resist the marauding soldiers and peasants, the Ispolkom also prohibited the sale of bread to the natives.

Responding to reports of the continuing assaults on the refugees, on 3 June 1917 the Turkestan Committee instructed the Russian consul in Kashgar to prevent or delay

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51 TsGA RUz f. 17 op. 1, d. 236, l. 9 ob. in Budianskii, 108.
53 TsGA RUz f. 1044, op. 1, d. 5, l. 40 in Budianskii, 86.
54 “Rezoliutsiia soedinennogo zasedaniia musul’manskikh organizatsii g. Tashkenta, proishodivshego 20 avgusta 1917 goda po voprosu o polozenii del v Semirechenskoi oblasti” in Koigeldiev, 139.
56 Ibid., 96.
57 TsGA RUz f. 1044, op. 1, d. 5, l. 40 in Budianskii, 86, 166.
the return of the refugees to Semirechye: “The return of the Kirghiz in the nearest future is undesirable, even if they resettled in Naryn-sands (i.e. the barren, sandy lands of Naryn).”\(^{58}\) Despite the instructions of the Turkestan Committee and the depredations of the local settlers, the Kyrgyz and Kazakhs continued to return. Some were able to slip through the military posts or bribed their way out. Still others were taken by the peasants who were short of labourers. Many others grew sick threatening to spread the epidemic further into the settlers’ villages and cities. Yet more pled with the authorities in Tashkent and Petrograd. On 12 March 1917, the Kyrgyz of the Pishpek uezd petitioned the Provisional Government to “revoke (sic, “otmenit’”)...the violence” and to allow them to resettle in the Pishpek uezd.\(^{59}\) The same month, the refugees petitioned the Turkestan governor-general requesting him to restore the nomads’ right to land and put an end to the repressive measures. The petitioners also pointed to the illegality of the actions of the local administration, which “continues to enforce the measures of unjust cruelty,” including “the liquidation of land holdings” of the nomads, and the deployment of soldiers to prevent the refugees from harvesting their fields.\(^{60}\) In April 1917, writing on behalf of 1,200 Kyrgyz households of the Shamshy volost of the Pishpek uezd, the petitioner described the plight of the native pastoralists: “the Russian peasants take away our land and plough it, they cut down our forest, destroy our buildings, our gardens and clover fields, and threaten to kill the Kirghiz. There is no rule in the uezd and no one to protect us.”\(^{61}\)

_Tukramus_ continued its quixotic quest to help the refugees by appealing to the Turkestan Committee. On 30 June, the deputies of _Tukramus_ informed the members of the Committee that “the Kirghiz are being hunted down” and “suffer extreme poverty,” causing them to resort to cannibalism. The roots of the issue were obvious: “the Russian settlers of Semirechye are armed, while the Kirghiz are not.”\(^{62}\) Two weeks later, _Tukramus_ convened all Muslims organizations of Tashkent to develop a set of “emergency measures” intended to counter the settlers’ violence. Chief among these

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58 Ibid., 87.
59 TsGVIA RF f. 400, Aziatskaia chast’, d. 42, l. 45-47 in ibid., 82.
61 TsGVIA RF f. 400, Aziatskaia chast’, d. 42, l. 84-85 in Budianskii, 81.
62 "Telegramma musul'manskogo soveta Turkestanskogo kraia Vremennomu pravitel'stvu i ispol'notel'nomu komitetu soveta soldatskikh deputatov o bedstvennom polozhenii "kirgiz,“ 30 iyunia 1917 g.”, RGVIA f. 400, op. 1, d. 4639, l. 110
measures was the disarmament of the settlers, return of fugitive Russian soldiers to the army, and the formation and stationing of mixed Russo-Muslim troops in Semirechye.  

Tukramus’ proposal was in part motivated by the decision of the Turkestan Committee to retain the Russian troops stationed in Semirechye as the guarantor of peace in the oblast. Of course, the Turkestan Committee had not the slightest intention of introducing Muslim soldiers to Semirechye in spite of the presence of Tatar soldiers in Tashkent. In an atmosphere of growing suspicion and distrust of Muslims, ethnic Russian troops were seen by both the Tashkent government and the settler society not simply as the guarantor of peace, but as the guarantor of control over Muslims and safety of the settlers. A telegram wired by the Turkestan Committee to Petrograd in early September 1917 warned the central government of the increased hostility of the native population and identified Semirechye (and Khiva) as a particularly bellicose area. Citing reported purchases of arms by Muslims and various other – undoubtedly hostile in the authorities’ view – “preparations,” the telegram requested from Kerenski’s government additional troops for the defence of the region’s “European population.”

The authorship of the telegram – by the Committee’s chairman, Vladimir Nalivkin, and Turkestan’s District Commander, General Leontii Cherkes – indicates the pervasiveness of this distrust. Even the Turkestan Committee’s Muslim members were under suspicion. The tone and the message of the telegram also suggests that the influence of the Committee’s Muslim members on their European colleagues was negligible; it is hard to imagine the Muslim Commissars agreeing to the reinforcement of Russian troops in Semirechye. A minority in the Turkestan Committee, they were, in all likelihood, outvoted and lacked the means to endorse policies to benefit the native communities. As an institution and as a provisional government of Turkestan, the Turkestan Committee consistently favoured the settler population, whether in protection, or in provision of food and welfare. To cite but one example, where the settlers could claim up to 1,000 rubles per household in compensation from a special fund set up by the Provisional Government in July 1917 for the damages caused by the uprising, the nomads would only receive 100 rubles per family.

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63 TsGA RUz, f. 1044, op. 1, d. 5, l. 227 in Shodmonova, 37.
64 TsGA RUz f. 1613, op. 1, d. 3, l. 15 in ibid., 36-37.
65 “Shifrotelegramma voennomu ministru, 6 sentiabria 1917 g.”, RGVIA f. 366, op. 2, d. 27, ll. 193-193 ob. in Buttino, Revoliutsiya naoborot: Sredniaia Aziia mezhdu padeniem tsarskoi imperii i obrazovaniem SSSR, 178-79.
66 “Protokol mezhdvodomstvennogo soveshchaniia, obrazovannogo pri Voennom ministerstve dlia obsuzhdeniia voprosa ob okazании material’nyi pomoshchi russkomu i “kirgizskomu” naseleniui Semirechenskoi oblasti, postradavshei ot “kirgizskogo miatezha” v 1916 g., 8 iulii 1917 g.”, RGVIA, f. 400, op. 1, d. 4639, l. 105 ob.-106. According to Sanobar Shodmonova, the funds were issued only in October and fell short of the projected amount; settler households received half, or 500 rubles, of what they were promised, while the native families received 10 rubles.
In a grim irony, the failure of the Turkestan Committee to stem violence against the nomads made concerns about native political mobilization a self-fulfilling prophecy. The native society organized itself in response to the apparent reluctance of the Provisional Government to protect the native population and accommodate its needs and demands.

New Hope: Political Mobilization in Tashkent

Tashkent, as Adeeb Khalid notes, became the centre of the native population’s newly-found political freedom after the February revolution. A number of gatherings were held in the native part of the city attracting 30,000 men each in the first weeks of March alone.67 Eager to seize an opportunity a group of native intellectuals known as the Jadids (the advocates of “the new method” in teaching) organized in March 1917 city-wide elections into Tukramus.68 Comprised of 48 members, Tukramus, or Shuroi-Islomiia (Islamic Council), became the governing body of the Muslims of Turkestan.69 Soon, branches of Shuroi-Islomiia opened in Pishpek, Naryn, and Przhevalska.70

Shuroi-Islomiia was instrumental in drawing public attention to the unfolding drama in Semirechye. Already, in April 1917, the members of the Council gathered to discuss the events in Semirechye. A decision was made to launch an official investigation. Five groups of four representatives of the Shuroi-Islomiia and representatives of the Soviet of Workers’ and Soldiers’ Deputies each were dispatched to Semirechye in May.71 The results of the investigation were presented at a joint meeting of all Muslim organizations of Tashkent in mid-July. The participants of the meeting produced a list of measures intended to resolve the crisis. These measures targeted primarily the settler population of Semirechye; before any peace could be restored, the meeting concluded, the settlers had to be disarmed. At the same time, the troops stationed in Semirechye and drawn mainly from the settlers were to be replaced by units dispatched from Russia and comprised of both Muslims and Europeans. Finally, the meeting decided to form a

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68 The most authoritative source on the Jadid movement is Adeeb Khalid. See his The Politics of Muslim Cultural Reform: Jadidism in Central Asia; Making Uzbekistan: Nation, Empire, and Revolution in the Early USSR.
69 Making Uzbekistan: Nation, Empire, and Revolution in the Early USSR, 57.
70 Buttino, Revoliutsiia naoborot: Sredniaia Azia mezhdu padeniem tsarskoi imperii i obrazovaniem SSSR, 123.
71 Shodmonova, 34-35.
commission responsible for the distribution of financial aid to the arriving refugees. Upon the conclusion of the meeting the participants forwarded the list of demands to the Turkestan Committee and the Soviet of Workers’ and Soldiers’ deputies.

The awareness of the events in Semirechye extended beyond the region. The attendants of the first all-Russia Muslim Congress in Moscow in May 1917 also expressed their support of the Kyrgyz and Kazakhs of Semirechye. At the second all-Russia Muslim Congress in July 1917, the representative from Turkestan, Ubaidulla Khodzhaev, raised again the issue of the government’s unresponsiveness to the continuing atrocities.

In August, Shuroi-Islomiia convened again. Conscious of the impotence – and the torpor – of the Turkestan Committee, the Council resolved to send a telegram to the State Duma and personally to Kerenskii. A special commission was also formed to collect funds for the refugees in Semirechye. Lastly, the meeting decided to organize a mass protest in Tashkent in the second half of August to demonstrate solidarity with the Muslims of Semirechye. The protest presented the authorities with the most vocal expression of the popular discontent with the mistreatment of the native population of Semirechye. Thousands of Muslims took their protest to the streets calling for an end to “the indignity” and “the atrocities in the Semirechye oblast.” In what many of the European dwellers of Tashkent deemed to be a challenge to the Russian authority, the protesters marched through the Russian district and converged on the centre of the European part of the city. There, the leader of the organizing committee gave a speech and called the Provisional Government to action. The manifestation then presented the members of the Turkestan Committee with the list of its demands.

Two days after the manifestation, the demands were put into a formal resolution. In addition to urging the authorities to provide food and medical assistance to the refugees, the resolution demanded the immediate disarming of the Semirechye’s Russian population, withdrawal of the demobilized soldiers, and the introduction of troops drawn

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72 TsGA RUz f. 1044, op. 1, d. 5, l. 227 in ibid., 37.
73 “Ettisuv viloiatida dakhshatli khollar” (The terrible situation in the Semirechye oblast) / Kengash, 1 August, 1917, No. 6 in ibid.
74 Buttino, Revoliutsiia naoborot: Sredniaia Azia mezhdu padeniem tsarskoi imperii i obrazovaniem SSSR, 173
75 Ettisuv viloiatida dakhshatli khollar (The terrible situation in the Semirechye oblast) / Kengash, 1 August, 1917, No.6 in Shodmonova, 37.
76 Buttino, Revoliutsiia naoborot: Sredniaia Azia mezhdu padeniem tsarskoi imperii i obrazovaniem SSSR, 173; Shodmonova, 38.
77 Buttino, Revoliutsiia naoborot: Sredniaia Azia mezhdu padeniem tsarskoi imperii i obrazovaniem SSSR, 173-74; Sahadeo, 197. Demonstrators gathered before the Turkestan Committee headquarters and shouted at those present to “give a clear answer…It’s been six months since freedom was declared, but the government has not given a though to [the Muslims of Semirechye]. This is because the blood flowing in Semirechye is Muslim blood and Turkic blood.” The demonstrators’ awareness of the religious and ethnic markers of the Semirechye victims is particularly notable.
in equal proportion from the Muslims and Russian soldiers from outside the region. The resolution also called for the restitution of land to the native owners. To oversee the implementation of these measures and to ensure the equal representation of the Semirechye’s nomads in the administration of the oblast, the signatories to the resolution volunteered to elect on behalf of the Turkestan Committee a Muslim representative responsible, along with Shendrikov, for the oblast, and to appoint Muslims to the committees in charge of refugee affairs. If the authorities failed to enforce these measures, the resolution continued, “the Kirghiz and millions of Muslims would not, to the end of their lives, forget this villainy and would bequeath it to their offspring.”78

The efforts of Shuroi-Islomiia to help the nomads of Semirechye were cut short by the October revolution in the metropole and the ensuing civil war in the region, but the Semirechye question continued to inform the political agenda of the indigenous elites. The transcript of the fourth congress of Muslims in Turkestan held in November 1917 suggests that concerns about the displacement of the native nomads and the Bolshevik backing of colonists in the oblast were among the key reasons for the establishment of the ill-fated Turkestan (or Kokand, after the city where the congress was held) territorial autonomy.79

In many respects, the plight of Semirechye’s nomads concerned the broader native society; at the heart of the issue was land and the rights of the native population to its ownership. The economic crisis and the renewed hostilities of the civil war made access to agricultural land a matter of life and death. In this sense, national autonomy with its privileging of the majority ethnic population within its borders offered an attractive alternative to the colonial state and came to be seen as the only means of enforcing and protecting the rights of the native majority.

Children of Alash: Political Mobilization in the Steppe

Understandably, concerns about the land seizures and European settlement were even stronger in the nomadic areas, where mass colonization had both begun earlier and led to a greater number of settlers than in the densely populated oasis areas of Turkestan. The displacement of the nomads and colonial settlement of the nomadic lands became the

79 Revoliutsiia naoborot: Sredniaia Azia mezhdu padeniem tsarskoi imperii i obrazovaniem SSSR, 214.
vehicle of political mobilization already in the last decade of the 19th century. The emergence of the idea of “homeland” among the emergent class of native politicians and intelligentsia was closely tied to a newfound sense of place grounded in the loss of ancestral lands.

The brutal suppression of the rebellion in Semirechye and the resulting dispossession of the nomads of their lands led to political mobilization in the former Steppe governorate. There, the established native intelligentsia drew on the issue of Semirechye’s refugees to both mobilize the nomadic population of the region and to establish a nascent national autonomy, named by its founders after the common ancestor of the nomadic Kazakhs and Kyrgyz, Alash.80

As a party proper, the Alash had emerged only in 1917 (until the February revolution the Alash was denied registration as a political party), but as a broader movement of the native intelligentsia the Alash had its origins in the 1905 revolution, when a group of Kazakh intellectuals became actively involved in political activities and sought to establish a Kazakh branch of the Russian Constitutional Democratic Party (Kadets).81 The Alash leadership was typical of the new generation of indigenous elites that sprang up in European colonies and that recognized the technological superiority of their colonial master, but abhorred its treatment of the native peoples. The leaders of the Alash in the Steppe were, as a rule, Russian-educated and employed in the colonial service. Witnesses to the abuses wrought by colonial rule on the native population of the region, they sought to improve the plight of their less fortunate compatriots and came to see themselves as their representatives before the colonial authorities; several Alash leaders were elected to the ill-fated second Duma.

The uprising of 1916 caught the Alash, in the words of the Kazakh engineer Mukhamedzhan Tynyshpaev, “between the hammer and the anvil.” Wishing, on the one hand, to satisfy the demands of the government, and to spare, on the other hand, the nomads from the hardships of a war in which they had no stake, the leadership of the Alash attempted to negotiate with the authorities on behalf of the native pastoralists, while simultaneously appealing to the nomads to remain calm and furnish the labourers.

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80 The contemporary Kazakh historiography of the Alash Orda is rich, if somewhat biased. Dina Amanzholova’s works are an exception to the rule. See Dina Amanzholova, Kazakhskii avtonomizm i Rossiiia: Istoriiia dvizheniia Alash (Moscow: "Rossiia molodaia", 1994); Na izlome: Alash v etnopoliticheskoi istorii Kazakhstana (Almaty: Taimas, 2009). For English-language sources on the Alash, see Uyama, “Two Attempts at Building a Qazaq State: The Revolt of 1916 and the Alash Movement.”; “The Alash Orda's relations with Siberia, the Urals and Turkestan: the Kazakh national movement and the Russian imperial legacy,” in Asiatic Russia: Imperial power in regional and international contexts, ed. Tomohiko Uyama (London and New York: Routledge, 2012); Sabol.

Unfortunately, the appeals of the Alash leaders to the tumultuous nomads and their efforts to negotiate the conditions of the draft came to naught. In the uprising’s aftermath, many of the Alash members travelled to the cities and locales where the drafted labourers were stationed. Their efforts to improve their living and working conditions made them both “larger and more popular” with the native labourers.

More importantly, the issue of agricultural colonization of the nomadic areas, which the Alash leaders believed to be the primary reason for the uprising, came to define the political agenda of the party. The demands for the closure of the region to settlement from outside as well as the calls for recognizing the right of the nomads to their land and self-administration had, in the course of the two revolutions, evolved into a programme of comprehensive national autonomy. The Alash welcomed the news of the February Revolution because “firstly, it freed the Kirghiz from the oppression and abuse of the Tsarist government, and, secondly, strengthened their hope to realize their most cherished dream – to govern themselves.” Numerous congresses were convened across the Steppe to discuss the shape and form of the future “Kirghiz” (that is both Kazakh and Kyrgyz) autonomy. Among the attendees were Kyrgyz representatives from Semirechye, including, the future “founding fathers” of Soviet Kirghizia, Abdykerim Sydykov and Ishenaly Arabaev, and Diur Soorombaev. In July 1917, the first “all-Kirghiz” Congress had established the national party of Alash and charted the course of the Alash within Russia. The majority of participants were in favour of a national territorial autonomy in a democratic, federative, and parliamentary Russian republic. On the land issue, the...
Congress resolved to prohibit further settlement of nomadic lands and lands that had been seized but not yet settled were to be returned to their original owners.\textsuperscript{88}

The next all-Kirghiz Congress was held in Orenburg in the wake of the Bolshevik revolution in Petrograd. The resulting programme upheld the earlier resolution to establish an autonomy within the loosely federated Russia, where “every state has its own territory, and exercises sovereignty to implement its tasks (suverenno reshaet svoi zadachi).”\textsuperscript{89} In theory, the Alash autonomy was a “national-territorial autonomy,” or “a single unified entity” uniting “all Kazakh lands… that formed a compact (sploshnaia) territory with the predominant Kazakh-Kirghiz population of the same origin (edinogo proiskhodzhenia), single culture, history, and language” and “possessing sovereignty.”\textsuperscript{90} As an autonomy, the Alash would be governed by a provisional peoples’ soviet and possess an independent militia. Land, water, and mineral resources of the Alash autonomy were the property of the autonomy. The governing body of the autonomy was to be a provisional peoples’ soviet consisting of 25 members, 10 of whom would represent the non-Kazakh (and Kyrgyz) population of the autonomy.\textsuperscript{91}

How successful the Alash was is a matter of debate. On the one hand, the nascent autonomy was crippled by its lack of resources and its rivalry with the competing White and Red armies, which ravaged the native countryside. The uneasy alliances that the Alash formed at different times with the Bolsheviks and the Provisional Siberian Government in an effort to protect the autonomy had largely failed.\textsuperscript{92} Similarly, the control of the Alash only extended to several smaller areas in the inner Steppe. On the other hand, the idea of “the unity of the Kazakh-Kirghiz people (narod)” spearheaded by the Alash became the foundation of Soviet Kazakhstan.\textsuperscript{93} The Alash and many of its leaders were co-opted by the ascendant Bolshevik state, which built on the Alash’ popularity and expertise. Writing in 1923, Turar Ryskulov, the chairman of the Muslim (Regional) Bureau of the Communist Party, remarked that the Alash takeover of the Steppe was the only event in the history of the civil war that had any real meaning to the Kazakhs many of whom were unaware of the developments in Moscow and Petrograd.\textsuperscript{94}

\textsuperscript{88} Olcott, 135.
\textsuperscript{89} “Proekt Programmy parti” “Alash”” in M. K. Koigeldiev, Stalinizm i repressii v Kazakhstane 1920-1940-kh godov (Almaty: Iskander, 2009), 22.
\textsuperscript{91} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{92} On the Alash’ relationship with the Provisional Siberian Government, see V. I. Shishkin, “Vzaimootnosheniia Alash Ordy i Vremennego Sibirsogo Pravitel’stva,” Izvestiia Ural’skogo gosudarstvennogo universiteta, no. 4 (96) (2011).
\textsuperscript{93} Martynenko, 122-27.
\textsuperscript{94} Olcott, 140.
Semirechye occupied a peculiar place in the already peculiar borderlands. As a part, at various times, of Turkestan and the Steppe governorate, Semirechye stood at the crossroads of the two and was amenable to developments in both. At the same time, the distance of Semirechye from the main centres of the colony’s native political mobilization and the absence of railway meant that Semirechye remained in isolation throughout the period of civil war. Semirechye’s isolation was further compounded by the continuing ethnic conflict and the ethnic fragmentation of the oblast. As the site of the worst hostilities during the uprising of 1916, southern Semirechye, populated mainly by the ethnic Kyrgyz, suffered the greatest drop in agricultural production. By 1917, the shortage of grain in the Pishpek and Przhevalsk uezds reached 2.6 million poods. The Lepsinsk, Kopal’sk and some areas of the Verny uezd, on the other hand, produced 3 million poods of surplus grain, but getting this grain to southern Semirechye was difficult. Communication between Verny and Pishpek depended on animal-drawn transport and 600 versts (about 640 kilometres) of poor-quality road.

The conjunction of Semirechye’s geographic terrain and the ethnic tension is critical to understanding the political context of the civil war in southern Semirechye. The isolation of southern Semirechye and the presence of a large well-armed settler population the settlers’ ability to mobilize the colonial institutions and extract resources from the native population. They likewise explain why although directly affected by the civil war, the Kyrgyz of Semirechye could offer little resistance to the colonists.

The news of the second revolution in Petrograd, which reached Verny in late October 1917, received a warmer welcome in colonial Semirechye than elsewhere in the region. There were several reasons for this. First, as Adeeb Khalid notes, the revolutionary slogans of “power to local authorities” and “land to those who work it” were particularly advantageous to the Russian settlers. Secondly, the unpopularity of the Provisional Government – earned, no doubt, by the toothless declarations of equality with the nomads and the failure to feed the colonists and suppress the remaining nomads – ensured that the sympathies of the settler majority were on the Bolshevik side. Finally, the social and political circumstances conducive to the overthrow of existing authority, conveniently

known in Bolshevik parlance as “the revolutionary situation,” formed in Semirechye already by summer 1917. Reporting to the Ministry of Internal Affairs in June 1917, Shkapskii and Tynyshpaev, noted that the real power in the south of the oblast (Shkapskii and Tynyshpaev toured the Pishpek, Przhevalsk, Djarkent and partly Verny uezds) was in the hands of informal gatherings (mitingi) of the colonists.

These gatherings became the ad-hoc foundation of the future Bolshevik stronghold in southern Semirechye. They attracted considerable popular support; in addition to the landless settlers and soldiers, the gatherings were attended by a diverse crowd of supporters, including members of the far-right monarchist Union of Archangel Michael, “bar frequenters,” and “various shady characters” (temnye lichnosti). The gatherings made “their own laws and policies” (svoi zakony i svoi poriadki) and used the slogans of “the will of the people” and “people’s right” to “make arrests and requisition goods.”97 On 9 July, one such gathering marched to the centre of Pishpek, where 3,000 soldiers and peasants voted in favour of replacing the uezd commissar, and convening an uezd-wide congress.98 A series of unauthorized land seizures then followed in the Pishpek and Prezhevalsk uezds.99 In Verny, a group of soldiers arrested and requisitioned a transport of grain.100 As discontent grew, women, too, took to the streets. In mid-October, a babii bunt led by a group of women and aided by soldiers seized produce from the native merchants in Pishpek.101 On 18 October, a large gathering of soldiers returning from the front and Tashkent took place in Pishpek.102

The authorities scrambled to maintain order. The administration in Verny despatched two Cossack sotnias to Pishpek in response to the soldiers’ meeting and put a ban on public gatherings. Short of loyal supporters, the Provisional Government in Semirechye relied on the Semirechye Cossacks, but they, too, could not control the mass of armed soldiers and peasants. All semblance of central power in the oblast had disappeared in the winter of 1917. The Provisional Government was still nominally in power, but had neither the resources nor the popular support to maintain its hold on authority. With the Cossack forces concentrated mainly in the Verny uezd, the Pishpek and Przhevalsk uezds were largely left to their own devices.

97 “Dokladaia zapiska chlena Turkestanskogo komiteta O. A. Shkapskogo v Zemskoi otdel MVD o situatsii v Semirechenskoi oblasti, 27 iunia 1917 g.,” RGIA f. 1291, op. 84, d. 57, l. 2-2 ob.
100 Ibid., 44.
101 Ibid., 27.
102 Ibid., 63.
In the fateful months between the tumultuous autumn of 1917 and the declaration of the Turkestan Soviet Republic in late spring 1918 the settler society of Semirechye increasingly fragmented and mobilized. As the seat of power, Verny became the centre of conflict between the Provisional Government supported by the Semirechye Cossacks and the nascent Soviets, which emerged from the spontaneous and unauthorized gatherings of soldiers and peasants. By early March 1918 power shifted decisively to the Soviets. Mere months later, in the summer of 1918, this power was challenged by the advancing White Armies, which turned the young Soviet republic into an embattled fortress. Desperate to hold onto the region in spite of “the circumstances…threatening to tear the republic away from the centre…; the uncovering of counter-revolutionary groups in the various places of the republic;…famine in the masses of the poorest population of the republic;…and the weak organization of the proletarian masses of the population,” the Communist Party of Turkestan declared “the dictatorship of the proletariat.”

In the absence of central authority and with no standard practices and procedures, the dictatorship of the proletariat in Semirechye assumed the familiar features of total mobilization first experienced by the settler society during the native rebellion. A network of semi-formal and interlocking institutions developed at all levels of authority, from village soviets at the lowest level to the mainly urban soviets of soldiers and peasants, to the uezd and oblast-level Ispolkoms, and numerous committees in charge of land and food supply. The attendant militarization of these institutions allowed the settler society to control, manage, and extract resources in the circumstances of war and ethnic conflict.

The formation of Red Army units in Semirechye began immediately after the establishment of Soviets in the uezds of the oblast. In the Przhevalsk uezd, the order to mobilize, arm, and train the Red Army units was made by the uezd Ispolkom in May 1918. The backbone of the Red Army in the oblast were “the Turkestani riflemen” – experienced soldiers of peasant stock and with a history of service in the imperial army. Of the 19,357 men deployed by the Bolsheviks in the region (with the exception of the Orenburg and Ashkhabad fronts), about a quarter, 4,227 men, were stationed in

103 “Rezoliutsiia tsentral’nogo komiteta Kommunisticheskoi partii Turkestana o polozhenii respubliki, leto 1918 g.” in S. B. Zhantuarov, ed. Velikaia Oktiabr’skaia sotsialisticheskaia revoliutsiia i grazhdanskaiia voina v Kirgizii (1917-1920 gg.): dokumenty i materialy (Frunze: Kirgizskoe gosudarstvennoe izdatel’stvo, 1957), 104-06.
104 “Protokol zasedaniia Semirechenskogo soveta narodnyh komissarov o sozdanii v gorode Przheval’ske sovdepa I organizatsii Krasnoi Armii” in ibid., 92-93.
Semirechye. The majority of these forces were drawn from the settler population of the oblast. The local *Ispolkoms* succeeded in enforcing the nearly universal military mobilization of male colonists. In addition to the Red Army units, the *Ispolkoms* formed the paramilitary Red Guards and Communist party militias. New recruits were trained and armed. Munitions were produced locally as well.

The first actions of the *Ispolkoms* in the oblast aimed to seize and establish control of the meagre resources of the devastated colony. Often, these actions were directed at the unarmed native population, who provided a convenient target for the colonists. As in 1916, the authorities seized the nomads’ land and animals. In June 1918, the Przhevalsk *Ispolkom* seized the landholdings leased by the settlers from the Resettlement Administration and the native nomads, thereby making it impossible for the nomads to return to their land. Land was seized by both the authorities and unauthorized settlers. In September 1918, the Pishpek Soviet reported about the continuing seizures of land by the “the landless city dwellers and peasants.” A month later, in October 1918, the Pishpek uезд commissar ordered the distribution of “Kirghiz, public, and state” land to the land and water committees formed in the Pishpek uезд. Where the Kyrgyz were allowed to stay on land they already occupied they had to pay a fee “determined by the oblast.” The authorities had in effect treated the nomads’ land as no-one’s land, which was up for grabs.

Land was also seized by colonists from other oblasts of Turkestan and refugees from European Russia. In August 1919, for example, a group of settlers from the Syr-Daria oblast moved to the Przhevalsk uезд and forced the Kyrgyz off 9,800 dessiatines of land. Short of labour, the re-settlers were able to cultivate less than a tenth, 900 dessiatines, of the land they seized from the nomads.” Similar seizures of land took place.
in the Pishpek uezd, where the nomads’ land “was being continuously occupied by the settlers from other uezds.”

The native population also remained a target of forced requisitioning. In the months of November and December 1918, for example, the administration of the Przhevalsk uezd taxed the wealthy Kyrgyz (how their presumed wealth was measured is unclear) and requisitioned manaps’ livestock. In the Pishpek uezd, the local Ispolkom levied a one-time tax on “the Muslim as well as the Russian” population of the uezd, which in practice amounted to the confiscation of the nomads’ livestock at artificially low prices. Pigs, on the other hand, bred exclusively by the Russian settlers, were evaluated at the “current” market prices.

In May 1918, the Przhevalsk Ispolkom expropriated opium production, which traditionally provided income to the Dungans and Kyrgyz of the Przhevalsk uezd.

As in 1916, the nomads were also required to provide free labour on the farms of the settlers whose family members served in the Red Army. Where the native communities failed to provide labour, the authorities requisitioned their grain and animals to feed the soldiers and their families. Naturally, the seizures of livestock and grain, landlessness, and forced labour led to immense mortality in the nomadic society, thereby damaging the colonial agriculture, which had come to rely heavily on native labour. By August 1918, the shortage of labour had become so acute that “in view of the beginning of the grain harvesting season” and “for the maintenance of the economic life of the oblast,” the Pishpekov soviet of soldiers and peasants had found the return of refugees from China “desirable.” “Full amnesty” would be granted to those of the returning Kyrgyz who recognized Soviet power and surrendered arms. Despite the promises, “the mass beatings of the Kirghiz by the peasants of the Przhevalsk uezd” continued.

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115 “Iz protokola zasedaniia III semirechenskogo oblastnogo chrezvychainogo s’ezda sovetov o polozenii v Przheval’skom, Lepsinskem, i Tómkakscom uezdakh, 19 avgusta 1919 g.” in ibid., 228.
116 “Vypiska iz protokola zasedaniia ispol’nitel’nogo komiteta soveta narodnykh deputatov pishpekskogo uezda o norme oblozhenii nalogom baev i manapov i otpuske sredstv dlia golodaishchikh kirgizov, 6 noiabria 1918 g.” in ibid., 155-56. “Protokol zasedaniia Przheval’skogo uezdnoho soveta narodnogo khoziaistva o raspredelenii bednote konfiskovannogo u manapov skota, 18 dekabria 1918 g.” in ibid., 163-64. “Zapiska iz protokola ob’edinennogo zasedaniia chlenov ispol’nitel’nogo komiteta i soveta narodnykh deputatov pishpekskogo uezda o norme oblozhenia nalogom dlia pomoshchi golodaishchemu naseleniu, 8 noiabria 1918 g.” in ibid., 157-58.
117 “Protokol zasedaniia Semirechenskogo uetva narodnyh komissarov o sozdanii v gorode Przheval’ske sovdepa i organizatsii Krasnoi Armii” in ibid., 92-93.
119 “Postanovlenie chrezvychainoi komissii po mezhdunarodnym delam o vozvrashchenii bezhentsev iz Kitaia, 6 avgusta 1919 g.” in ibid., 115.
120 Telegramma M. V. Frunze i V. Kuibysheva Przheval’skomu uezdnomu komitetu kommunisticheskoi partii Turkestan a priniatii reshitel’nykh mer bor’by s kontrevoliutsionnymi vystupleniiami kulachestva v Przheval’skom uezde, 10 marta 1919 g., TsGA PD KR f. 14, op. 14, d. 7, l. 39.
Competition for resources, particularly land, also split the colonial society. The Cossack support of the White cause, their past associations with the old regime, and the distinctly Cossack makeup of the White Armies in Semirechye and elsewhere in the region, made Cossacks suspect in the eyes of the Bolshevik authorities. At the same time, the vast tracts of land in Cossack ownership pitted the townsmen and landless settlers of Semirechye against the Cossacks. Armed with the rhetoric of class struggle, the authorities requisitioned grain and animals from the Cossack settlements. In the spring of 1918 the Pishpek soviet requisitioned 12,000 poods of grain from the large Cossack village of Belovodskoe.\(^{121}\)

By December the same year the villagers of Belovodskoe had had enough. Joined by the Dungans of the neighbouring settlements who were similarly targeted by the Pishpek soviet and emboldened by the rumours of an approaching Czechoslovak legion, the villagers occupied Pishpek on 14 December.\(^{122}\) Less than ten days later, on 23 December the combined forces of the Red Army and local militias drove the villagers back to Belovodskoe. By 26 December Belovodskoe was captured and the rebellion was put down.\(^{123}\) As a reward to the settler militias who participated in the suppression of the revolt, the Pishpek Ispolkom redistributed among them grain and rice seized from Belovodskoe and the Dungan villages.\(^{124}\) The Belovodskoe revolt had important implications for the land and water reforms of 1921-1922 in Semirechye. As the next chapter will show, the reforms – aimed at equalizing the land rights of the native population with those of the colonists – targeted primarily the Cossack settlements. The transfer of land under the Cossack settlements to the native population was effectively a punitive campaign against the group that had shown itself to be disloyal to the new regime.

As bruising as the events in Belovodskoe were to the nascent Soviets in the oblast, the biggest threat came from outside. In the spring and summer of 1919, the retreating Annenkov armies and Irgash’s basmachi bands armies put pressure on southern


\(^{122}\) “Donesente pishpekskogo uezdnogo soveta v semirechenski oblipsoidolkom o bor’be s belovodskimi miatiezhniki” in Karakeev and Zima, 100-01. Mukhlynin relates that the leaders of Belovodskoe contacted the manaps of the Pishpek uezd, Abdykerim Sydykov and Satarkul Djangarachev, with an offer to join. Sydykov and Djangarachev politely refused, but offered to donate horses and yurts. Angered by the refusal, the villagers resolved to take revenge on the Kyrgyz by taking Susamyr and Kyz-Molo away from them. Accessed January 10, 2015. [http://belovodskoe-muh.ucoz.ru/publ/moi_ocherki/1917_god_i_belovodskoe_vostanie_1918_goda_chast_4_aja/2-1-0-250](http://belovodskoe-muh.ucoz.ru/publ/moi_ocherki/1917_god_i_belovodskoe_vostanie_1918_goda_chast_4_aja/2-1-0-250)

\(^{123}\) In total, 54 villagers were killed. “Iz protokola zasedanii semirechenskogo oblastnogo chrezvychainogo s”ezda sovetov o polozhenii v Przheval’skom, Lepsinskoi i Tokmakskom uezdah, 19 aprelia 1919 g.” in Zhantuarov, 227.

\(^{124}\) “Iz protokola zasedanii chlenov i zavedutushchikh otdelami i podotdelami” in ibid., 230.
Semirechye. A state of siege was declared in the Przhevalsk uezd in May 1919. In a move suggesting the desperation and complete exhaustion of the settler population, the Semirechye authorities began the mobilization of groups considered hostile, including “Cossacks, former officers and military administrators, and those Muslims who served in the rank of the old army.” Although the Pishpek uezd military commissariat completed the mobilization of 340 Muslims (likely Tatars) of the uezd in August 1919, the mobilization campaign among the natives failed. The following month, the Turkestan Revvoenkom (Revolutionary Military Council) reported to Moscow that “the attempts to use (mobilize) the native population lead to mass flights abroad and only worsen the general devastation.”

The labour mobilization had similarly “existed on paper only.” The terrified nomads refused to work on the settlers’ fields and fled, making it impossible for the colonists to harvest their fields. The flight of the natives in the face of growing demand for manpower and soldiers had convinced the administration to take a more conciliatory stance towards the nomads. Although a comprehensive campaign to rehabilitate the refugees and the native population at large did not start until 1920-1921, some native communities received limited food assistance in 1919. In April 1919, for example, the authorities distributed grain and barley among the poorer peasants of Sretenskoe and the Kyrgyz of the Djamansartovskaia volost.

The softened stance of the local soviets in 1919 portended a general shift in the Soviet policies towards the non-Russian minorities during the first decade of Soviet rule. The continued resistance of the native population to the Soviet power, understood, justifiably, by the native society as rule by Russians, had brought recognition that the use of violence and repression was damaging the prospects of the region’s integration,

125 Pokrovskii, 233.
126 “Iz prikaza operativno-politicheskogo shtaba oboronys przheval’skogo uezda ob ob’iavlenii g. Przheval’sk i Przheval’skogo uezda na osandom polozhenii, 28 maia 1919 g.” in Karakeev and Zima, 128-29.
127 “Prikaz semirechenskogo oblastnogo revvoensoveta i ispolkoma o mobilizatsii v krasnuiu armiui, 30 iiulia 1919 g.” in ibid., 146-47.
128 “Donesenie pishpekskogo uezdnogo voenkoma semirechenskomu oblrevvoensovetu ob otpravke mobilizovannykh komunistov v Tashkent i na severnyi semirechenskii front, 4 avgusta 1919 g.” in ibid., 148.
129 “Iz donesenia revvoensoveta i glavkomi voisk Turkrespubliki glavkomu voisk RSFSR o voenno-politicheskom polozhenii v Turkestane, 17 sentiabria 1919 g.” in ibid., 57. One of the biggest issues was that even the mobilized Muslims could not understand their Russian instructors and asked to be trained in their mother tongue. “Soobshchenie VIII s’eziudo sovetov Turkrespubliki ot nachal’nika eshelona, dostavivshego v Tashkent 428 mobilizovannykh pishepetskikh komunistov” in ibid., 58-59.
130 Zhantuarov, 226.
131 Even then, the Kyrgyz received proportionally much smaller amounts of grain and barley. Every settler received a little over 0.6 pooods of grain and slightly less than 0.3 pooods of barley, whereas every Kyrgyz received 0.1 pooods of grain, 0.01 pooods of millet, and 0.01 pooods of barley. “Protokol zasedaniia belovodskogo raionnogo komiteta bednoty o raspredelenii konifiskovannogo khleba, 3 aprelia 1919 g.” in ibid., 191.
reconstruction, and development. How the new government sought to mend the broken relations with the native population and initiate “socialist construction” in the region is the subject of the next chapter.

**Semirechye, “the Broken Trough”**

The peculiarity of southern Semirechye extended beyond its geographic isolation. The background of southern Semirechye’s native elites was equally distinctive. The leadership of the Pishpek branch of the Alash, which opened in June 1917, in particular, warrants a closer look. For one, the surviving members of the Pishpek Alash – many of the Alash members in the Przhevalsk and Pishpek uezds were executed by the uezd Ispolkoms in 1918 – came to play a crucial role in the political development of the oblast under the Soviet administration. Secondly, the Pishpek membership of the Alash was qualitatively different from its Steppe counterpart. Unlike the Russian-educated Kazakh elites, the Kyrgyz members of the Alash were of *manap* background, received traditional religious education, combined sometimes with several years of instruction in one of the Russo-native schools of the oblast, and often did not speak Russian.\(^{132}\) Their position in relation to the colonial authorities differed markedly, too; where the Kazakh leaders of the Alash were employed in the colonial administration in professional capacities (Mukhamedzhan Tynyshpaev was a railway engineer and Alikhan Bukeikhanov was an editor in a number of Kadet newspapers) and represented the Steppe in the short-lived Dumas, the Kyrgyz members of the Alash occupied lower-level elected positions of volost heads and translators.

Lastly and very significantly, with the exception of the future chairman of the Semirechye Oblast Committee (*Obkom*), Abdykerim Sydykov, and unlike the Kazakh leadership of the Alash, nearly all of the *manap* members of the Pishpek Alash took part – and in many cases, led – the uprising and escaped to China to avoid persecution. Ishenaly Arabaev, a prominent and very active Kyrgyz member of the Alash, is particularly illustrative of the difference between the two groups. Arabaev received religious education in Ufa and for a few years before his return to the home village in the Przhevalsk uezd worked as an editor in the Alash newspaper “Kazak.” A co-author of the reformed Arabic alphabet for Kyrgyz and Kazakh speakers, Arabaev opened a new method (Jadid) school in the Tonskaia volost of the Przhevalsk uezd in 1912. During the

\(^{132}\) There was a noticeable generational gap; while an older generation of *manaps* did not speak Russian, their sons often did.
uprising he fled to China with his volost. Arabaev’s experience was by no means unique. Indeed, the experience of exile and persecution was universal among the Kyrgyz members of the Alash and across the wider native society of southern Semirechye.

For the Kyrgyz of Semirechye, exile became a source of collective solidarity, an ethnic marker, which separated the Kyrgyz from other peoples of the region. The sense of the physical and emotional displacement engendered by exile and amplified by the continued persecution at the hands of the colonists prompted the development of a strong emotional attachment to the ethnic “homeland” in Semirechye and led the native elites to formulate territorial claims to this homeland. The geographic isolation of southern Semirechye had further reinforced collective ethnic identity. The distinctive tropes of loss and survival in the collective petitions of the Kyrgyz of Semirechye and reflections of the native elites on the civil war in Semirechye highlight the emotional charge of the emergent ethnic identity while simultaneously reconstructing the social context in which this identity was articulated.

The critical article by Akhmet Baitursynov – one of the leaders of the Alash – remains perhaps the best known assessment of the October revolution and the civil war in Semirechye and the Steppe from the perspective of native intelligentsia. The revolution, wrote Baitursynov, “terrified the Kirghiz (Kazakhs) with its external manifestations. What the Bolshevik movement was like in the central parts of Russia was unknown to the Kirghiz. But in the peripheries it was accompanied by violence, looting, abuses, and a peculiar dictatorial power. In short, the (Bolshevik) movement in the

133 Jipar Duishemibeiva examines oral poems of the uprising of 1916, commemorated in the unofficial communal histories of the Kyrgyz as Urkun, or exodus, to argue that these poems “communicated a strong sense of Kyrgyz identity, by stressing the differences between the Kyrgyz and the other ethnic groups of Semireche, and by expressing deep longing for the lands of Issyk Kul and Jeti Suu…considered the land of the Kyrgyz.” Duishemibeiva, 205.

134 Again, Duishemibeiva’s thesis explores how a deeply-held and territorially-oriented sense of collective belonging among the Kyrgyz developed within the Russian imperial context through the efforts of the Kyrgyz poets and intellectuals during the late tsarist period.”

135 For a discussion of the response of the native intelligentsia and akyns, native folk bards, to the rebellion, see Duishemibeiva, 199-220.

136 What makes Baitursynov’s piece particularly interesting is that it was intended as criticism from within the party ranks. By the time he wrote the article, Baitursynov had joined the Bolsheviks and called onto other Alash members to recognize the Soviet power. Baitursynov’s critique was in fact a common, if not dominant, view shared by many of the Communist party leaders at the same time. The best known examination of the October revolution as “the colonial revolution” is given in Georgii Safarov’s “Kolonial’naja revoliutsija: Opyt Turkestana” published in 1921. It is tempting to see the works of Safarov and a handful of native activists like Baitursynov as an outgrowth of revolutionary idealism facilitated by the initial openness of post-revolutionary political life. There certainly was a sense of earnestness to Safarov’s examination of the inequalities that attended the revolution in Russia’s colonies, but, as Adeeb Khalid correctly points out, Safarov was critical of local Russian “revolutionaries,” but not of Soviet power. Adeeb Khalid, “Between Empire and Revolution: New Work on Soviet Central Asia,” Kritika: Explorations in Russian and Eurasian History 7, no. 4 (2006): 867. If anything, Safarov helped the party absolve itself of the crimes committed in its name against the native population of Turkestan during the civil war and immediately after. A common claim that the Soviet power did not come to the region until after the land and water reforms of 1922-23 when a large portion of the lands seized by the colonists was returned to its native owners helped the Soviet government distance itself from the violence of the re-conquest of Central Asia.
peripheries was often not the revolution as it is usually understood, but complete anarchy (polneishaia anarkhiia).”

A lesser known but equally scathing assessment of Bolshevik rule in Semirechye is given in the March 1919 resolution adopted by the Alash’s Semirechye Oblast Committee. Authored by Ibraim (Ibragim) Dzhainakov, whose ethnic background remains a point of contention between Kazakh and Kyrgyz historians, the resolution blames “the pitiful, wretched, and impoverished” state of “the previously bountiful and wealthy” oblast under “the arbitrary rule (svoebraznoe khozianichan’e) of the Semirechye Bolsheviks.” As the result of continuing “to this day… mass executions [of the native population], including children and women, rapine, and the general destruction of property, livestock, and farm implements, and other depredations” the native population of Semirechye was “positively vanishing.” “Of all the groups of population” Dzhainakov concludes “the Kirghiz were affected most by the Bolshevik rout as well as the prior unfavourable circumstances.”

The resolution was made all the more poignant by the failure of the Alash to act on the tragedy unfolding in the Pishpek and Przehevalsk uezds. The fate that befell the Pishpek branch of the Alash and other “Muslim institutions” in the southern Semirechye reflects the state of isolation and helplessness of its Kyrgyz, Dungan, and Taranchi population. Formed in June 1917, the Pishpek Alash had survived for a little over a year and was disbanded by the Bolshevik authorities in September 1918. A number of the Kyrgyz Alash activists, including a prominent manap Diur Soorombaev, were killed the same year by the head of one of the Red Army units, a certain Pavlov. The remaining activists were forced to recognize the Soviet power and corralled into a newly established “Kirghiz Revolutionary Committee.” A similar fate awaited other indigenous political organizations, such as the Shuroi-Islomia, “the Tatar Ittifak and the Kirghiz Soviet of Proletarians,” all of which were shut down in September 1918.

A group petition written by one of the rebellious manaps Mambetaly Muratalin in January 1920 similarly implies that the Kyrgyz of Semirechye were affected more than

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137 Baitursynov, 1.
138 “Postanovlenie Semirechenskogo Oblastnogo Kirgizskogo Komiteta Alash, 17 marta 1919 g.” in Koigeldiev, 176-77.
140 Zhantuarov, 97-98.
141 “Iz protokola zasedaniia ispolnitel’nogo komiteta soveta narodnykh deputatov Pishpekskogo uezda o zakrytii vsekh burjuazno-natsionalisticheskikh musul’manskih uchrezhdenii, 20 sentiabria” in ibid., 141.
others. The petition lists six Kyrgyz volosts of Shamsinskaia, Buraninskaia, Tynaevskaia, Nurmambetovskaia, Baiseitovskaia, and Issygatinskaia, and a single Kazakh volost of Kulboldinskaia as most “devastated in terms of land and economy.” Although addressed to the Turkestan Executive Committee (TurKtsIK), the petition does not differentiate between “the time of Nicholas,” which the petitioners compare to “the time of the Egyptian pharaoh” in an obvious biblical reference to Moses’ exodus, that of the Provisional Government and of the Soviet authorities, under which “the Kirghiz were left naked and barefoot…starved to death and were dispersed across the uezds – their land occupied by Russian settlements.”

Another petition – addressed to “comrade Lenin” – seeks “to remind the Supreme authority of the Russian Socialist Republic of the calamities and privation that befell the Kirghiz proletariat.” Signed by Ishenaly Arabaev and several manaps, most notably the Shabdanov brothers, and the representatives of the Dungans and Taranchis of the Przhevalsk, Naryn, Tokmak, and Pishpek uezds, the petition is appreciative of the efforts of the Special Commission charged with the task of aiding the returning refugees. At the same time, the petitioners are highly critical of the Bolshevik government in Semirechye; they ask themselves “if the Kirghiz of the Semirechye oblast use the freedom of the estate (class) revolution” and respond that they do not “for they do not have it.” They detail the various abuses perpetrated by the new authorities and “the Bolshevik bosses” (glavari in the original, literally “bosses of Bolshevik mobs”), including the executions of “the smartest and most honourable among the Kirghiz” and the murderous actions of the settlers, who killed the returning Kyrgyz “at first convenience” and “to the last man.” One of the more interesting passages in the petition describes strategies of survival employed by the Kyrgyz who “put a watchman on every clearing and every hill and if a Russian appeared…hid in holes underground, dressed their wives and daughters in rags, and smeared ash and soil on their heads and faces, so that they appeared loathsome and wretched to the eye.” The petition repeatedly portrays “the Kirghiz of Semirechye, especially of the Przhevalsk and Pishpek uezds” as “most constrained and oppressed in relation to the land question.” To resolve this “unhappiest and neediest state” of affairs the petitioners request that Lenin disarm the settlers and replace the Red Army units drawn from the settlers with units from central Russia.

142 “Zaiavlzenie ot Semirechenskikh delegatov v Prezidium TurTsIKA, 27 ianvaria 1920 g.” in Koigeldiev, 190-91.
In addition to bringing to light the specific experience of Semirechye’s native nomads in lieu of other written sources, these petitions and reports provide factual data, which paint a rather damning picture of the economic and social disruption in the oblast. From these petitions and reports we learn, for example, that by July 1917 more than half, or 83,000, of 164,000 nomads who fled to China, had died of starvation, exposure, and diseases. In the winter of 1918, “thirty Kirghiz died daily.” We also know that little had changed for the Kyrgyz under the Bolshevik government. The settlers continued to raid the returning Kyrgyz in 1919 and had killed – with the help of the Red Army – 10,000 Kyrgyz and Kazakhs; “the Reds wiped out entire auls (native villages).”

The government figures confirm the scale of devastation. Between 1917 and 1920, the Naryn uyezd (formed in the aftermath of the uprising) lost 63.4% of the livestock population while the Pishpek uyezd lost 43.6%. By 1920, the livestock population of southern Semirechye shrank to 46.7% of the 1914 population. Altogether, the Alash’s Semirechye Oblast Committee put the losses of the native nomads in Semirechye at 900 million rubles. The agriculture of the region suffered a similar decline. Where in 1915, there were 640,000 dessiatines of sown land and 9,2 million heads of livestock, by 1920, there were only 300,000 dessiatines of sown land and 2,6 million heads of livestock. The productivity of sown areas had also dropped; a dessiatine sown in 1920 yielded only half of its pre-war harvest.

The consequences of this drop were dismal, if expected. Reporting on famine in Semirechye, Turar Ryskulov noted that among the nomads “the loss of life to famine and epidemics varies between the different regions from 25 to 50%. Only one tenth of livestock remains…The de-population has reached such a degree that in some localities

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144 “Kytai zherine boskan kazak-kyrgyz shygyny turasyndagy M. Tynyshbaevdin malimdemesi, 24 shilde 1917 zh.” in ibid., 130.
145 “Kopiia telegrammy iz Przheval’ska na imia Mustiukova” in ibid., 164.
146 “Kopiia telegrammy Predsedatelia Tonskogo komiteta Arabaeva ot 25 iunia za №10436 na imia Dzhainakova” in ibid., 175. “V Sovet Ministrov, O merakh k vosstanovleniiu khoziaistv v Semirechenskoi oblasti, 14 iunia 1919 g.” in ibid., 182.
149 “V Sovet Ministrov, O merakh k vosstanovleniiu khoziaistv v Semirechenskoi oblasti, 14 iunia 1919 g.” in Koigeldiev, 182.
where there were previously two to three, and even four, volosts, only one volost remains.”

Despite the general economic crisis in the oblast, famine had mostly affected the native population. Undeterred by the starving Kyrgyz, the stream of settlers continued to trickle into Semirechye. By 1919, seven new settlements had sprung up in the Przhevalsk uezd alone. The attraction of lands cleansed of their native inhabitants attracted settlers from across the country; the settlers continued to “arrive in waves daily” (plyvut i plyvut s kazhdym dnem). Both the new and established settlers depredated on the nomads. A circular letter sent to the uezd, volost, and village Ispolkoms in January 1919 reported that “the politically ignorant (nesoznatel’nye) citizens of some of the settlements in the Semirechye oblast form groups of 4-5 men, and, armed with rifles, raid the neighbouring auls, where they commit various abuses against the Kirghiz, harass, plunder, and sometimes even kill.” As the next chapter will show, this convergence of land, ethnicity, and conflict continued well into the first decade of the Soviet rule in the region. How the Soviet authorities set about untangling this deadlock is the subject of the next chapter.

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153 GAAO f. 361, op.1, d.1, l.26-26 ob. in ibid.
Chapter IV

Semirechye, the Frontier of the Revolution

Coercion and mass mobilization, as we have established in the previous chapters, are critical to the establishment and maintenance of political regimes. Their use by the three successive governments – first, by the Tsarist authorities, then, by the Provisional Government, and, finally, by the Bolsheviks – underscore their importance both in warfare and state-building. The civil war in Semirechye is a good illustration of how the Soviet parastatal complex emergent from the colonial institutions and practices of total war employed coercion, repression, and mobilization to seize control over the key resources of the oblast and assert authority over its native and settler population.

But the war had also shown that coercion alone was insufficient to sustain the fledgling Soviet state and its institutional network in the region. First, the marginalization and exclusion of the native population from state-building made impossible the mobilization of the Semirechye’s nomads for the task of state building, economic development, and defence. Second, the distance of the region from the Bolshevik centres of power in central Russia and the fact that though armed, the settler population on which the Soviet authorities came to rely, constituted a minority, prompted the new government to adopt policies aimed at “making Soviet power close and native to the peasantry of non-Russian nationalities.”

The reintegration of the region into the reformed and reorganized Russian state testifies to the ability of the Soviet regime to co-opt the indigenous elites and overcome resistance in the native countryside. How this was accomplished is the subject of this chapter. Substantively, this chapter is an examination of the productive, or positive, dimensions of Soviet power. Where the previous chapters examined the repressive instruments of imperial and later Soviet state-building in the Semirechye, this chapter analyses the efforts of the Bolshevik government to fashion popular loyalties through the implementation of targeted programmes aimed at “implanting national Soviet statehood (gosudarstvennost’)” among the non-Russian peoples of the empire.

Of particular interest to me are the critical junctures in the political development of Semirechye in the first decade of Soviet power: the policies of decolonization, most

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1 B. Chokushov, Klassovaia bor'ba v kirgizskikh ailakh v pervye goda sotsialisticheskih preobrazovani (1918-1924 gg.) (Frunze: Kirgizskii gosudarstvenny universitet, 1970), 46.
notably, the land and water reforms of 1921-1922; the campaign of national delimitation, which had divided and consolidated the native pastoralist population of Semirechye into geographically circumscribed ethno-territorial units. These, I argue, were critical to Soviet state-building – or “socialist construction” to use the Soviet term – in the oblast and the region in general. The redistribution of land and the demonstrative expulsion of Cossack colonists helped the regime attract considerable support among the native population and retaliate against a social group with a record of anti-Soviet resistance and suspected cross-border ties. Similarly, the cultivation and fostering of the institutional trappings of a modern nation-state and ethnic identities generated broad social support for the regime and consolidated the political boundaries of the state.

In my analysis of the inter-war political history of Semirechye I proceed from the argument made by Peter Sahlins that “the creation of the territorial state constituted one component of the modern nation-state; the emergence of national identity formed another.” The land and water reforms and the national delimitation of the region helped cement the connection between the territorially anchored national republics and a sense of ethnic belonging.

To understand why the Soviet government sought to enforce ethnic solidarities, I situate the Soviet project of nation-building in the historical – rather than ideological – context. In addition to concerns of domestic stability, the Soviet government also had to contend with cross-border threats. The perceived hostile “encirclement” of the young Soviet state made political loyalties of the borderland population a matter of state security. The cultivation and management of national institutions and sentiments was fundamentally a boundary-building project aimed at mobilizing the population of the ethnically diverse and politically volatile region for the purposes of state construction. In simple terms, institutionalized ethnic identities lent legitimacy to the Soviet nation and state-building projects; they bolstered as well territorial claims on behalf of the Soviet government and helped assimilate the multi-ethnic and multi-confessional population into the highly centralized state.

While not denying the importance of Marxist doctrine to the Bolshevik regime, I see it “as one of a range of transformational ideologies and agendas.”

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Soviet policies of development and nationalization in Semirechye constitute therefore an instance of “Soviet social intervention” that formed a part of “one particular constellation of modern state practices that arose in conjunction with ambitions to refashion society and mobilize populations for industrial labour and mass warfare.”\textsuperscript{5} As such, the policies of the Soviet government in Semirechye sought to forge the native pastoralists of the region into a highly productive and loyal population whose service to the state was voluntary and drew on the civil and political consciousness of Soviet citizens.

Furthermore, this chapter will demonstrate that the Bolshevik practices of state and nation-building were informed by the principles that also guided the officials of the colonial administration and the Provisional Government. Like the Tsarist authorities and the Provisional Government before, the Soviet leadership sought to exert control over land – as simultaneously a natural resource and a marker of the state’s political boundaries – through the redistribution of land and delimitation of boundaries.

Underlying this chapter’s discussion of nation and state-building in Soviet Semirechye are the concepts of nationalism and identity elaborated by, among others, Ernest Gellner, Benedict Anderson, and Ronald Suny, who argue that national identities are socially constructed, or imagined, to use Anderson’s term, through print culture and mass education.\textsuperscript{6}

**From Rebels to Citizens**

Perhaps the single most important – and contentious – question that historians of the Soviet nationalities policies have sought to answer is the question of why the Bolshevik leadership sought to develop and promote institutional forms of statehood and national consciousness among the empire’s minorities. Terry Martin and Ronald Suny have convincingly demonstrated that the Bolshevik leadership took this decision in response to the ascendant national movements in the national borderlands of the former Tsarist

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\textsuperscript{5} Hoffmann, 2.

empire. The concern of the Soviet leaders with the growth of nationalism translated into a policy of concessions to and accommodation of non-Russian movements and elites.

Although largely in agreement with Martin’s suggestion that in formulating nationalities policies, the Soviet leadership sought to counter national aspirations of the empire’s minorities, I propose to highlight certain nuances of Soviet nationalities policies by placing their development in the broader historical context. I argue in particular that the promotion of the empire’s inorodtsy subjects to Soviet citizens should be seen less as simply an extension of the politics of concessions and accommodation, than a project of state-building in the ethnic peripheries of the state.

I distinguish several strategic and political factors that influenced Bolshevik thinking on the question of national minorities. First, the civil war had severely truncated the former Tsarist state; by 1921 Russia had relinquished vast territories stretching from Finland to Bessarabia and shrunk, as the result, to its nineteenth century borders. Second, the ethnic mobilization of the empire’s minorities engendered by the civil war gave rise to a multitude of national movements that the Bolsheviks had to contend with even in the territories under the Red Army’s sway. Third, the rapid expansion of imperial Russia in the decades before the war reduced the share of the “Great Russian” (i.e. Slavic population inclusive of Ukrainians and Belarussians) population to 44% of the empire’s total population by the turn of the twentieth century. Fourth, the loss of productive population, Russian and non-Russian alike, resulted in the decline of agricultural production. As the population of central Russia and the national peripheries succumbed to famine and violence, the government was left with little to feed the Red Army and defend Soviet Russia. Finally, the inter-state rivalry between the Soviet Union and the hostile “capitalist” nations meant that although the Soviet state “happily emerged from the condition of civil war, the danger of attack from without was by no means excluded.”

Tackling this danger would not be easy. Speaking in 1920, the then commissar of nationalities, Iosif Stalin, insisted that in conditions of Soviet Russia’s dependency on the

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7 The argument is now new and has been made by a German historian, Gerhard Simon, in his book on “Nationalism and Policy Toward the Nationalities in the Soviet Union: From Totalitarian Dictatorship to Post-Stalinist Society” already in 1986 (though it became available in English only in 1991). Gerhard Simon, Karen Forster, and Oswald Forster, *Nationalism and Policy Toward the Nationalities in the Soviet Union: From Totalitarian Dictatorship to Post-Stalinist Society* (Westview Press Boulder, 1991). At the same, Martin’s magisterial work cannot be reduced to this simple interpretation. Like Francine Hirsch and others, Martin also argues that to a considerable extent, the Soviet nationalities policies were grounded in the Marxist doctrine of class equality transposed onto the multi-ethnic population of the former empire. Martin; Francine Hirsch, *Empire of Nations: Ethnographic Knowledge & the Making of the Soviet Union* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2005).


borderlands’ “raw materials, fuel and foodstuffs” the only way “to carry the revolution through to the end” was the establishment of “definite relations, definite ties between the centre and the border regions of Russia, ensuring an intimate and indestructible union between them.” The Soviet nationalities policy was intended to do just that. The simultaneous integration of the peoples and territories of the former empire into Soviet Russia on a more egalitarian basis allowed the Soviet state to mobilize broad support, pre-empt claims of various national movements, and draw on the “support of the peasant East” and its “essential resources.” The sensitivity of the Bolshevik government to developments abroad suggests that the Soviet nationalities policies drew in equal measure on the efforts of the Soviet government to attract popular support and to counteract foreign influences. In essence, the Soviet nation-building arose from the convergence of domestic challenges and the geopolitical concerns of the Bolshevik leadership. The equalization of the native peoples of the borderlands, their increased political representation, and the state-sponsored development of republican economies ensured the cohesion and unity of the “new mighty union state” against the “external danger.”

Soviet Central Asia engendered most of the Soviet leadership’s concerns about security. Hardly a unified whole before the revolution, Turkestan emerged deeply divided and fragmented in the wake of the civil war. Like elsewhere in the country, this fragmentation gave rise to a number of conflicting and disputed ethnic and political loyalties as well as nascent forms of nation and statehood, such as the Alash Orda and the Turkestan (Kokand) Autonomy. In many ways, the Bolsheviks benefitted from this political and military disarray of the forces on the ground. Rather than lose the breakaway peripheries to what the Soviet leaders saw as the rival – and hostile – states and movements, they forged alliances with the indigenous elites, thereby presenting the Soviet state as the champion of the national cause and pre-empting the claims of these groups to represent the native population.

While this fragmentation proved useful during the civil war, it severely limited the Bolsheviks’ ability to govern the region in its aftermath. The economic dislocation

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12 Ibid., 363.
13 Joseph Stalin, “The Union of the Soviet Republics, Report Delivered at the Tenth All-Russian Congress of the Soviets, December 26, 1922,” in Stalin, 5, 158.
14 Terry Martin in particular argues that the Bolsheviks were alarmed by the rise of nationalism and national “bourgeois” movements, which they saw as a threat to the Soviet Russia. More pointedly, Stephen Kotkin argues that the Bolsheviks had to contend with the fait accompli of national autonomies. He writes that “in the face of hostility from both hard-line Bolsheviks opposed to nationalism at all and national-minded Bolsheviks opposed to centralization” Lenin and Stalin “groped toward a workable federalism consonant with Marxist tenets, faits accomplis on the ground, and geopolitics.” Kotkin, *Stalin: Volume I: Paradoxes of Power, 1878-1928*, 422-27.
and the physical displacement of the native pastoralists resulted in the constantly shifting population. In 1920 alone, 63,000 Soviet citizens had crossed the border from Semirechye into China. The flight of the native population pointed to the problematic nature of the boundaries and the population’s ability to defy and negotiate the authority of the state. In the fraught atmosphere of inter-state competition, the unauthorized flow of people and goods across the border came to be seen as a security threat.

The borderland position of Soviet Central Asia created additional complications as the new government struggled to control the border and curtail cross-border movements. The financial hardship also weighed heavily on the ability of the government to defend the border. By 1925, the USSR’s eastern frontier region, which stretched for 5,000 kilometres from Naryn to the Caspian Sea, was manned by two border detachments and three border command posts. Between February and October 1922, the border forces of Soviet Kazakhstan and Kirghizia killed or detained 4,756 persons attempting to cross the border. Furthermore, the proximity of Chinese Turkestan and Afghanistan to Soviet Central Asia with which they shared cultural and economic ties as well as the co-ethnic and co-religionist populations made the task of building “the unassailable fortress” of Soviet Turkestan simultaneously more difficult and more urgent.

The international environment in which the Soviet Union operated also played a critical role in the formulation of nationalities policies. In significant ways, the Bolshevik leaders tended to view domestic and foreign threats as mutually constitutive and reinforcing. This was, for example, the case with the native basmachi (from Turkic basmak - to hit) guerrilla movement, to which the Soviet government routinely attributed connections to “the imperialist nations” of Europe, which were “conducting a policy of encircling the USSR from the East (China, Afghanistan, Persia, Turkey).” As “the hirelings” of the Soviet Union’s “worst enemy” – “the capitalist world” – “orchestrated from abroad,” the basmachi, who briefly united under the leadership of the renegade Turkish General Enver Pasha, engendered the Soviet government’s concerns about

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15 Kamoludin Nazhmudinovich Abdullaev, Or Sin'tsziana do Khorasana: Iz istorii sredneaziatskoi emigratsii XX veka (Dushanbe: Irfon, 2009), 277.
17 TsPM FSB RF dok. F. DNV -1634, s.90 in "Krasnoznamennyi Vostochnyi Pogranichnyi Okrug," 51.
18 "Stenograficheskii otchet 1 uchreditel’nogo s”ezda Sovetov KAO, mart 1925 g.” TsGA KR f. 20, op. 1, l. 14, l. 202
19 For a typical report on the “counterrevolutionary” connections of the basmachi with the British see “Iz doklada nachal’nika Bukharskogo oblastnogo pogranichnogo otriada o vrazhdebnii deiatel’nosti kontrevolucionnoi emigratsii, 25 noiaabria 1923 g.” in P. I. Zyrianov, Pogranichnye voiska SSSR 1929-1938: Shornik dokumentov i materialov (Moscow: Nauka, 1972), 597-98. Joseph Stalin quoted in Kotkin, Stalin: Volume 1: Paradoxes of Power, 1878-1928, 739. Tajik historian Kamoludin Abdullaev argues that neither the White Armies, which had fled to neighbouring Chinese Turkestan, nor any anti-Bolshevik forces in the West seriously considered the basmachi as a potential ally. Abdullaev, 303.
foreign intervention in the region.\textsuperscript{20} A 1922 OGPU (Joint State Political Directorate, the secret police agency, which replaced Cheka in 1922) report described the basmachi movement as an “open war” against the Soviet state.\textsuperscript{21}

In Semirechye, the basmachi threat was less pronounced than in the Ferghana Valley. The presence of a large and well-armed settler minority curbed any attempts of the native population to offer armed resistance. Nevertheless, the porous border with Chinese Turkestan, which had become a safe haven for 13,000 White Cossacks and many thousands of Kyrgyz and Kazakhs gave the authorities ample reason for concern. Between August and November 1924 the Soviet border guards clashed 36 times with illegal border crossers in the Jarkent uezd alone.\textsuperscript{22} Added to this was the continuing ethnic conflict between the colonists and the natives, which threatened to undo the successes of the Red Army in the oblast and made impossible the mobilization of native society for “socialist construction.”

Colonialism in Reverse: Land and Water Reforms of 1921-22

The land question remained by far the thorniest issue facing the Soviet authorities in the oblast. Years of devastation had rendered vast tracts of land unproductive; by 1920 the sown areas in Semirechye contracted by 60% compared with the pre-war levels.\textsuperscript{23} The loss of nearly half, 46.5%, of the oblast’ population of livestock also boded ill for the heavily pastoralist economy of Semirechye.\textsuperscript{24} At the same time, the continuing stream of refugees from famine-ravaged central Russia put additional pressure on the strained resources of the region. The war had significantly expanded the number of new arrivals from European Russia. In as little as a decade, the Russian population of Semirechye nearly doubled from 175,000 settlers in 1911, to over 300,000 settlers in 1921.\textsuperscript{25} In the Przhevalsk uezd, where the native uprising had claimed lives of more than 3,000 settlers in 1916, the European population grew by roughly 13%, from 69,107 persons to 76,389

\textsuperscript{22} TsPM FSB RF dok. F. DNV-1634, s.90 in Tereshchenko, “Krasnoznamennyi Vostochnyi Pogranichnyi Okrug.” 51.
\textsuperscript{23} “Stenograficheskii otchet 1 uchreditel’nego s”ezda Soyvetov KAO, mart 1925 g.,” TsGA KR f.20, op.1, d.14, l.66
\textsuperscript{24} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{25} Genis, 44, 46.
persons, between 1917 and 1920. Similarly, the Pishpek uezd whose population shrank by 21.28% between 1917 and 1920 had experienced a significant growth in its European population, which increased by 12.65%.

The effects of economic dislocation were shouldered mainly by the native population of the oblast. Despite the overall contraction in the sown area, the area sown by the settlers in 1920 increased, if insignificantly by 0.83%, or 447 dessiatines. In contrast, the land area cultivated by the Kyrgyz in 1920 fell to a quarter of the acreage under the settlers’ crops. The Kyrgyz of the Bystrorechenskaia volost of the Pishpek uezd, for example, held on average 1.4 dessiatines of irrigated land, while every settler household in the same volost owned 4.1 dessiatines. Forced off their land, the Kyrgyz grew increasingly dependent on their herds. Between 1917 and 1920, the share of the farming Kyrgyz households dropped by roughly a quarter, from 7,734 to 5,989 households. The fall in livestock, however, made the prospects for survival of the native nomads even more tenuous. The overall decrease of 46.5% in the oblast’s livestock population belied the dramatic decline of the nomadic herds by 67.4% between 1917 and 1920.

Expectedly, the increased competition for land resulted in a continuing surge of violence. The authorities recognized both “the extraordinary complexity of the land issue in the Semirechye oblast” and the resulting “extreme aggravation in the relationship between the settler and the native population.” A typical secret police (OGPU) report at the time read that “the conflict between the Kirghiz and the Russian peasants reached the greatest proportions in the Dzhetytysu (Semirechye) oblast. Here, the antagonism expresses itself in every possible way.” How disruptive this antagonism was to the Soviet project of post-war reconstruction in the region emerges in the March 1922 resolution of the Central Committee of the Turkestan Communist Party (hereafter KPT) on the Semirechye question, which concluded that the continuing land seizures by the newly arrived settlers

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28 Ibid.
29 Chokushov, 10.
30 Ibid., 16.
31 Ibid., 10.
32 Ibid., 17-18.
33 “Postanovlenie Turkbiuro Tseka RKP I Tseka KPT po Semirechenskomu voprosu, 30 marta 1922 g.,” TsGA KR f.89, op.1, d.240, l.65.
can lead to “very serious complications, including civil war.”

A secret police report from the same year had similarly identified “the antagonism between the Russian settlers and the indigenous peasants” as one of the two “principal obstacles to the establishment of Soviet power.”

The ethnic nature of the conflict over land also undermined the prospects of indigenous support for the regime. The broad significance of the land issue was readily recognized by the oblast and union authorities; the oblast Ispolkom had explicitly linked the land question to “the nationalities policy of the Soviet government.” An oblast meeting of Semirechye’s authorities in November 1920 put the concerns of the authorities in even more straightforward terms; “from the first days of the revolution to this day, the Russian population (of the oblast) considered Soviet rule to be the rule by the Russians in the interests of the Russians.”

The strong identification of the new government with “Russian national domination (zasil’e)” fed into the festering discontent of the native nomads, creating pockets of resistance to the authorities in the native countryside.

For the native elites, too, the land question was the most pressing issue on the political agenda. Speaking on behalf of the “Kirghiz” (that is both Kazakhs and Kyrgyz) Akhmet Baitursynov of the former Alash Orda contended that “until the Kirghiz are treated differently by the Russians they will – regardless of class divisions – remain distrustful of the Russians. To prove that they are the liberator of the exploited nations, the proletariat of the Russian nation, which for centuries plundered and oppressed the Kirghiz, must show in practice that they are not their (the exploited nations’) new enslaver whose only wish is to replace the Tsarist administrators.”

In response to the continuing “national antagonism” and with a view to drawing the support of the native communities, the Soviet government launched a campaign of decolonization in 1920. In Semirechye, the state-led efforts to equalize the native population’s land access became the centrepiece of this campaign. Openly demonstrative – and often violent – the land and water reforms were designed, to quote

35 “Postanovlenie Turkbiuro Tseka RKP I Tseka KPT po Semirechenskomu voprosu, 30 marta 1922 g.” TsGA KR f. 89, op. 1, d. 240, l. 65.
37 “Prikaz №12 Semirechenskogo Oblastnogo Ispol’nitel’nogo Komiteta Sovetov, 25 marta 1922 g.,” TsGA KR f. 89, op. 1, d. 240, l. 65.
38 AP RK f. 666, op. 1, d. 36, l. 6 ob. in Miimanbaeva, "Arkhiivnye materialy kak istochnik po sotsial’no-ekonomicheskoi istorii krest’ian-pereселенцев Semirech‘ia v posleoktiabr’skii period," 10.
39 AP RK f. 666, op. 1, d. 198, l. 26 ob. in ibid., 11.
Lenin, to “win the confidence of the natives” and to show in practice, as Baitursynov had insisted, that the Soviet authorities “were not imperialists.”\textsuperscript{42} In this regard, the reforms were an astounding success; observations by visiting party members and secret police reports suggest that the campaign served to solidify the position of the new government in the native countryside.

Whether reaching accommodation with the native population was the only objective of the land and water reforms, however, begs a question. The fact that only a fraction of confiscated land was transferred to the native population and that the Soviet leadership chose to resettle the evicted Russian peasants elsewhere in Semirechye rather than deport them suggests that the authorities were not solely driven by considerations of justice. Instead, alongside the concerted efforts to demonstrate their commitment to redressing the past wrongs, the Soviet leaders sought to extend control over resources and the subject population of the region.\textsuperscript{43} The land and water reforms helped the authorities accomplish several goals at once. First, the dissolution of the European settlements provided the regime with the key natural resource in the oblast – land – and enabled it to impose political control on the settler population. Second, the selective targeting of the Cossack and starozhil (i.e. long-term settlers, who arrived in the oblast before 1905 Stolypin reforms) settlements, which openly sympathized with the White Armies during the civil war, and the punitive tone of the campaign of expulsion indicate that the government used the land and water reforms to punish the segments of settler population suspected of disloyalty. Third, by redistributing the land and reorganizing and consolidating the land holdings along ethnic lines the Soviet leadership laid the foundation for future campaigns of national delimitation and collectivization.

At the same time, the abrupt end of the reforms revealed the regime’s continuing reliance on the Russian population for producing grain and maintaining military control over the national periphery. As the next chapter will show, the implications of this implicit Russocentrism for nation-building in Soviet Semirechye, and indeed, elsewhere in the national republics and autonomies, were far-reaching and led both to readjustments in the nationalities policies and the increased identification with the Russian “core” of the Soviet Union.

\textsuperscript{43} A similar observation is made by Beatrice Penati, “Adapting Russian Technologies of Power: Land-and-Water Reforms in the Uzbek SSR (1924–1928),” \textit{Revolutionary Russia} 25, no. 2 (2012). “Using the land redistribution campaign in Uzbekistan she proposes viewing the “land assessment, land settlement and land-tax measures” as a form of “technology of power,” that is the “technical know-how and practical means…employed by the State administration to exert its authority and control on land and people.”
Although a decree calling for the equalization of the Russian and native land holdings was adopted at the Ninth Turkestan Congress of Soviet in September 1920, the actual implementation of the reforms did not start until half a year later, in January 1921. The reforms set four basic tasks of: 1) liquidating the non-working (netrudovye) kulak and bai farms and redistributing land between the landless and land poor peasants according to the set “labour norm”; 2) equalizing the rights of native and settler populations to land and water through the confiscation of excess land; 3) restoring land seized by the settlers in the wake of the 1916 uprising to their native owners; and 4) parcelling land and assisting settling nomads in transition to sedentary farming. The reforms were implemented in the course of two stages. During the first stage, from December 1920 to September 1921, the authorities repossessed and redistributed the land of the targeted settlements. The second, land management (zemleustroistvo) stage of the reforms was not accomplished until after the collectivization in the first half of the 1930s.

The redistribution of land was a violent affair. The teams charged with the task of redistributing land were formed from the military detachments and Extraordinary Political Land Management Troikas (Chrezvychainye politicheskie zemel'stroitel'nye troiki). Understandably, few, if any, peasants were willing to move and leave their animals and property to the much hated and maligned nomads. Resistance to expulsions took many forms. Some settlers chose to burn their houses down and to damage the farming equipment rather than see it being used by the Kyrgyz. Others took to arms to defend their property. In the settlement of Georgievka in the Pishpek uezd a group of Russian settlers threw a bomb at the building of the local Ispolkom and carried off the farm inventory that they were earlier forced to give away. Still others forcibly evicted the newly settled Kyrgyz from their settlements as soon as the land management troikas left the area.

Eviction, however, did not involve deportation from the oblast; the settlers were as a “general principle” resettled in the starozhil settlements in the same or neighbouring uezds. The 198 families of Bogoslovskoe in the Jarkent uezd, for example, were

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44 Martin, 60.
46 “Svedeniia o proizvedennih rabotakh po zemel'noi reforme v KKAO za period 1921 l 1922 godov i proizvodimykh rabotakh po mezhselennomu zemleustroistvu, 12.02.1925,” TsGA KR f. 903, op. 1, d. 1, l. 7 ob.-8
47 Ibid, l. 7.
48 TsGA KR, f. 89, op. 3, d. 214, l. 31, d. 147, l. 168 ob; f. 12, op. 4, d. 4, l. 62-65 in V. P. Sherstobitov, Lenin i krest'ianskii Sovetskogo Vostoka (na materiale Kirgizskoi SSR) (Frunze: Ilim, 1969), 293.
49 TsGA UZ, f. 17, op. 3, d. 21 b, l. 727 in ibid., 292.
50 “Svedeniia o proizvedennih rabotakh po zemel'noi reforme v KKAO za period 1921 l 1922 godov i proizvodimykh rabotakh po mezhselennomu zemleustroistvu, 12.02.1925”, TsGA KR f. 903, op. 1, d. 1, l. 7.
resettled in Uspenovskoe, Georgievskoe, and Chernorechenskoe settlements of Pishpek uezd.\textsuperscript{51} The 215 households of Iur’evskoe (Iur’evka hereafter) of Tokmak volost were resettled in Dmitrievskoe, Krasnorechenskoe, Ivanovka, Belyi Piket, Bystreorechenskoe, and Novopokrovskoe.\textsuperscript{52} In the Naryn uezd all Russian settlements were consolidated into a single settlement of Kochkorka comprised of 38 families.\textsuperscript{53}

The Cossacks of Semirechye were the only category of the Russian settler population to be expelled from the republic.\textsuperscript{54} The anti-Bolshevik stance of the Semirechye Cossacks during the civil war and their participation in a series of armed uprisings in Semirechye made them an unwelcome presence in the eyes of the authorities. The fact that the Cossacks were well armed added to the concern of the central government; the 1920 report of the Central Committee (TsK) of the Communist Party of Turkestan described the Cossacks of Semirechye as “armed and ready to openly rebel.”\textsuperscript{55} The openly vindictive rhetoric used in the resolution passed by the Semirechye oblast Ispolkom in March 1922 discloses the rationale of selective targeting: “the settler and Cossack poor are themselves at fault in that they stood with (\textit{vmeste i za odno}) kulaks and were punished as a result.”\textsuperscript{56} Even then, the deportation was not wholesale; the decisions to deport were made on a case by case basis.\textsuperscript{57} The “personal” nature of the deportations suggests that the total number of deported was low.

The total number of evicted was, of course, much larger. By the end of April 1921, the authorities disbanded 14 settlements in the Przhevalsk (later, Karakol) uezd, 12 European settlements in the Pishpek uezd, and 1 settlement and 10 farms in the Verny uezd. More than 800 European households comprising approximately 4,500 people had been expelled from the 14 settlements in the Karakol uezd, freeing 25,000 dessiatines of land. In their stead the authorities resettled nearly twice as many returning refugees from China. 8,000 Kyrgyz were settled in twenty “sedentary points” formed in the settlements cleared of their Russian inhabitants.\textsuperscript{58} Exactly how many settlers were expelled is unclear. Based on archival research in Kazakhstan, Niccolo Pianciola suggests that altogether

\begin{itemize}
  \item \textsuperscript{51} Pianciola, 128.
  \item \textsuperscript{52} “VTsIKu – Dokladaia zapiska po voprosu ustroistva gr-n c. Iur’evskogo, Pish. Okruga, KAO,” TsGA KR f. 20, op. 1, d. 156, l. 309.
  \item \textsuperscript{53} Pianciola, 126.
  \item \textsuperscript{54} P. M. Polian, \textit{Ne po svoei vole: Istoriia i geografiia prinuditel’nykh migratsii v SSSR} (Moscow: O.G.I. Memorial, 2001), 54.
  \item \textsuperscript{56} “Prikaz №12 Semirechenskogo Oblastnogo Ispolnitel’nogo Komiteta Sovetov, 25 marta 1922 г.,” TsGA KR f. 89, op. 1, d. 240, l. 54.
  \item \textsuperscript{57} The decree adopted by the Turkbiuro in December 1920 specified the “personal” nature of the deportations. Genis, 45-46.
  \item \textsuperscript{58} Pianciola, 124.
\end{itemize}
1,798 European households were expelled in the Karakol and Pishpek uezds. My own research in the archives of Bishkek suggests that a total of 2,631 households, or 15,381 settlers, were evicted.

Estimates of the actual amount of confiscated land also vary. According to the report of the Karakol land settlement party (pozemel’no-ustroitel’naia partiia) only 58,164 dessiatines of land were confiscated from the settlers of the Przhevalsk (Karakol) uezd. Niccolò Pianciola suggests that altogether 133,432 dessiatines of land were seized by the authorities in the Pishpek and Przhevalsk uezds. Other sources give a higher number of 198,602 dessiatines of arable and over 200,000 dessiatines of rain-fed land. Still other, mostly Soviet, sources refer to more than one million dessiatines confiscated in Semirechye and Syr-Daria oblasts. The likely explanation for the difference in numbers is that the highest estimates indicate the amount of occupied – and cultivated – land projected by the government for use by both the native and settler land societies and individual farms. In 1925, for example, the authorities delimited 1,204,733 dessiatines of land in the Kara-Kirghiz Autonomous Oblast for this purpose. That did not mean, however, that the occupants of this land were displaced to free land for native communities.

In fact, the native communities were allocated only a fraction of the seized land. Only 15,000 dessiatines of land had been distributed among the Kyrgyz in the Przhevalsk uezd by March 1922. About 7,500 dessiatines of arable and the equivalent amount of rain-fed land were transferred to the Kyrgyz of the Naryn uezd in the same period. A larger share of the confiscated land was transferred to the Land State Properties (Gosudarstvennye Zemel’nye Imushchestva, hereafter GZI) fund established in 1922 as the umbrella authority for the management of land reserves. Of the total 58,164

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59 Ibid., 134.
60 “Svedeniia o proizvedennykh rabotakh po zemel’noi reforme v KKAO za period 1921 i 1922 godov i proizvodimykh rabotakh po mezhselennomu zemleustroistvu, 12.02.1925,” TsGA KR f. 903, op. 1, d. 1, l. 7 ob.-8, l. 15 ob.
61 “Ob’iasnitel’naia zapiska k godovomu otchetu Karakol’koi Pozemel’noi-Ustroitel’noi Partii s 1 oktiabria 1924 goda po 1 oktiabria 1925 goda,” TsGA KR f. 847, op. 1, d. 63, l. 20 ob.
62 Pianciola, 136.
63 Shuleikin, 296.
65 “Svedeniia o proizvedennykh rabotakh po zemel’noi reforme v KKAO za period 1921 i 1922 godov i proizvodimykh rabotakh po mezhselennomu zemleustroistvu, 12.02.1925,” TsGA KR f. 903, op. 1, d. 1, l. 16.
66 S. K. Kerimbaev and V. P. Sherstobitov, eds., Formirovanie i razvitie kirgizskoi sotsialisticheskoi natsii (Frunze: Kirgizskoe gosudarstvennoe izdatel’stvo, 1957), 112.
67 I. D. Shuleikin, Istoriia zemel’nykh otmeneshii i zemleustroistva (Moscow, Leningrad: Izd-vo kol’khozoii i sovkhozsoi literatury, 1933), 104-05. Of course, the legal category of State Properties, which covered land and water, was in existence long before the land and water reforms. The 1886 Turkestan Statute explicitly defined “water systems, fisheries, wild woods, plots which the state rented out (obrochnye stat’i), and, above all, all the land that was not ascribed in favour of the native rural population.” Beatrice Penati, “Managing Rural Landscapes in Colonial Turkestan,” in Explorations in the Social History of Modern Central Asia (19th-Early 20th Century), ed. Paolo Sartori (Leiden: Brill, 2013), 72.
dessiatines of land repossessed by the *troikas* in the Przhevalsk uezd, for example, only 35,653 dessiatines were transferred to the Kyrgyz; the rest became the property of the fund. By 1922, the *GZI* fund had 108,528 dessiatines of land. By 1925, the fund grew to 315,602 dessiatines of prime agricultural land. In total, only about a third, or 578,481 dessiatines, of the 1,722,625 dessiatines of land, seized by the authorities in the whole of Turkestan, were distributed among the native communities.

Despite the inadequate land distribution – only 6,000 native households received land – the campaign had naturally triggered a flood of requests for land. Sixteen thousand petitions were filed in the uezds of Naryn and Pishpek alone in 1921. It had also succeeded at rallying native support for the regime. In 1921, the plenipotentiary of the Central Executive Committee of the Communist Party (hereafter VTsIK) to Turkestan, Adolph Ioffe (Joffe) telegraphed Moscow with the news of the “unprecedented, incredible, utterly inconceivable enthusiasm of the Kirghiz masses.” According to Ioffe, “the mood among the Kirghiz poor in Semirechye…was the first and strongest impression of Semirechye, [it is the kind of] impression that made even the horrors of the economic ruin, the dangers of national strife and enmity…pale in comparison.”

Eager to seize on the momentum and galvanize grass-roots support for the Soviets, the authorities launched a comprehensive public awareness campaign. As a part of the campaign, hundreds of meetings were held in the native settlements across the oblast. In the Pishpek uezd alone, 54 meetings took place over the course of winter of 1920-21. At the same time, the administration attempted to mobilize the indigenous communities by enlisting them in a labour union of the “poor, landless, and middle” peasants. Founded in 1920, the *Koshchi* (plowman) union was expected to take over some of the functions of the local government by “taking active part in the work of creating organs of Soviet rule in the localities.” By the end of March, Naryn district had around 2,300 registered members, Pishpek district had 4,700, and Karakol had 1,037. By 1922 *Koshchi* had

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68 “Ob’iasnitel’naja zapiska k godovomu otchetu Karakol’koj Pozemel’noi-Ustroitel’noi Partii s 1 oktiabria 1924 goda po 1 oktiabria 1925 goda,” TsGA KR f. 847, op. 1, d. 63, l. 20 ob.
69 “Svedeniia o proizvedennykh rabotakh po zemel’noi reforme v KKAO za period 1921 i 1922 godov i proizvodimykh rabotakh po mezhdel’nomu zemleustroistvu, 12.02.1925,” TsGA KR f. 903, op. 1, d. 1, l. 16.
70 “Protokoly zasedaniy uchreditel’nogo s’ezda Sovetov KAO. Stenograficheskii otchet 1 uchreditel’nogo s’ezda Sovetov KAO, mart 1925 g.,” TsGA KR f. 20, op. 1, d. 14, l. 67.
71 Novikov, 43.
72 Kerimbaev and Sherstobitov, 113.
74 Genis, 45.
75 Loring, 42.
76 “Rezoliutsii 1-go kraevogo s’eza kazakhskoi i kirgizskoi bednoty TurkASSR, 29 ianvaria 1921 g.” in *Sovetskoe stroitel’stvo v aulakh i selakh Semirech’ia: 1921-1925 gg. Sbornik dokumentov i materialov*, 140-41.
77 Loring, 43.
90,000 members in Semirechye alone. As the first mass organization in the native countryside, Koshchi provided a useful – and sometimes the only – propaganda venue with a captive audience.

Receiving land, however, was not unconditional. Land was redistributed in order of priority. The first to receive the confiscated land were the Kyrgyz refugees returning from China. They were followed by native farm labourers and landless sedentary Kyrgyz and Kazakhs. Whatever their category, however, all the petitioners were required to settle down and take up farming. The decree adopted by the VTsIK in May 1923 “On the mandatory compact inter-settlement land use in the nomadic and semi-nomadic areas of the Turkestan ASSR” limited land grants and assistance to “detached” (obosoblennyi) groups of households forming a compact, ethnically homogenous land society (zemel'noe obshchestvo).

The decree had simultaneously sought to settle the nomads and group the newly formed land societies on the basis of ethnicity. Between 1923 and 1924, 273 land societies with the population of 50,248 households were registered in the 14 volosts of Kyrgyz Semirechye. By 1923, all settlements in seven (of the total eight) volosts of the Karakol uezd had been grouped into land societies according to the ethnicity of the villagers. 70 land societies were indigenous and 25 were European. In 1924, of the 233 land societies 180 were Kyrgyz. The forced evictions of the settlers and their subsequent resettlement in the starozhil villages facilitated the formation of larger mono-ethnic settlements and separation of the native and European population. By the end of 1924, 23,000 households, or more than two thirds of the 34,000 households covered by the land management campaign, were Kyrgyz.

In their decision to allocate land to native communities transitioning to settled agriculture the authorities built on an implicit assumption that the nomads had little choice but to settle down. There was a good reason to believe so as few refugees had enough animals to continue stockbreeding. The conditions under which the reforms were implemented were, however, far from conducive to farming. The absence of draft animals and a dire shortage of farming tools and seed material made the prospect of settling

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78 Novikov, 44.
79 “V Sovet narodnykh komissarov,” GA RF f. 1318, op. 1, d. 152, l. 17 in Loring, 44.
80 Kerimbaev and Sherstobitov, 115.
81 Il'asov and V. P. Sherstobitov, eds., Istoriia sovetskogo krest'ianstva Kirgizstana (Frunze: Ilim, 1972), 91.
82 Sherstobitov, 314.
83 Kerimbaev and Sherstobitov, 115-16.
84 Ibid, 116.
unrealistic for the majority of Kyrgyz. By 1 July 1921, 12,900 Kyrgyz households were formally settled, but over half of them continued to practice seasonal migrations.85

The land reforms had furthermore eroded the government’s attempts to push through the sowing campaign. Deterred by the prospect of losing land, the Russian settlers of Semirechye had refused to grow or harvest grain. The Kyrgyz, on the other hand, had no seeds or tools to grow it. In 1924 the Agricultural Commissariat reported a steep drop in grain production in Semirechye, where the sown grain crop had declined from 740,000 dessiatines in 1913 to 284,000 in 1924.86 By 1925, the mean crop failure reached 18% and up to 35-40% in some areas, creating a shortage of 331,180 poods of grain.87 In a bitter remark, Ioffe, who had earlier recognized the positive effects of the reforms, had now described their outcome as “land mismanagement (rasstroistvo).”88

“Land mismanagement” was not the only outcome of the reforms. The discontent of the settler population with the expulsions and land seizures threatened to spill over into riot. Writing to Lenin in February 1922, Ioffe noted that “according to the chekist (from Cheka, “Extraordinary Commission,” the first Soviet state security organization founded in December 1917) reports we can expect peasant uprisings in Semirechye this spring.”89

In August 1922, the OGPU reported the emergence of settler gangs, concluding that their slogans of “away with the confiscations and land reforms” and “beat up the communists!” could be successful given “the agitated state” of the settler society.90 The resolution of the Semirechye oblast Ispolkom in March 1922 admitted that the reforms “pitted the settler peasantry against the Soviet government.”91

The stream of alarming reports caused uneasiness in the party ranks. In a sharp criticism of the reforms, Ian Rudtzutak (Janis Rudzutaks), the former chairman of the party’s Turkestan Bureau (Turkbiuro), had called the reforms “a veritable crusade against the Russian population.”92 Wary of potential disturbances and concerned with the steep decrease in grain production, the party leadership attempted to defuse the tension by issuing a statement directed at the local authorities in charge of the reforms as well as the settler society. Adopted in August 1921, the directive maintained the importance of the

85 “Protokol No. 5 zasedaniia pervoi sessii Federal’nogo Komiteta po zemel’nym delam pri NKZeme, 24.09.1921,” GARF f. 1318, op. 1, d. 114, l. 51 in Loring, 52.
86 Martin, 63.
87 “Protokoly zasedanii uchreditel’nogo s”ezda Sovetov KAO. Stenograficheskii otchet 1 uchreditel’nogo s”ezda Sovetov KAO, mart 1925 g.,” TsGA KR f. 20, op. 1, d. 14, l. 124, l. 23
88 Genis, 57.
89 Ibid., 53.
91 Prikaz №12 Semirechenskogo Oblastnogo Ispolnitel’nogo Komiteta Sovetov, 25 marta 1922 g., TsGA KR f.89, op.1, d.240, l. 65.
92 Genis, 46.
struggle against colonialism, but emphasized at the same time that this struggle should not be waged at the expense of the “(European) base of the republic from which the bulk of the Red Army divisions are drawn.” “The land reforms,” continued the directive, “should be implemented and all the traces of predatory (land) seizures should be liquidated too, but not by replacing the farmers with nomads. Although the war should be waged against anti-Soviet elements, overly primitive and careless measures should not drive away the population of entire oblasts.”

In the course of three years, between 1922 and 1925, the Bolshevik leadership moved from ideological pronouncement to concrete actions. By the summer of 1922 the land and water reforms in Semirechye were officially over. The decree signed by the Sredazbiuro on 18 July 1922 ended the resettlements and expulsions. A month later, to put to rest the rumours of further evictions the authorities circulated an address to the peoples of Semirechye. The message of the address was unequivocal; the rumours of continuing expulsions were the work of “the White Guards” and “from now there would no longer be expulsions and confiscations.” At the same time, the government also announced the extension of land grants to the returning Red Army soldiers, settlers born in Semirechye, peasants, and refugees from Russia who arrived in the oblast before December 1924.

Despite these measures the continuing stream of settlers from the famine-stricken Volga region put pressure on the authorities to accommodate the new arrivals. By 1925, the number of settlers in need of land grew to 5,500 households of 23,000 men, women, and children. To alleviate the chronic need in land, the VTsIK issued in March 1925 an additional 70,000 rubles for the settlers “who were affected by the incorrect partitioning (razdelenie) and expulsions.”

More importantly, the growing need for grain had prompted the party leadership to implement concrete measures designed to revive the settler economy. One such measure was the establishment in December 1924 of the Plenipotentiary Land Management Commission (Osobaia Komissiia VTsIK po zemleustroistvu KAO i iuzhnykh gubernii KSSR, or simply Osobkomzem). The Commission supervised and facilitated the

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93 Ibid., 52.
94 GAAO f. 137, op. 1, d. 129, l. 257 in Miimanbaeva, “Zemel’nyi vopros vo vzaimootnosheniakh pereselencheskogo i kиргизскогo naseleniia Semirech‘ia posle Oktiabr’skoi revoliutsii.”
95 “Prikaz No.12 Semirechenskogo Oblastnogo Ispolnitel’nogo Komiteta Sovetov, 25 marta 1922 g.,” TsGA KR f. 89, op. 1, d. 240, l. 65 ob.; “Tsirkuliar – Osobaia Komissiia VTsIK po zemleustroistvu Turkestanskoi oblasti Kirgizskoi S.S.R. i Kara-Kirgizskoi avtonomnoi oblasti, 14 iiulia 1925 g.,” TsGA KR f. 20, op. 1, d. 156, l. 222.
96 “Stenograficheskii otchet 1 uchreditel’nogo s”ezda Sovetov KAO, 27 marta 1925 g.,” TsGA KR f. 20, op. 1, d. 15, l. 37.
97 “Stenograficheskii otchet 1 uchreditel’nogo s”ezda Sovetov KAO, 27 marta 1925 g.,” TsGA KR f. 20, op. 1, d. 15, l. 26.
distribution of land to the settlers. The first actions of the Commission signalled a reversal of the land and water reforms of 1921-1922. The Commission ordered the Pishpek uezd authorities to allocate land for the settlers from “the landholdings of the adjacent Kirghiz (land) societies.” Similarly, in July 1925 the Presidium of the VTsIK ordered the Kirghiz Oblast Ispolkom “to return to the expelled citizens of Iur’evka in a month’s time the buildings, farms, and land that they previously owned.”

In an equally drastic measure, the Osobkomzem castigated the Pishpek Land Management Party for “the utter outrage” committed by the Party during the land and water reforms and arrested the Party’s chief supervisor for the “crimes” committed. The demonstrative arrest of the head of the Land Management Party suggests that the authorities attempted to send a message to the settler society that the expulsions of 1921-1922 were “excesses” committed by the oblast and uezd authorities. A marked shift in the official rhetoric about the settlers, whose role was elevated to that of “cultured forces” – “the working peasant” who could “bring culture” to the agriculture of the oblast and “invigorate the Kara-Kirghiz (Kyrgyz) peasant” – also points in this direction.

The revision of the land reforms between 1924 and 1925 restored the rights of the settlers to the land. Ultimately, the authorities prioritised the grain-growing Russian settlers over the native pastoralists. There were good reasons for this. First, as sedentary farming communities European settlements represented, in the eyes of the party leadership, a more productive group. Secondly, in the absence of the loyal native society – with the exception of a small group of native intelligentsia, native society had remained largely indifferent to or resentful of the Bolshevik government – the Russian colonists remained the base of Soviet power in the region. Alienating the Russian population of the region was not something the Soviet leadership could afford. As the next chapter will show, the continued association of the regime with the settler population was a source of conflict for a decade to come.

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98 Osobaia Komissiia VTsIK po zemleustroistvu KAO i iuzhnykh gub. Pishpekskaia zemleustroitel’naia partiia, 8 noiabria 1925 g., TsGA KR f.20, op.1, d.156, l. 296 ob.
99 Vypiska iz protokola №11 zasedaniia Prezidiuma VTsIK ot 27 iiulia 1925 goda ob obratnom vselenii grazhdan sela Iur’evka Pishpekskogo raiona, TsGA KR f.20, op.1, d.156, l.261.
100 Stenograficheskii otchet 1 uchreditel’nogo s”ezda Sovetov KAO, 27 marta 1925 g., TsGA KR f.20, op.1, d.156, l.261.
101 Stenograficheskii otchet 1 uchreditel’nogo s”ezda Sovetov KAO, 27 marta 1925 g., TsGA KR f.20, op.1, d.15, l.37.
102 Pianciola, 132.
A Homeland for the Kyrgyz: The National Delimitation of Semirechye

It is impossible to discuss the rationale of the Soviet national-territorial delimitation in Central Asia without providing at least a cursory overview of the current state of scholarship on the subject. Contemporary English-language historiography of Soviet national delimitation emphasizes both the participation of the native elites in the nation-building process and the political imperatives of the Soviet leadership to conciliate the ethnic minorities of the former empire, to modernize their largely peasant economies, and to showcase their efforts across the border.\(^{103}\) Certainly, the active participation of indigenous leaders in national delimitation and nation-building suggests that the Bolsheviks were not averse to co-opting local interests and that although the Soviet nation-building project was “directed” by the Bolshevik leadership it was also “co-authored” by the indigenous elites.

The example of the Kara-Kirghiz Autonomous Oblast (hereafter Kirghiz AO) is particularly illustrative of this argument. Unlike the delimitation of “Uzbekiia, Kirghiziia (i.e. Kazakhstan), and Turkmenia” envisioned by Vladimir Lenin already in 1920, the formation of the Kirghiz autonomy was neither given nor inevitable.\(^{104}\) Carved out of the geographically divided Semirechye and the Ferghana valley, the Kirghiz AO made little sense as an economic or administrative unit. The claims of ethnic distinctiveness were equally shaky, as the shared lifestyle and linguistic proximity of the Kyrgyz and the Kazakhs led many European and native functionaries alike to argue that the former were in all likelihood an offshoot of the latter. Yet, the progression of the Kirghiz AO from an autonomous oblast to a fully-fledged union republic suggests that the Soviet leaders found the arguments, advanced by the indigenous elites, in favour of its creation sufficiently convincing. Examining these arguments will help us observe some of the overlooked aspects of national delimitation.

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To understand the complexities of Soviet national delimitation we need to look beyond the domestic challenges to the regime and consider the prevailing international environment of the time and the challenges that it presented to the Bolshevik government. In this respect, the Soviet boundary and nation-making can be read as an attempt by the Soviet government to reorient the population of the national peripheries away from competing models of political development. As a positive form of state intervention, Soviet nation-building, which has been famously described by Terry Martin as affirmative action imperialism, was employed to mobilize the native population for the purposes of state-building. Building on Martin’s suggestion that “the intersection between nationalities and foreign policy” was one of the factors at the basis of the Soviet state sponsorship of national consciousness in the national peripheries, I argue that the security of the union state was an additional concern of the Soviet government. Through the demarcation of both national borders and identities, the Soviet campaign of national delimitation increased the military security of the state.105

My argument rests on the assumption that nationalism is essentially boundary-making.106 Nations, as Benedict Anderson has famously argued, are imagined, but so are the borders. National identities draw borders where physical markers, such as rivers and mountains, are absent. By making ethnic boundaries explicitly political, the Soviet leadership consolidated the territorial boundaries of the union state while at the same time integrating and enclosing the national periphery. The sponsorship of ethnic identities tied to national territories established in the course of national delimitation helped the Soviet government to fix, stabilize, and consolidate the volatile borderland.

Similarly, the identification of territory with ethnicity had effectively naturalized the political boundaries of the state and extended the task of maintaining and protecting borders to the “titular nationalities” of the republics. The perceived “ownership” of the national state and its territory cultivated by national delimitation both enforced the boundaries of the state and mobilized the indigenous population for the two-tier task of


state and nation-building. I draw both on the explanatory notes of a group of native administrators who lobbied for the establishment of the AO and official decrees and resolutions to highlight the connection between nation-building in the region and border security and state maintenance.

A discussion of the grass-roots initiative for national autonomy warrants an examination of the emerging national identity underpinning this initiative. A cursory survey of academic literature on the formation of national identities in Central Asia reveals a lack of consensus on the origins and maturity of the ethnic identity uniting the indigenous pastoralists of Semirechye and the Ferghana Valley. The question essentially boils down to whether the people that we know today as Kyrgyz identified themselves as such before the Soviet-sponsored project of nation-building. Between the claims of the artificial “constructed” nature of the nation that did not exist prior to the revolution and the essentialist claims of a long history of the nation’s existence, I hold that although a form of ethnic solidarity was taking shape among the Kyrgyz of Semirechye on the eve of the Uprising of 1916 – the rebels clearly targeted their victims on the basis of ethnicity and religious affiliation – the idea of an ethnic Kyrgyz autonomy crystallized only in the course of the Soviet campaign of nation-building. In other words, the implementation of Soviet nationalities policies created conditions under which the concept of a separate Kyrgyz autonomy could emerge among the native elites.

The idea of a separate Kara-Kirghiz autonomy was first floated in an informal conversation between a group of like-minded native officials and the members of the Turkkomissiia (the Turkestan Commission), Georgii Safarov and Sultanbek Khodzhanov, during their visit to Semirechye in 1921. Seeking to intervene with the transfer, the group, headed by the then chairman of the Semirechye oblast Ispolkom Abdykerim Sydykov, referred the proposal to the Communist Party of Turkestan (KPT). In their proposal the group employed several lines of arguments. First, there was an economic argument. “The dispersed state of the Kirghiz population” argued the group “did not allow to satisfy in full measure the cultural and economic needs of the working masses of the Kirghiz.” In the second instance, the group

107 “ Sozyv s’ezda po obrazovaniyu Gornoi Kara-Kirgizskoi oblasti v Turkestanskoj respublike v 1922 g.” in Abdurakhmanov, 263.
108 Benjamin Loring, Kyrgyzskaia natsional’naia elita i ee rol’ v sozdanii Kyrgyzskoi avtonomii, p. 79-80
cited the “continuing and worsening antagonism between the different groups of Kazak (Kazakh) and Kirghiz (party) workers” as an additional argument for a separate autonomy. Lastly, the group turned to the issue of domestic security. A Kyrgyz autonomy, they argued, would facilitate the liquidation of the basmachi movement in the Ferghana Valley – home to a sizeable Kyrgyz minority.\textsuperscript{109}

The KPT heeded the request. On 25 March 1922 the members of the KPT officially declared “the formation of the Mountainous oblast,” representing “one of the more consistent applications of…national self-determination in the communist and Soviet meaning of (national) self-determination.”\textsuperscript{110} The new “Mountainous” autonomy included the Pishpek, Karakol (former Przhevalsk), and Naryn uezds, and the mountainous district of the Aulie-Ata uezd. The question of Ferghana Kyrgyz would remain open until “the complete pacification of the oblast.”\textsuperscript{111} The resolution of the KPT interfered, however, with the plans of the Commissariat of Nationalities, headed by Iosif Stalin, which had similarly resolved to transfer Semirechye to the purview of the Kirghiz (Kazakh) ASSR. The two plans came head to head in June 1922. Alerted by the telegram informing the Commissariat of the establishment of the Mountainous Kara-Kirghiz autonomy, Stalin contacted the Turkestani Bureau (Turkbiuro) demanding an explanation as to “who was the congress permitted by, who were the organizers, and what was the nature of the congress.”\textsuperscript{112} Stalin was apparently bewildered by the unauthorized nature of the congress and had effectively vetoed the establishment of the autonomy.

In retrospect, the first attempt at autonomy was successful even though it cost the native officials dearly – the KPT was thoroughly purged – and failed to achieve its objective. The group succeeded at preventing the transfer of Semirechye and Syr-Daria to the Kirghiz (Kazakh) ASSR; both oblasts remained in the Turkestan ASSR. Equally importantly, the vocal demands for a separate territory agreed with the overall objectives of the nationalities policies. As later developments would show, the authorities were not in principle opposed to the idea of a Kyrgyz autonomy. What the Soviet leaders, and Stalin personally, took issue with was what they perceived to be the conspiratorial and overly independent way in which the resolution for autonomy was made. Damaging as it was for their careers, the affair proved beneficial for the native administrators, too; they

\textsuperscript{110} Rafik Turgunbekov, Stanovlenie i razvitie suverennogo gosudarstva kirgizskogo naroda (Frunze: Ilim, 1969), 35.
\textsuperscript{111} TsGA KR f. 391, op. 3, d. 61, l. 6 in Aylymbekov, 85.
\textsuperscript{112} Kurmanov, 138.
honored their arguments and came to recognize the decisive voice of the centre in matters of autonomy.

A new opportunity for achieving autonomy presented itself two years later, in January 1924. As national delegates had come to the negotiating table from every corner of Central Asia negotiate the division of “nationally heterogeneous” (natsional’no-raznorochno) Turkestan ASSR into “nationally homogeneous” (natsional’no-odnorodnye) states, the Kyrgyz delegation decided to address the central authorities directly.\(^{113}\) A note was passed to the Central Committee (TsK) of the VKP(b). Wary of raising the ire of the Commissariat of Nationalities again, the authors of the note made no demands for autonomy. Instead, they appealed to the government’s declared commitment to national equality. In no unclear terms the note stated that “the Kara-Kirghiz people form a separate nation equal to other nationalities (Uzbek, Turkmen, Tajiks, and Kaisak-Kirghiz [Kazakhs])” and should be treated as such. Similarly, the note also linked national existence to the Communist cause. “No (party) worker who thinks in the Communist way” could deny, according to the authors, the “reality of the Kara-Kirghiz” nation.\(^{114}\)

The note clearly paid deference to the communist ethos and demonstrated the ability of its authors to harness “Soviet speak,” but, ultimately, it was the realignment of local interests with those of the central state that decided the fate of autonomy. By arguing vehemently that the Kara-Kirghiz constituted a “real,” readily identifiable nation occupying a well-defined territory the group linked the issue of national autonomy with the Soviet project of state-building in the peripheries. On 28 April 1924 the Central Asian Bureau (Sredazbiuro) of the VKP(b) resolved to delimitate the region into five separate national territories, one of which was the Kara-Kirghiz AO.\(^{115}\)

The formation of the Kara-Kirghiz AO in 1924 and the later trajectory of its political development demands a closer look at the role of the security concerns of the Soviet authorities in nation-building. Well-guarded and well-defined borders form the foundation of any modern state. The Soviet Union was no exception. Despite the pronouncedly cosmopolitan rhetoric of class solidarity, the Soviet Union also sought to

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\(^{113}\) “Postanovlenie TsIK Turkestanskoi ASSR, data neizvestna,” TsGA KR f. 20, op. 1, d. 11, l. 248

\(^{114}\) The list of the demands made by the delegation reads as follows: “1) to recognize the Kara-Kirghiz people as a separate nation equal to other nationalities (Uzbek, Turkmen, Tajiks, and Kaisak-Kirghiz [Kazakhs]; 2) to engage the representatives of the working Kara-Kirghiz more widely in the organs of party and state power; 3) to allocate state funds for cultural and educational work among the Kara-Kirghiz toilers in their native language, primarily for the publication of textbooks and manuals.” TsGA PD KR, f. 391, op. 3, d. 68, l. 7. in Z. Kurmanov, V. Ploskikh, and D. Dzhuntsaliev, eds., Kyrgyz i Kyrgyzstan: opyt novogo i istoricheskogo osmysleniia (Bishkek: 1994), 153-81.

\(^{115}\) True to the unsuccessful 1922 proposal for a separate Kara-Kirghiz autonomy, the establishment of a Kara-Kirghiz autonomy pre-empted the demands of the basmachi groups for national autonomy and helped deprive them of local support. According to secret police reports from April 1925, “the separation of the population from the basmachi – facilitated by the national delimitation – is most obvious among the Kyrgyz. (“Iz obzora Politicheskogo upravleniia Turkestanskogo fronta sostoiannia bor’by s basmachestvom, 15 aprelia 1925 g.;” in Zyryanov, 619, 24.
enforce and protect its borders. The need for well-protected borders emerges clearly, for example, in the celebratory remark of Iosif (Juozas) Vareikis, a one-time secretary of the KPT Central Committee put in charge of national delimitation, about the “new state borders of independent Soviet republics” that will spring “tomorrow across the valleys and mountains of Central (Sredniaia) Asia!” Similar preoccupation with borders is apparent in a suggestion of one of the members of the commission for national delimitation that “one or two years will be needed to set stability on the external borders of the Republics” and that no changes should be made to them in the meantime.

The establishment of national autonomy emboldened the native administrators. Soon after the national delimitation the leadership of the new autonomy mobilized again to push for republican autonomy. In November 1925, the oblast Ispolkom convened to discuss the possibility of a Kara-Kirghiz autonomous republic. After “taking into consideration the economic and political significance of the KAO in the RSFSR” as well as the “national-territorial density (kompaktnost’)” of its population, the Ispolkom resolved to establish a Kirghiz autonomous socialist republic. The resolution demonstrated the knack of the oblast leadership for framing local ambitions in terms that resonated with the central authorities. The emphasis on population density and the solidity of the ethnic boundaries exploited Moscow’s concern for border security.

The IV Congress of the Soviets of Kirghizia upheld the proposal. The first secretary of the Obkom (oblast committee) of the Kirghiz AO, Nikolai Uziukov, expanded on and merged the demographic and geographic arguments for autonomy: “While our population currently numbers 800 to 900 thousand people, we have on the other side, two million of our kin (literally, “blood brothers”) in China and other countries exploited by the imperialists...We border on one side with China, and on the other – with other monarchic countries...and the significance of our oblast is in no way inferior to that of other republics of Central Asia.

Similarly, concern for border protection was implicit in the request filed by the oblast Ispolkom with the TsIK (Central Committee) of the RSFSR in December 1925. The petition stressed the geographic position of the oblast – on the border with China – the length of the border and the oblast’s proximity to “Afghanistan and Hindustan” to

118 Obrazovanie Kirgizskoi ASSR: Materialy i dokumenty. (Frunze: Oblispolkom KAO, 1927), 45.
advocate for the transition. Raising the status of the oblast to that of an autonomous republic, the petition continued, would “attract the attention” of “the neighbouring exploited nationalities of the East,” of whom 300,000 were ethnic Kyrgyz and over three million were their “kin,” and “give an impulse to the self-mobilization (samodeiatel’nost’) of the masses in the economic sphere and in Soviet construction.”

The petition also emphasized the size and the significance of the oblast’s economy, which comprised 100,266 farming and 51,135 stockbreeding households.

Like the petition, Sydykov’s “A Brief Sketch of the History of the Kirghiz People” published in February 1926 sought to convince the central government of the urgency of greater autonomy for the Kyrgyz. In addition to providing a survey of the ancient history of the Kyrgyz and listing the key differences distinguishing the Kyrgyz and Kazakhs – including “anthropological measurements” – Sydykov pointed to the large ethnic Kyrgyz population of the Xinjiang province of China and Afghanistan. He estimated that the Kyrgyz of Xinjiang make up 22 volosts of 345,000 persons. Combined with the Kyrgyz of Afghanistan whose number he describes as “sufficiently large,” “the Kirghiz abroad” constituted, according to Sydykov, “a rather significant population” of two states, therefore “demanding great attention in the political sense.”

The petition and Sydykov’s article were well received in Moscow and two months later, in February 1926, the TsIK approved the proposal to form an autonomous Kirghiz (Kara was dropped as a part of the colonial heritage) Socialist Republic (ASSR). Citing the oblast’s “large territory, significant distance (otdalennost’) from the centre and its frontier position – Kirghizia was one of the oblasts extruding far into the east” – the XIII all-Russian Congress of Soviets (S’ezd sovetov) upheld the TsIK’s resolution to grant the KAO the status of an autonomous republic in April 1927.

In arguing for an elevated status for the Kirghiz AO, a member of the Kyrgyz delegation to the Congress, described the oblast as “the revolutionary advance outpost of the Soviet Union in the depths of Central Asian East.” The welcoming telegram sent by Stalin to the party committee of the new republic affirmed the centre’s recognition of the republic’s special place in the Soviet family: “The Kara-Kirghiz oblast that rests, with one of its halves, against the Chinese Turkestan, and looks through the Hindu Kush onto the Great Hindustan with the

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120 “Khodataistvo ispolkoma KAO vo VTsIK o preobrazovanii KAO v KIngizskuiu ASSR, 6 dekabria 1925 g.,” TsGA KR f. 20, op. 1, d. 151, l. 265.

121 Ibid, 264.


123 XIII Vserossiiskii s’ezd Sovetov. 10-15 aprelia 1927 g.: stenograficheskii otchet, (Moscow: VTsIK, 1927), 470.

124 Ibid., 474.
other half, occupies a special place in the task of spreading the Soviets’ ideas in the East.”

While the transformation of the autonomous oblast into an autonomous republic proved a smooth undertaking, the status of a fully-fledged union republic that Sydykov’s group hoped for remained aspirational until the second half of the 1930s. Because union republics enjoyed better financial assistance and broader powers, becoming one was difficult. But this did not stop Sydykov and the group of native functionaries that coalesced around him from lobbying for the establishment of Kyrgyz autonomy from attempting to further the cause of a fully-fledged socialist republic for the Kyrgyz. Of particular interest for my analysis are two letters written by Sydykov’s closest ally, Iusup Abdrakhmanov, the chairman of the Sovnarkom (Soviet of People’s Commissars) of the Kirghiz ASSR, to Stalin. Addressed personally to Stalin, the letters betray the sense of urgency of the native leadership and reflect the well-honed arguments about the autonomous republic’s strategic significance to the Soviet Union.

The first letter, dated November 1929, establishes the Kirghiz ASSR’s “special position” that “follows both from its economy and its geographical location.” Abdrakhmanov’s primary concern is the “triple subjugation” of the republic’s economy and administration to the executive bodies of the RSFSR, the regional administrative system, and to the union-wide institutions. He sees the solution to the issue in the transformation of the ASSR into a Soviet republic. Shy of using the republic’s frontier position as his main argument Abdrakhmanov, nonetheless, hints that the failure to solve the issue and the resulting lack of economic development “not only impacts negatively on the masses of peasants in the republic but also weakens our influence on those Kirghiz who live on the other side of the border, in China.”

As a final argument for the new status he refers to the Kirghiz ASSR’s “national makeup (70% Kirghiz), its foreign policy significance, and economic potential.”

Whether Stalin responded to the letter remains unknown, but a similarly styled letter written by Abdrakhmanov half a year later, in April 1930, suggests that he did not. Although the second letter is considerably shorter than the first one, Abdrakhmanov once again raises the issues of administration and economic development. This time, however, the letter pays closer attention to the “foreign policy significance of the transformation of

125 V sodracheste k protsvetaniu (191701937 gg.): Sbornik dokumentov, (Frunze: TsGA Kirgizskoi SSR, 1973), 76-77.
126 Abdrakhmanov, 183.
127 Ibid., 185.
128 Ibid, 186.
Kirghizia into a Union Republic.” Rather explicitly, Abdrakhmanov draws a parallel between the inadequate administration of the Kirghiz ASSR, which “shares a border with Western China of more than 800 kilometres,” and the military security of the Soviet Union. The neighbouring “Kashgar-Uch-Turfan province of China, populated primarily by Uyghurs and Kirghiz,” he warns, “was penetrated by English imperialism” and “can become a base for English imperialism to make an assault on Soviet Central Asia.” The transformation of the Kirghiz ASSR into a Union Republic would serve “as the best agitation possible…against the predatory designs of English imperialism” and “strengthen the sympathies” of the native population of Chinese Turkestan towards the Soviet Union. Abdrakhmanov’s efforts, however, were not for naught. Although his pleas remained unanswered, his work, like that of his colleagues, laid the foundation of the union republic and for a “homeland” for the nomads of Semirechye and the Ferghana Valley. Ultimately, the competency of his efforts ensured that in 1936 the Kirghiz ASSR became one of the 15 constitutive republics of the Soviet Union. Abdrakhmanov’s own role in the cultivation of the sense of national belonging was critical, but it led eventually to his demise. Along with other members of the group that first voiced the idea of a Kyrgyz autonomy, Abdrakhmanov was arrested and executed during the party purges of 1936-38 and indicted for bourgeois nationalism. In a great irony, his death and the deaths of his colleagues coincided with the creation of the Kirghiz Soviet Socialist Republic.  

**Conclusion**

This chapter examined the first efforts of the Soviet leadership to recruit the native nomads of Semirechye for the Bolshevik cause by redistributing agricultural land seized from the Cossack settlers during the land and water reforms of 1921-1922. While the reforms had helped to rally support of the native communities for the regime they had

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130 Altogether, about 100 senior officials, including Sydykov and Abdrakhmanov, were executed on charges of conspiring against the Soviet state and forming “the counter-revolutionary socialist-Turan party.” Little is known about the party and there are good reasons to believe that the party did not in fact exist. This is the conclusion reached by Pavel Diatlenko. P. I. Diatlenko, "Uroki proshlogo ne zabyty: put' ot "Sotsial-Turanskoi partii" k partii “Turan”," Vestnik KRSU, no. 7 (2008). Svetlana Ploskikh, on the other hand, believes that “an embryo” of the party existed and that it united indigenous party workers discontented with Soviet policies in the republic.S. V. Ploskikh, Repressirovannaya kultura Kyrgyzstana: maloizuchennye stranitsy istorii (Bishkek: Ilim, 2002), 189-205.

also put the Soviet administration in Semirechye in a precarious position as the majority of Red Army soldiers in the region hailed from the settler society. Coupled with the drastic drop in agricultural production – the newly settled nomads had neither animals nor instruments or seed material to grow crops – the growing fears of settler rebellions led to the reversal of the reforms in 1924-1925.

The second half of the chapter focused on the lobbying of the native elites for the establishment of an ethnic Kyrgyz autonomy. As this chapter demonstrates, the Kyrgyz officials, most notably Iusup Abdrakhmanov and Abdykerim Sydykov, honed their rhetoric in support of the Kyrgyz autonomy by appealing to the security concerns of the central government. Citing the frontier position of Semirechye and the presence of a numerically significant Kyrgyz population in China whose sympathies could be swayed by hostile powers to hurt the Soviet interests in the region, Abdrakhmanov and Sydykov sought to influence the decision-making in the centre. In the final analysis, despite the initial setbacks and the personal price they had to pay for their presumed transgressions, including nationalism, the native elites were successful at promoting ethnic autonomy.
Chapter V

Defending the Revolution: The “Great Turn” in Soviet Kirghizia

National delimitation was the watershed event in the modern history of Central Asia; it had fundamentally reshaped the political geography of the region and ushered it into a distinct modern period characterized by the increased integration of local societies into a framework of a modern – and modernizing – political system based simultaneously on mass support and institutionalized coercion. National delimitation was critical to this process. The 12 June 1924 decree establishing the five Soviet republics and autonomies completed the de-jure incorporation of Central Asia into the Soviet state. With its uncompromising stance on the centralization of authority, the decree also bound the newly established republics politically and administratively to the union-wide administrative institutions while at the same time promoting the ethnic particularism of national cultures. This chapter takes over where the previous chapter left off and focuses on the continuing efforts of the Soviet leadership at the administrative, political, and ideological “merging” (sliianie) of Central Asia with Soviet Russia.

Covering the period of the “Great Turn” (velikii perelom) from the second half of the 1920s until the latter half of the 1930s, this chapter examines the defining moments of the second decade of “socialist construction” in the Kirghiz ASSR. In focus in this chapter are the campaigns of administrative division known as regionalization (raionirovanie) and collectivization. By placing collectivization, raionirovanie, and the pre-war historiography of the uprising of 1916 against the background of a looming war and domestic crisis, this chapter argues that security concerns were central to the broad modernization drive, which encompassed the creation of socialized agriculture, territorial restructuring, and ideological centralization.

More broadly, this chapter is an attempt to examine the continued and intensified consolidation of the Soviet state in the Central Asian borderlands. In approaching regionalization and collectivization as a means of expanding state control into the countryside and extracting resources, I argue that both should be understood as an exercise in territorial and population management. First, by dividing the territory into ethnically homogenous territorial and administrative units with the express purpose of facilitating “peaceful cohabitation” (mirnoe sozhitel’stvo) of the settler and native population, raionirovanie had legitimized and institutionalized the settlers’ control of
contested resources. The formation of the Frunze (former Pishpek) European canton had effectively created an autonomy within an autonomy and enhanced the central state’s political control of the republic by giving the Bolshevik leadership capacity to intervene in the domestic affairs of the republic on behalf of the European population. At the same time, raionirovanie had preserved the hierarchic and asymmetric pattern of resource distribution and consumption established under the colonial administration. As the “titular nationality” of the canton and volosts occupying some of the most fertile land in the region, the settler population enjoyed access to better agricultural land and state services.

Second, in proposing that collectivization grew out of the political, economic, and ideological crisis in the second half of the 1920s, I argue that in the context of the national periphery the collectivization drive sought to extract resources from and extend control into the native countryside yet untouched by “revolutionary development.” The implications of this drive were twofold. On the one hand, the mobility of the pastoralist population of the republic, which took flight in response to the repressive policies of the central state, prompted the Soviet leadership to forcibly settle the Kyrgyz in collective farms. Sedentarization was therefore employed both to fix and stabilize the native population at the local and state level and to make the nomadic society more governable. On the other hand, collectivization aimed to extract resources from the pastoralist economy by seizing nomadic livestock and converting pastures into fields and nomads into peasants.

Collectivization had broad repercussions for the native pastoralists. The failure of the land and water reforms of 1921-1922 to provide sufficient land, seed material, and equipment to the returning nomads meant that the majority of Kyrgyz continued to practice pastoralism. At the same time, the double burden of livestock requisitions and grain procurement quotas levied on the Kyrgyz forced the nomads to sell their livestock for grain. The resulting shortage of meat and grain mostly affected the native population of the republic; between 1932 and 1933, approximately 25,800 Kyrgyz succumbed to famine.

132 “Protokol Soveshchaniia pri Oblastnoi Komissii po raionirovaniiu KAO predstaviteliami volostnykh Ispolnitel’nynkh Komitetov evropeiskikh volostei Talasskogo raiona, 5 dekabria 1926 g.,” TsGA KR f. 20, op. 1, d. 116, l. 122.
A significant part of the collectivization campaign was the dispossession of the so-called bai-manap households (a rather loose grouping of wealthy livestock owners, bais, and native elites, manaps). The expulsion and deportation of several hundred bai-manap families from the republic was in many ways similar to the earlier expulsions of the Semirechye Cossacks during the land and water reforms of 1921-1922. Similarly to the Cossacks, bai-manaps were seen by the authorities as disloyal and suspect. The bai-manaps’ reported support for the basmachi movement and their cross-border ties with the Kyrgyz of China played into the security anxieties of the Soviet leadership.135 Compounding the distrust of the government was the bai-manaps’ alleged influence over the indigenous communities, which hampered the sovietisation of the native countryside.136 In the context of Moscow’s perceptions of international hostility bai-manaps came increasingly to be viewed as a potential threat that had to be eliminated.

The Soviet Fortress: The War Scare and Domestic Crisis

The decision to launch “the violent assault on the countryside,” to quote Lynne Viola, emerged in the context of a crisis in diplomatic relations that began in 1925 and intensified towards the end of the decade. The initial impetus to growing apprehension among the Soviet leadership about challenges to the Soviet Union was sparked by the Locarno Treaties signed, without Soviet Russia’s participation, between Germany, the United Kingdom, France, Belgium, and Italy in October 1925.137 Although Locarno did not directly infringe on Soviet interests in its immediate European neighbourhood, the Bolshevik leadership came to view Locarno as “a direct threat.”138 This threat perception


136 Bai-manaps were routinely accused of “anti-Soviet agitation” and activities. See, for example, Obzor politicheskogo sostoianiia SSSR za sentiabr’ 1928 g. (po dannym Ob”edinennogo gosudarstvennogo politicheskogo upravleniia), TsA FSB RF f. 2, op. 6, d. 283, l. 460-480 ob., accessed 2 January, 2015. http://istmat.info/node/25773. In his article on “Rural Dynamics and Peasant Resistance,” Benjamin Loring suggests that the bai-manaps (or biis in the context of southern Kyrgyzstan) were seen as the main reason for the failure of the government to penetrate the native countryside. Benjamin H Loring, "Rural Dynamics and Peasant Resistance in Southern Kyrgyzstan, 1929-1930," Cahiers du monde russe 49, no. 1 (2008): 195-96.

137 On the role of Locarno Treaties in the Soviet reorientation towards the countries of the East and the formation of a “united anti-imperialist front” with Kemalist Turkey, see Jon Jacobson, When the Soviet Union Entered World Politics (Berkeley: Univ of California Press, 1994), 177-205.

138 As formulated in the programmatic statement on Locarno by the then Soviet ambassador to France, Christian (Khristian) Rakovsky, The Meaning of Locarno for the U.S.S.R. (Statement by Rakovsky) in Xenia Joukoff Eudin and
was not entirely unfounded: to start with, none of the signatory parties was sympathetic towards Bolshevik Russia; furthermore, the treaties realigned the balance of power in Europe, tilting it against the Soviet Union; and finally, the possibility of similar pacts being concluded with the breakaway Eastern European nations along the Soviet borders had the potential of making “the hostile capitalist encirclement” of the USSR a self-fulfilling prophecy.\textsuperscript{139}

Equally importantly, Locarno had driven home to the Bolshevik leadership the painful weakness of the Soviet Union’s industrial capacity and the stark deficiencies of the Red Army. Speaking at the TsK (Central Committee) plenum in January 1925, Stalin reminded the audience that “if war begins, then we must not sit with folded arms, we must act, but act last” and “this is demanded” of the USSR by “the international situation.” “To throw the decisive weight on the scales” and prepare the country “for everything,” Stalin concluded, the Soviet Union should first and foremost “lift the Red Army to the requisite heights” by “shoeing and clothing it, training it, improving its technology, improving its chemical weapons, aviation.”\textsuperscript{140}

Catching up with the capitalist West would not be easy. The pitiful state of the Soviet military and navy was made glaringly obvious by a report presented by the then People’s Commissar for Military and Naval Affairs (NKVM) Mikhail Frunze to the Politbiuro in late March 1925. Some of the more serious issues included the poor material provision of the Red Army, its obsolete armaments, lack of training, and the defeatist “peasant” mood among its soldiers.\textsuperscript{141} Frunze’s predictions were reiterated a year later by the Chief of Staff of the Red Army, Mikhail Tukhachevsky; if war began, Tukhachevsky emphasized, the Soviet military industry would be able to produce only 29% of the required rifle rounds and 8.2% of the shells.\textsuperscript{142}

“The international situation” continued to slowly deteriorate over the next year. The British decision to break off diplomatic relations with Soviet Russia in the wake of the Soviet involvement in the General Strike of May 1926 and the growing concerns of

\textsuperscript{139} Jacobson, 177-178. Fears of “capitalist encirclement” were, as Robert Tucker and James Harris, among others, show, a constant fixture of the Bolshevik Weltanschauung. See Robert C Tucker, “The emergence of Stalin’s foreign policy,” \textit{Slavic Review} 36, no. 4 (1977); James Harris, “Encircled by enemies: Stalin’s Perceptions of the capitalist world, 1918-1941,” \textit{The Journal of Strategic Studies} 30, no. 3 (2007).

\textsuperscript{140} Kotkin, \textit{Stalin: Volume 1: Paradoxes of Power, 1878-1928}, 557.

\textsuperscript{141} Frunze’s proposal involved the “planned transition by the country and its armed forces from a state of peace to war.” Nikolai S Simonov, “‘Strengthen the defence of the land of Soviets’: The 1927 ‘war alarm’ and its consequences,” \textit{Europe-Asia Studies} 48, no. 8 (1996): 1356, 59.

\textsuperscript{142} Simonov, 1357.
London with the Soviet Union’s potential invasion of India, fuelled by the skirmishes on the Soviet-Afghan border, drew conflict closer to Soviet Central Asia.  

It was in 1927, however, that the security anxieties of the Soviet leadership reached their fever pitch. A series of diplomatic blunders, including most notoriously a British raid on the office of the All-Russian Co-operative Society (ARCOS) in London, the attack of the Kuomintang government on its Communist allies in China, and the murder of a Soviet plenipotentiary Piotr Voikov in Warsaw, combined to produce a domestic crisis in the Soviet Union, convincing the party leadership and the country as a whole that “war was inevitable.” Rumours of war led to a panic in the countryside, where peasants, fearing starvation, refused to sell grain and livestock to the cities. The resulting grain procurement crisis meant that the central government secured only one-third of its annual domestic requirements.

Although far removed from the centre, Soviet Central Asia was as rife with rumours as central Russia. How pervasive the war scare was in the country’s Asian borderlands is demonstrated in an OGPU report dated August 1927, which suggests that “lively discussions about the possibility of war” were being recoded “in all segments of the Kirghiz (Kazakh) population (vsemi sloiami kirgizskogo naseleniia).” A July 1927 report had similarly reported that manaps of Kalininskaia and Tolkanovskaia volosts of the Kirghiz ASSR held a meeting where those in attendance discussed the upcoming “war between England and USSR,” concluding that the silence of Soviet power in response to “the bullying (izdevatel’stva) by other powers” was indicative of its “weakness” and “fear.” Anti-Soviet agitation was reported across the region. As the June 1929 OGPU report shows, rumours of war persisted well beyond the immediate crisis, inciting “cases of terror” and mass protests, of which there were 14 (12 “terror cases” and 2 mass protests) that month in the Kirghiz ASSR alone. According to the same report, bais and manaps urged their kinsmen to prepare for the war of “Japan, China, and England” against the USSR “in advance” and “not to give Soviet power men and horses.”


While recording the discontent of the native population, these reports also point to the growing distrust of the national borderlands. In Central Asia, this distrust was driven by the revival of basmachism and cross-border flight of native communities in response to the expulsions of rural elites (e.g. the bai-manap campaign) and the general tightening of Soviet control over the native countryside. The re-emergent basmachi groups in the south of the Kirghiz ASSR enjoyed a degree of popular support in native society and coordinated their actions with other groups in the republic and beyond. A local basmachi leader, Istambek Chanybekov, for example, was found to have a letter from Kurshirmat, one of the most powerful basmachi leaders, calling onto all former basmachi to “fight for “Islam.”” Chanybekov also sought arms and supplies from other basmachi groups in the north of the republic (Talas canton). By November 1929, the OGPU counted over a hundred active participants in coordinated armed resistance in Kyzyl-Jar, Ketmen-Tiube, and Bazar-Kurgan districts. Adding to the growing apprehension of the central government was the mobility of various basmachi groups. A long border with China provided a convenient escape route for those dissatisfied with the regime and a springboard for basmachi attacks. Attacks from across the border were frequently launched by Janybek Kazy, a bii of Basyz tribal lineage and the former head of the Ak-Dzharskaia volost of the Osh uezd under the tsarist administration. Throughout winter 1929, Janybek Kazy, together with his fellow basmachi leader Iarmat Maksum, launched attacks on Soviet personnel and administration in Kyzyl-Kiia and Uzgen districts along the border with Chinese Turkestan.

The growth of anti-Soviet resistance in the national borderlands alarmed the Bolshevik leadership, sparking fears of the Soviet Union’s disintegration. In an effort to rein in the “national deviations” in the union republics, Moscow had adopted a tougher stance on real and suspected dissent from the policies of the centre. Although korenizatsiia continued and even expanded, expressions of national sentiments that “assumed the character of a struggle against Moscow in general, against Russians in general, against Russian culture and its highest achievement – Leninism,” thereby

150 Ibid.
“weakening the unity of the working people of the different nations of the USSR and playing into the hands of the interventionists,” were unconditionally condemned.154

Moscow’s growing suspicion of the national republics had similarly led to an increased identification of the centre with the “Russian core” of the Soviet state.155 As the possibility of war loomed larger, the “Russian proletariat” was accorded a vanguard role in the union state, a “recognized leader that is carrying out the most revolutionary active policy.”156 As the largest ethnic group occupying the industrial and agricultural heartland of the country, the Russian population of the Soviet Union fulfilled the role of “ethnic glue” holding the Soviet state together both in symbolic and physical terms. Thus, between 1926 and 1939 the number of ethnic Russians outside of the RSFSR increased from 5.1 to 9.3 million, while their proportion in the total Soviet population outside the RSFSR grew from 8.6% to 14.9%. Soviet Central Asia was the largest gross recipient of migrants from European Russia, receiving in total 1.7 million people.157

In the Kirghiz ASSR, the influx of migrants from European Russia resulted in the decrease of the relative share of the “titular nationality” in the total population of the republic. In 1926, Kyrgyz population stood at 66.6%.158 By 1939, the share of ethnic Kyrgyz fell to a little more than half, or 51.7%, of the total population. At the same time, the European (Russian and Ukrainian) population of the republic increased from 17.3% of the total population in 1920 to 18.1% in 1926 to 30.2% in 1939.159 The rapid growth of the European population, concentrated mainly in the north of the republic, solidified Soviet power in the volatile borderlands, but also posed a challenge to the authorities to solve the lingering discontent of the Russian population of the republic with the land and water reforms of 1921-1922.

Regulating the Inter-Ethnic Conflict: the Administrative Regionalization

155 Terry Martin argues that by 1938 “a purposeful, comprehensive, and carefully targeted institutional Russification of the RSFSR had been set into motion,” leading to “the division of the Soviet Union into a central Russian core and a non-Russian “national” periphery...The creation of...Russian space took place in the 1930s and was the result of a conscious strategy of national consolidation and institutional Russification.” Martin, 412.
157 Ibid., 168-69.
159 TsGA KR f. 105, op. 12, d. 573, l. 3 in Ibid.
Ethnicity, as the previous chapter has established, was the main organizing principle of the Soviet Union. Ethnicity was reified at the international boundaries of the Soviet Union, at the boundaries separating the Soviet republics and autonomies, and even at the level of republics where ethnic minorities formed self-governing territorial units – national soviets – administered separately from the titular nationalities. It is the drawing of intra-republican boundaries that I would like to examine here.¹⁶⁰

My argument addresses the domestic aspect of the national delimitation – the extension of territorial autonomy to the ethnic minorities within the Soviet republics in 1925-1926. I argue that the reorganization (raionirowanie) of the administrative divisions of the republics and the merging and consolidation of the republics’ diverse ethnic groups into the territorially bound and ethnically homogenous national soviets continued the ethno-territorial trajectory of Soviet state-building in the peripheries. Similarly, ethnic conflict – though not expressly manipulated by the Soviet leadership – was crucial to this process. It legitimized government’s seizure of and control over land and population and justified state intervention in the domestic affairs of the republic. At the same time, the establishment of national soviets, whose representatives routinely bypassed the republican authorities and addressed the central government with their concerns, put a check on the centrifugal inclinations of the republican leadership. The national soviets had in effect acted as a counterbalance to the ethno-centric “deviations” of the indigenous elites and maintained the primacy of union interests.

Terry Martin argues that the initial drive for the regionalization had come mainly from the economic planners, but led eventually to the “conjunction of economic and national” principles.¹⁶¹ The raionirowanie materials compiled by the Oblast Committee for Regionalization of the KAO (Kirghiz Autonomous Oblast, later ASSR) suggest that the opposite was the case in Soviet Kirghizia. The second Meeting of the Special Commission for the Regionalization of the Central Asian Bureau (Sredazbiuro), convened to discuss the raionirowanie issues in the KAO in June 1926, had acknowledged that in light of “the extreme dearth of data, and the absence of knowledge (neizuchennoś’) about the nomadic and semi-nomadic districts,” the regionalization of Kirghizia “cannot

¹⁶⁰ Terry Martin distinguishes between two kinds of raionirowanie – macro and micro-raionirowanie. Macro-raionirowanie entailed the planning of large economic districts and was, as a rule, the prerogative of the union and regional authorities in Moscow and Tashkent. Micro-raionirowanie, on the other hand, was decided by the republican authorities. Martin, 33-35.
¹⁶¹ Avel Enukidze quoted in Martin, ibid., 34.
be recognized as economic.”162 What the actual objective of raionirovanie was is spelled clearly in the resolution of the Congress, which suggests that the regionalization constituted the institutional “consolidation (oformlenie) of cohesive (tselostnye) units bound by cultural, economic, and lifestyle conditions,” for the purposes of “resolving the national question through the delimitation of national minorities into self-administered units.”163 Put simply, the goal of raionirovanie in the Kirghiz ASSR was “the peaceful coexistence of the European and Kirghiz population” of the republic.164

On the eve of the regionalization, the republic was divided into 4 districts (okrugs), 72 volosts, and 437 village soviets. In terms of ethnic distribution, a considerable number of the volosts were “mixed” (smeshannyi) meaning that they had both native and Russian or Uzbek village soviets and that all village soviets in one volost were administered by a single volost Ispolkom: in the Frunze okrug out of 18 volosts 8 were Kyrgyz, 4 European, and 6 mixed; in the Karakol okrug out of 16 volosts 9 were Kyrgyz and 7 mixed; in the Osh district there were 10 Kyrgyz, 1 Uzbek, and 8 mixed volosts; in the Djalal-Abad okrug 11 volosts were Kyrgyz and 8 mixed.165 The ethnographic map of the republic before the regionalization suggests that although the removals and resettlements of the Russian population in the course of the land reforms consolidated the Russian population in larger settlements in the Frunze and Karakol okrugs, there was a considerable interspersion of native and Russian land-holdings. An additional complication arose from the fact that some volosts were excessively large and administered as many as 25,000 people, while others were too small and catered to the needs of only 3,000 people.166

For the authorities these irregularities presented certain issues. For one, the administrative division of the republic made little sense in the framework of centralized economic planning. Because the volosts did not reflect the ethnic division of labour, the grain-growing peasant settlements were grouped together with the cattle-breeding villages of the Kyrgyz.167 Secondly and equally importantly, the existing administrative division was found to be inconsistent with the Soviet nationalities policies. Like the colonial administration before, the Soviet leadership conceived of social conflict both in

162 “Protokol №2 Zasedaniia Komissii Sredazburo TsK VKP(b) po voprosam raionirovaniia Kirgizstana 30-go iunia 1926 goda,” TsGA KR f. 20, op. 1, d. 340, l. 45
163 “Rezoliutsiia plenuma Sr-Az. Komissii Raionirovaniia po proektu raionirovaniia Kirgizskoi Avt. Oblasti,” TsGA KR f. 20, op. 1, 2. 340, l. 4
164 Protokol Soveshchaniia pri Oblastnoi Komissii po raionirovaniuu KAO Predstavitel’nym Komitetov evropeiskikh volostei Talasskogo raiona, 5 dekabria 1926 goda, TsGA KR f. 20, op. 1, d. 116, l. 122
165 Obrazovanie Kirgizskoi ASSR: Materialy i dokumenty, 7-8.
167 I. A. Fat’ianov, Khoziaistvennoe i kul’turoe stroitel’stvo Kirgizii (Frunze1927), 5-10.
geographic and ethnic terms. Territorial interactions of ethnic groups came to be seen as the major source of ethnic strife. Like Tsarist officials, the Soviet administrators, too, saw the solution in the ethno-territorial segregation of the region’s ethnic groups. In practice, however, by linking land ownership to ethnicity the government fostered competition between ethnic groups for resources. The association of resources with ethnicity meant that political demands were, by default, economic and, conversely, economic interests became, by definition, political. The resulting rise in the number of ethnic conflicts in the republic registered in the wake of the land and water reforms of 1921-1922 was a logical, if unpleasant, outcome of nationalities policy.

An equally important corollary of the institutional framework where claims to resources were necessarily based in ethnicity was the emergence of a hierarchy of what can be termed ethno-economic interests. As a group engaged in grain production, favoured by the state over cattle breeding, the Russian settlers had greater bargaining capability than the native population. By capitalizing on their role as farmers and Red Army soldiers, Russian peasants were able to gain access to resources that the native pastoralists were often denied. To properly understand the rationale of regionalization we thus need to examine the peasants’ negotiations with the authorities. One way to glean the peasants’ attitudes to Soviet policies in the region, where the government was dependent on the settlers for military security and food production is by looking at their letters to the central institutions. Encouraged by the authorities as a means of gauging public attitudes, these letters provided grassroots feedback on the government’s measures (letters were usually sent either to the “Peasant newspaper” (Krest’ianskaia gazeta) or Mikhail Kalinin, himself of peasant stock and a designated “peasant elder” of Soviet Russia. A large number of these letters came from the national republics including the Kirghiz ASSR. One such letter was written by certain E. F. Filippov of the Novorossiiskoe village in the Pishpek okrug. Typically for this kind of letter, the letter describes the unfairness of the land and water reforms of 1921-1922, when the villagers were forced to give up their land and 320 draft animals to the Kyrgyz. The villagers, Filippov then

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168 As Terry Martin argues, the formation of national soviets cemented “the connection between ethnicity, territory, and land ownership,” generating, as a result, inter-ethnic conflicts across the country. Martin, 42-43; 56-74. For a discussion of the role of resource tension in the ethnic conflicts in Kyrgyzstan in the post-Soviet context, see Reeves, 64, 92, 246.
169 Terry Martin demonstrates that the regionalization had actually intensified ethnic conflict in the Soviet East. Martin, 41, 56-74.
170 On letters from peasants as a form of public speech, see Sheila Fitzpatrick, Stalin’s peasants: Resistance and survival in the Russian village after collectivization (Oxford University Press, USA, 1996), 14-16; CJ Storella and AK Sokolov, eds., The Voice of the People (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2013); Nicolas Werth, “”Dorogoi Kalinushka...” Pis’ma krest’ian Kalininu, 1930 g.,” in Terror i besporiadok. Stalinizm kak sistema. (Moscow: Rosspen, 2010), 77-88.
continues, were denied legal recourse and left on the brink of starvation, while the land transferred to the Kyrgyz “lay vacant.”

Peasant demands for justice and the recognition of their role as both Red Army soldiers – letter writers from the region frequently emphasized their service in the army – and grain-growers reveals that, in significant ways, the interests of the Russian minorities coincided with those of the central state. It would be safe to say that in the Kirghiz ASSR the impetus for regionalization came from the Russian settlers as well as the union authorities. The regionalization was intended to solve two separate but closely related issues. Officially, the goal of the regionalization was to resolve the lingering ethnic conflict and improve the functioning of the republic’s economic and administrative structures. Implicitly, regionalization was also intended to rectify the “excesses” of the earlier land and water reforms of 1921-1922 and boost the grain production.

A series of similarly named commissions and resolutions convened and approved by the Soviet leaders between the second half of 1924 and 1927 indicate that the authorities connected the issue of land ownership with ethnic hostilities. They blamed poor harvests on the “mismanagement (neuregulirovannost’) of land and national relations.” The vagueness of official statements obscured their actual views on the issue. The fall in grain production convinced many in Moscow that the Russian minority in the region was “eternally persecuted” and was in need of protection. At the second Kirghiz oblast party conference in 1925, the chairman of the Planning Commission, Iakov Gil’pershtein addressed the issue of grain shortage in terms of the need to regulate and properly organize land ownership without discriminating against “cultured” Russian households. He emphasized that the republic could potentially produce up to 30 million poods of grain and feed the entire region. Currently, however, the situation was dire – the ASSR produced only 2 million poods a year – and “many cultured households already sent petitioners to find new land” outside of the republic. Unless the central authorities intervened, Gil’pershtein warned, agriculture would continue to “decline.”

The government moved swiftly. Already, in May 1925, the TsK VKP(b) passed a resolution calling on the republican authorities “to implement measures for greater involvement of national minorities, particularly Russian, in the task of soviet construction

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171 GARF f. 1235, op. 121, d. 240, l. 132 in Chebotareva, 15.
172 One such letter reads: “Our 24 families have been doomed to death by starvation. And so have been the families of our children serving in the Red Army.” RTsIKhDNI, f. 2, op. 1, d. 20724, l. 2 in Genis, 47.
173 Stenograficheskii otchet 2-i Kirgizskoi oblastnoi konferentsii RKP(b) 5 noiabria 1925 g., p. 81 Stenograficheskii otchet 2-i Kirgizskoi oblastnoi konferentsii RKP(b) 5 noiabria 1925 g., p. 81 in Chebotareva, 18.
174 Martin, 62.
175 Stenograficheskii otchet 2-i Kirgizskoi oblastnoi konferentsii RKP(b) 5 noiabria 1925 g. in Chebotareva, 18.
by establishing self-governing administrative units within the Kirghiz republic.\textsuperscript{176} In June the same year, a special Commission for regionalization instructed the Obkom of the Kirghiz ASSR to “liquidate national tensions through the separation (vydelenie) of national minorities into self-governing districts, volosts, or, at the very least, if their numbers are small or if their settlements are interspersed with those of others (cherespolositsa), to separate them into dedicated village soviets with administration and education conducted in native tongues.”\textsuperscript{177}

Apparently, the republican authorities were too lax in implementing the reforms because in May, 1926 TsK once again pointed to “certain abnormality in the relations between the nationalities,” expressed in fistfights, murders, and the flight of peasant settlers from the republic, and castigated the Kirghiz Obkom, describing its efforts at reconciling the conflicting nationalities as “utterly unsatisfactory.”\textsuperscript{178} The recommendations that the TsK made repeated the earlier instructions to improve inter-ethnic relations through the creation of independent administrative units in the Kirghiz republic.\textsuperscript{179} A few months later, in November 1926, the TsK’s instructions assumed legislative power as VTsIK decreed to resolve “the land and water relations among the population (especially along inter-ethnic lines).”\textsuperscript{180}

To a considerable extent, regionalization was facilitated by the existing territorial distribution of the Russian settlements, which reflected the patterns of settlement under the colonial administration, but was also the result of population removals and resettlements undertaken in the course of the land and water reform of 1921-1922. In essence, the regionalization was the continuation of the Soviet policies of ethno-territorial consolidation at the local, republican level. Where the national delimitation enforced the national boundaries of the Soviet republics the regionalization drew the ethnic boundaries within the republics.

The regionalization was implemented in December 1926. The new administrative structure of the Kirghiz ASSR was three-layered. The largest administrative unit was a canton, cantons were further divided into volosts, which in turn were divided into national

\textsuperscript{176} TsK VKP(b) i soiuznoe pravitel’stvo o Kirgizi. Sbornik dokumentov, (Frunze: Kirgosizdat, 1937), 18.
\textsuperscript{177} TsPA IML, f. 62, op. 1, d. 170, l. 112 in Malabaev, 266.
\textsuperscript{178} An OGPU report dated February 1927, for example, refers to the “aggravated relationship between the Russians and the Kirghiz. The Russian peasants of the Karakol district express strong discontent with the unequal distribution of the land between the Russian and Kirghiz population. This discontent is most pronounced among the poor.” Obzor politicheskogo sostoianiia za fevral’ 1927 g. (po dannym Ob”edinennogo gosudarstvennogo politicheskogo upravlenia), in Soveshchennno Sekretno: Lubianka Stalini o polozenii v strane, 1922-1934 gg., t. 5, accessed 13 December 2015. http://istmat.info/node/25626.
\textsuperscript{180} Ibid, 26.
soviet. Altogether, 7 cantons, 52 volosts and 455 village soviets were formed.\textsuperscript{181} The new volosts and even cantons were remarkably homogenous in their ethnic makeup. Frunze canton – the seat of the autonomy’s government – was nearly completely European. Out of 45 village soviets in the Frunze canton 36 were Russian. Likewise, Russians constituted a majority in the cities of Frunze, Tokmak, and Karakol and the surrounding areas, all in the north of the country. 81.4\% of the republic’s entire European population lived in these areas. Of the 11 volosts with the predominantly Russian population 5 volosts were 90 to 100\% Russian and Ukrainian, 4 volosts were 75 to 90\% Russian and Ukrainian, and 2 volosts were 65 to 75\% Russian and Ukrainian. Altogether, these 11 volosts were home to 81.2\% of the republic’s European population. Kyrgyz constituted an ethnic majority in the 41 volosts of the republic. Out of 41 predominantly Kyrgyz volosts 30 volosts were 90 to 100\% Kyrgyz in their ethnic makeup, while the remaining 11 volosts were 60 to 90\% Kyrgyz. Altogether, the 41 native volosts comprised 97.1\% of the entire Kyrgyz rural population.\textsuperscript{182}

Although the regionalization was implemented in December 1926, the actual restructuring of the native and European land holdings took a few more years to complete. The shortage of arable land continued to be an issue. This time, however, the government sought to placate the Russian minority. By 1927, the authorities came to speak openly of the need to compensate the Russian settlers affected by the 1921-1922 land and water reforms and give them equal access to land. In February 1927, a new commission was formed at the VTsIK’s behest to investigate peasant complaints. The commission concluded that the “excesses” of the land and water reforms of 1921-1922 led to a situation where a considerable number of Russian peasants did not receive land in compensation. At the same time, the commission accused \textit{bai-manaps} of instigating ethnic violence. To address the issue of land shortages and to put an end to the ethnic strife the Commission recommended the dekulakization of \textit{bai-manaps} and land settlement for poor and landless Russian households who arrived in the republic before 14 September 1925.\textsuperscript{183}

The majority of such households were concentrated in the north of the republic; 300 of these households, according to the estimates of the Commission, were located in the Karakol canton, 37 in the Frunze canton, and 104 in the Jalal-Abad canton in the

\textsuperscript{181} Chebotareva, 15.
\textsuperscript{182} “Materialy k sostavleniiu piatiletnego plana razvitiia narodnog khoziaistva Kirgizskoi ASSR na 1928-1932 gg.,” TsGA KR, f. 99, op. 2, d. 7, l. 6 ob.
\textsuperscript{183} GARF f. 1235, op. 121, d. 240, l. 132 in Chebotareva, 16; Malabaev, 279.
south. Because land was in high demand the settlement of peasants was often carried out at the expense of the interests of the Kyrgyz. Land tracts disputed by the native and settler communities were as a rule transferred to the latter. One of the particularly contentious instances of such transfer that signalled the reversal of the land and water reforms of 1921-1922 and raised an outcry among the native leadership involved the two villages of Iur’evka and Baitik-Pavlovka in the Frunze canton. The tensions surrounding Iur’evka and Baitik-Pavlovka, both of which were subject to removal under the 1921-1922 reforms, were brought on by the refusal of the villagers to leave and the attempts of district authorities to evict them by force. After a series of violent standoffs and a stream of appeals to the central authorities – that culminated in the personal visit of Iur’evka’s “peasant representative,” Semion Rubak, to Stalin in January 1927 – the conflict was settled in favour of the villagers.

In retrospect, the conflict seems to have been blown out of proportions by the local and union authorities alike. Its implications, however, were far-reaching. In addition to the distrust between native leaders and their European colleagues that the conflict engendered, it effectively marked the restoration of political rights and privileges of the Russian settlers. The ability of peasants to intervene and even effect change in the republican politics alarmed the indigenous leadership of the ASSR. A letter by Iusup Abdrakhmanov, the then deputy chairman of the republican Ispolkom, to Stalin suggests that the native administrators attempted to sway the party leaders to their side. In the letter, Abdrakhmanov recognizes the land shortage experienced by peasants but attributes it to the large numbers of newly arrived settlers as well as the population’s natural growth and the continuing transfer of land to the GZI (the State Land Properties). Similarly, Abdrakhmanov warns against the resettlement of Russian households in their previous places of residence for two reasons. First, it would indicate “the factual revision of the results of the land reforms.” And, second, “it would, in practice, lead to the incitement of ethnic antagonism between the Kyrgyz and the Russians, which is politically inadmissible in the current conditions.” Any solution to the issue, he concluded, should therefore take account of “national factors (национальные моменты).”

184 Malabaev, 279. Land settlement of the peasant households was completed in 1929. The authorities established a dedicated fund of 149,000 rubles to assist the Russian settlers.
Abdrakhmanov voiced his arguments again at “Ryskulov’s meeting of national minorities” (Ryskulovskoe soveshchanie natsionalov) the same year.\(^\text{188}\) With characteristic directness, he claimed that “there are a great many of deficiencies in the relations between the national peripheries and the central organs of the RSFSR.” In particular, he pointed to the centre’s tendency to intervene on behalf of the Russian population: “It often happens that the claims of Russian petitioners from the national peripheries are considered more important than the claims of official organs of the same autonomous republic, and in every single case, we (the republican authorities) are brutalized by the VTsIK and the Narkomats (People’s Commissariats), which creates an intolerable mood (nevozmozhnoe nastroenie).”\(^\text{189}\)

Dramatic flourishes aside, in both his letter and his speech, Abdrakhmanov had correctly diagnosed the preferential treatment of the peasant settlers by the government and the resulting neglect of the native communities. The inequality that it produced was both spatial and ethnic. The Kyrgyz volosts and cantons were less developed and received fewer investments. As a case in point, Abdrakhmanov cites the share of the agricultural credit received by the Russian peasants of the Frunze canton, who accounted for roughly 11% of the total population, but received 44% of the credits. On the other hand, the Kyrgyz who made up 70% of the republic’s population received only 5% of the credits.\(^\text{190}\)

The political ramifications of such an asymmetrical distribution of resources were significant. Instead of giving the native and settler population equal access to economic and political decision making, the regionalization heightened the existing regional and ethnic inequalities and concentrated political and economic power in the Frunze canton. As the seat of the republic’s government, the canton wielded more power and had more leverage with the central authorities than the Kyrgyz cantons. Russian deputies of village soviets comprised the absolute majority of national minority deputies. There were 1,145 Russian deputies in comparison to only 524 Uzbek deputies, who constituted the second largest minority.\(^\text{191}\)

\(^{188}\) Conducted with the prior knowledge of Stalin but without his prior permission, the meeting proved controversial, though Russian historian Valentina Chebotareva argues that the authorities took criticism voiced at the meeting into account and adjusted their policies accordingly. As an example of such accommodation she points to the establishment of the Kirghiz ASSR in the aftermath of the meeting. She suggests that Abdrakhmanov’s arguments at the meeting on 14 November led to the resolution on the formation of the ASSR on 18 November. Her article is perhaps the best account to date of the meeting: V. G. Chebotareva, “I. V. Stalin i partino-sovetskie natsional’nye kadry,” Voprosy istorii, no. 7 (2008). Other articles on the Ryskulov’s meeting include: B. S. Sarsenbaev, “Novye svedeniia o ‘Ryskulovskom soveshchaniis natsionalov’,” Vestnik KRSU, no. 15 (2015); S. V. Ploskikh, “Iz istorii pervogo protivostoiannia intellektualisii i vlasti Kyrgyzstana (ser. 20-kh - ser. 30-kh godov XX v.),” ibid., no. 7 (2008).

\(^{189}\) GARF, f. 1235, op. 16a, d. 212, l. 23 in Chebotareva, 17.

\(^{190}\) Abdrakhmanov, 84.

\(^{191}\) “Otchet o rabote pravitel’stva Kirgizskoi ASSR za mar’ 1927 g. – aprel’ 1929 g.,” 22-24, in Malabaev, 275.
Economically, too, the European canton punched above its weight. The formation of mainly European national soviets on the basis of access to the irrigated agricultural land favoured settlers over the native population. The effects of the concentration of prime agricultural land in the hands of the European population are particularly obvious when one examines ethnic variations in grain and meat consumption. In 1926, for example, the Kyrgyz consumed on average anywhere between 8.0 (in the Chui canton) and 4.31 (Naryn canton) poods of grain per person. The Europeans of the republic, on the other hands, consumed between 15.57 (Karakol canton) and 12.7 poods of grain. Meat – the nomads’ proverbial diet – was hardly a staple on the Kyrgyz table. In 1926, the pastoralists of the republic ate at best 2.23 poods of meat (Naryn canton) per person and as little as 0.42 poods of meat at worst (Talas canton), while the settlers consumed between 2.5 (Talas canton) and 1.32 poods (Frunze and Karakol cantons).

As the main grain-producing area of the republic with the highest income, the canton was both wealthier and had a more influential voice in the republican decision-making bodies. Furthermore, the territories administered by the Russian minority soviets were better developed and boasted more industries than the Kyrgyz soviets. The unequal rates of industrial development carried into the post-Stalinist period. In 1970, the so-called “North-Kirghiz Economic Region” (Severo-kirgizskii ekonicheskii raion) produced over three quarters of the republic’s industrial output. Ultimately, the regionalization had re-established the ethnic hierarchy that had characterized the region under the colonial administration.

Assault on the Native Countryside: The Collectivization Campaign

When approaching collectivization in the pastoralist areas of Soviet Central Asia it is instructive to remember that collectivization in the context of nomadic areas of the region was, in practice, not one but three parallel campaigns of debaization (the confiscation and deportation of the bais and manaps, sedentarization and collectivization. In significant

192 K. D. Egorov, Raionirovanie SSSR. Shornik materialov s 1917 po 1925 g. (Moscow: Planovoe khoziaistvo, 1926), 250-51.
194 “The lowest income district was the Karakol-Naryn Kyrgyz district. Dublitskii, Doklad o raionirovanii,” TsGA KR f. 20, op. 1, d. 344, l. 221. “
195 K. O. Otobaev, Problemy razvitiiia proizvoditel'nykh sil Kirgizskoi SSR. Ekonomicheskoe raionirovanie (Frunze: Ilim, 1976), 44.
196 There is a marked paucity of English-language studies of collectivization in Kyrgyzstan. For a rare exception see Loring, “Building Socialism in Kyrgyzstan: Nation-making, Rural Development, and Social Change, 1921–1932,” 279-351. By contrast, collectivization in Kazakhstan has been a subject of a number of excellent studies, including those by Niccolo Pianciola, Isabelle Ohayon, and Sarah Cameron. See Niccolo Pianciola, “The Collectivization Famine
ways, the collectivization of the native countryside was similar to the collectivization of peasantry in European Russia. Certainly, Lynne Viola’s argument that collectivization was a tool of state-building also applies to the Kirghiz ASSR.\textsuperscript{197} To understand why the Soviet leadership was willing to incur the human and monetary costs of the campaign in the volatile borderlands I propose to situate collectivization as well as debaization and sedentarization, in the broader context of the Soviet-state building project in the national peripheries.

I argue that collectivization was designed to extract resources from the native population of the republic and bring the nomads under the purview of the state. Because the Kyrgyz were mainly engaged in pastoralist livestock breeding, their settlement and socialization into state-controlled agriculture could be accomplished only through forced removal of livestock. By dispossessing the wealthiest members of the nomadic communities of their animals, the authorities accomplished two goals at once. First, they succeeded in transferring the pastoralist economy’s resource base from the native society to the central government, thereby forcing the nomads to settle and take up farming. Second, by forcibly settling the native pastoralists, the government was able to better control the highly mobile communities and make them “more readily identifiable and accessible to the centre,” to borrow James Scott’s formulation.\textsuperscript{198} Inevitably, the seizure of resources from the native pastoralists impacted on their economic well-being and led to the destruction of the pastoralist economy.

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\textsuperscript{197} Lynne Viola, “Collectivization in the Soviet Union: Specificities and Modalities,” in \textit{The Collectivization of Agriculture in Communist Eastern Europe: Comparison and Entanglements}, ed. Constantin Iordachi and Arnd Bauerkamper (Budapest: Central European University Press, 2014), 50. The central government viewed the nomads as an inconvenient and potentially destabilizing group. The nomads’ engagement in cattle breeding was seen as less productive than grain farming. At the same time, their mobility challenged the ability of the Soviet authorities to maintain and secure the state borders. Adrienne Edgar, for example, notes that by the second half of the 1920s and early 1930s, the authorities “came to see nomads as…intransigent and uniquely anti-Soviet. Not only were they elusive and hard to control, but they were also the most likely to flee across the border to Iran and Afghanistan in response to unpopular Soviet policies, and the most likely to take up arms against the Soviet regime in extremis.” Edgar, 194-95. Similarly, Botakoz Kassymbekova suggests that “the Turkic tribal groups represented the greater military threat” in the view of the authorities. She refers in particular to a 1926 report of the Orgbiuro of the Tajik ASSR, which stated that the nomadic Uzbeks were good fighters and could “be dangerous for Europeans in small wars.” Kassymbekova, 365. The Soviet view of the nomads was nothing new, nor was it limited to the Soviet Union; similar prejudice against the region’s nomadic population was expressed earlier by the colonial administration, which attempted – with various degrees of success – to settle the nomads. The campaign of forced sedentarization was therefore the logical conclusion of the state’s quest to “tame” and socialize the nomads to both the state and the “ethnic” homeland, and secure the frontier. Like the campaign of national delimitation, the sedentarization “fixed” the native communities territorially and rendered them less mobile.

The collectivization drive in the Kirghiz ASSR began with the campaign of debaization, which sought to strip native bais and manaps of their wealth and influence in the native countryside. The Soviet authorities held a deeply-seated hostility toward clan and tribal affinities. As local figures of traditional authority, manaps were believed to be particularly adept at manipulating these ties at the expense of the Soviet state-building efforts. In 1925, for example, the Kirghiz Oblpartbiuro (Oblast Party Bureau) reported that in the past year, bais and manaps increased resistance to the Soviet authorities and used kinship ties to “seize control of the village.” Similarly, the first secretary of the Kirobkom, Vladimir Shubrikov emphasized that “in our conditions, kulaks (bai-manaps were believed to be the native equivalent of kulaks) are far more dangerous for us than in any other area of the Union, because here, the kulak had not been subjected to the revolutionary onslaught (natisk) and the revolutionary limitation of his exploitative possibilities. Extending the presence of the state to the native countryside thus became one of the government’s central goals.

The first measures targeted at suppressing the “prosperous elements” and their perceived “corrupting influence on the poor and agricultural proletariat (batrachestvo)” were adopted in 1925 and consisted of a propaganda campaign. A year later, in 1926 the republican Obkom circulated a letter of instructions to the district party committees on the measures to be implemented to curb manaps’ influence, including sending agitators to the countryside, purging and imposing patronage over village party cells, and purging “Koshchi,” the union of the poor and agricultural labourers, of class-alien members.

Manaps were tribal chieftains who exercised political authority in native society, but were not necessarily its wealthiest members. For an English-language survey of manaps as a social institution, see Paul Georg Geiss: Pre-tsarist and Tsarist Central Asia, p. 99-102. There is no consensus on the origins of manaps. While the majority of contemporary Kyrgyz historians suggest that the institution of manapship predates colonial rule, Daniel Prior argues that manaps arose as a distinct class of intermediaries after the colonial conquest of the northern Kyrgyz. See Daniel G Prior, “High Rank and Power among the Northern Kirghiz,” in Explorations in the Social History of Modern Central Asia (19th-Early 20th Century), ed. Paolo Sartori (Leiden: Brill, 2013). They continued to exercise a considerable degree of political power at the local level even after the establishment of Soviets in the region. Furthermore, the majority of native administrators, such as Iusup Abdrahamanov and Abdykerim Sydykov, were of manap background. For a discussion of the social background of the first generation of Kyrgyz functionaries see Kurmanov, 34-43.

Niccolo Pianciola suggests that in Kazakhstan collectivization “was a campaign to eliminate traditional authority, with the intent to incorporate the Kazakhs into the state governed from Moscow.” Pianciola, “The Collectivization Famine in Kazakhstan, 1931–1933,” 199-200.
The measures had temporary and limited effect, and by 1927, the debaization campaign took on a more repressive tone.\textsuperscript{205} The policies enforced by the authorities in the period between 1927 and 1933 were intended not only to limit the manaps’ influence, but also to destroy them as a social class. This was to be accomplished through the disenfranchisement of manap households, their deportation and confiscation of their land and animals. The category of manaps was rather broad and included any nomadic household with more than 400 – or 300 for semi-nomadic areas – head of cattle, including sheep and goats, as well as those households whose members occupied a privileged position under the tsarist government or were implicated in “anti-Soviet activities.”\textsuperscript{206}

The first group of 20 manap households was deported from the republic in 1927 in accordance with the resolution adopted at the congress of Soviets of the Kirghiz ASSR. The resolution to expel “the largest cattle breeders from among the native population, which maintain the semi-feudal, patriarchal and tribal relations, and…impede the sovietization of aul (native village)” was upheld again in November 1928 by the TsIK and Sovnarkom of the Kirghiz ASSR.\textsuperscript{207} Between 1927 and 1929, 65 manap households were deported and their properties confiscated.\textsuperscript{208}

Inevitably, the deportations and expropriations triggered a wave of discontent and violent protests. In October 1929 alone, the OGPU registered five groups with 281 members conducting “anti-Soviet agitation.” The native population also engaged in “terroristic acts” (terakty) – assaults on Soviet administrators, threats, and arson. According to the same OGPU report, eleven cases of terrorism were registered in July, five cases in August, and two in September of 1929.\textsuperscript{209} The authorities blamed resistance on manaps. In March 1929 the republican Ispolkom complained that “the implementation of the directive of the Obkom about the comprehensive agitation-explanatory work on the tasks and significance of the expulsions was inadequate. As the result, there were cases of incorrect attitudes to the expulsions by the toilers of aul who considered the confiscation of manaps’ properties and their expulsions as detrimental to the kinship group (rod).”\textsuperscript{210}

\textsuperscript{205} For a more detailed account of the campaign, see Loring, "Building Socialism in Kyrgyzstan: Nation-making, Rural Development, and Social Change, 1921–1932," 167-80.
\textsuperscript{206} TsGA KR f. 21, op. 16, d. 98, l. 45
\textsuperscript{207} TsGA KR f. 21, op. 16, d. 98, l. 44
\textsuperscript{208} Sherstobitov, Lenin, p. 355
\textsuperscript{210}TsGA PD KR f. 10, op. 1, d. 210, l. 29 in D. Dzhunushaliev, "Istoricheskie istoki sovremennoi nestabil’nosti," in 24 marta 2005 g.: “Narodnaia revoliutsiia”?!, ed. V. M. Ploskikh (Bishkek: 2005), 120.
In practice, the discontent was caused in equal measure by the expulsions and livestock and grain requisitions, which had begun a year earlier in 1928. In need of grain to pay for industrialization, the authorities began to tighten control over the countryside. Collectivization recommended itself on several levels; as an instrument of state control collectivization allowed the government to extend political and administrative dominance over the countryside while, at the same time, ensuring the procurement of grain. Collectivization was both costly and difficult. In the context of the nomadic regions of Central Asia, it was doubly so. Because the pastoralists traditionally practised seasonal migrations, making it impossible for the state to assert control over individual groups and the population at large, collectivization in Soviet Kirghizia (and Kazakhstan) was accompanied by a campaign of forced sedentarization.

The authorities framed both collectivization and sedentarization in terms of overcoming nomadic backwardness; they would “lift the cultural level and the material wellbeing of the people, and ensure the fastest rates of economic reconstruction in order to abandon the inefficient subsistence and semi-subsistence economy.” Collectivization was both costly and difficult. In the context of the nomadic regions of Central Asia, it was doubly so. Because the pastoralists traditionally practised seasonal migrations, making it impossible for the state to assert control over individual groups and the population at large, collectivization in Soviet Kirghizia (and Kazakhstan) was accompanied by a campaign of forced sedentarization.

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Official optimism notwithstanding, the reality on the ground was sobering. In 1927, 62% of all Kyrgyz households were nomadic or semi-nomadic. Furthermore, they dominated – quantitatively, if not qualitatively – the republic’s economy. In 1925, for every hundred 100 households, 79 households were Kyrgyz. Of these 79 households, 51 were nomadic or semi-nomadic and only 28 were sedentary.

Despite the prevalence of nomadic households, the republic’s more temperate climate and availability of water made it one of the prime locations in the region for grain cultivation. A 1926 VTsIK brief suggests that the central authorities planned to increase grain cultivation in Central Asia by expanding grain growing area by 396,600 hectares of which 107,300 hectares, or 27% of the total, were to be cultivated in the Kirghiz ASSR.

The actual increase exceeded the proposed benchmark by almost 70,000 hectares; altogether, in 1927, the increase in the grain cultivation area measured 176,600 hectares.

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212 Stenograficheskii otchet 1 uchreditel’nogo s”ezda Sovetov KAO, 27 marta 1925 g., TsGA KR f.20, op. 1, d. 15, l.204
214 TsGA PD KR f. 10, op. 2, d. 266, l. 98 in Dzhunushaliev, 119.
hectares. Despite – or perhaps due to – the increase, land productivity suffered a marked fall. The grain harvested in 1927 in the republic was 800,000 tonnes short of the projected amount.

The diminishing harvests did not stop the authorities from seeking to expand grain cultivation. In January 1930, the EKOSO (Central Asian Economic Council), the main executive body regulating the economy of the region, instructed the republican authorities to increase the grain growing areas by 12%. Kirghizia was expected to furnish eight million of the total thirty million poods of grain grown in the region. The growing demand for grain coupled with the pressure to supply more forced the republic’s state organs to requisition more grain and introduce faster rates of collectivization, which in turn led to more resistance on the part of the native pastoralists. Once again, the authorities squared in on manaps: “sedentarization is hampered by the semi-feudal bai-manap brass (verkhushka) of the nomadic aul who see in sedentarization the loss of their opportunities to exploit and their kinship rights to manage land and animals of the nomadic society.”

Beginning from 1929 the bai-manap campaign resumed and intensified, leading to still more deportations and confiscations. Altogether, in the course of the campaign, the authorities liquidated and deported 497 manap households acquiring in the process 45,777 hectares of arable and 22,831 hectares of rain-fed land, and subjected 3,447 kulak and manap households to the confiscation of “excess” land, animals, and farm inventory.

In what amounted to a double assault on the native countryside, the authorities also forcibly seized and “collectivized” the nomads’ land and livestock. By October 1928, 287 kolkhozes were formed, comprising 5,730 households. In a year, their number grew to 747 collective farms covering 19,602 households. Altogether, by February 1931, 66,618 households were collectivized. The livestock population in the kolkhozes’

215 Ezhegodnik khleboi torgovli No. 1. 1925/26 i 1926/27. (Moscow: Izdatel'stvo Narkomtorga SSSR i RSFSR, 1928), 59.
216 Ibid., 60.
218 Tragediia sovetskoi derevnii: Kollektivizatsii i raskakalachivanie. Dokumenty i materialy v 5 tomakh, 1927-1939, vol. 2 (Moscow: Rosspen), 544.
219 Kommunisticheskii partii Kirgizii v rezoliutsiiakh i resheniakh s’ezdov, konferentsii i plenumov Obkoma i TsK, 1924-1936. (Frunze: Kirgosizdat, 1958), 378.
220 I. A. Gladkov, ed. Istoriia sotsialisticheskoi ekonomiki SSSR, vol. 3 (Moscow: Nauka, 1977), 240; Sarsenbaev, 80. We do not know the ethnic breakdown of the 3,447 households that had their land and animals confiscated, but it is likely that both the native and the Russian population were affected.
ownership grew from 8,100 head in 1928 to 24,000 head in 1929.\textsuperscript{222} By February 1931, 29\% of the republic’s households and 52.5\% of cultivated land were collectivized.\textsuperscript{223} The collectivization of livestock somewhat lagged behind with 36\% of horses, 20\% of cattle, and 26\% of sheep and goats collectivized. In less than a year, however, collectivization of livestock caught up. By December 1931, 40\% of sheep, 50\% of horses, and 39.9\% of the cattle population of the republic were collectivized.\textsuperscript{224}

Collectivization rates were unequal across the ethnic groups. Archival data suggest that the pastoralist communities were the primary target of collectivization. While roughly half of the grain and cotton-growing households were collectivized, the pastoralist areas experienced collectivization at much higher rates. Where the European village soviets of Arkhangel’skoe, Mikhailovskoe and Oktiabr’skoe were collectivized by 47.48, and 39\% respectively, the neighbouring semi-nomadic village soviet of Toguz-Toroo was 90\% collectivized.\textsuperscript{225}

Collectivization was expected to be completed by autumn 1933, but like elsewhere in the Soviet Union, the collectivization drive in the Kirghiz ASSR slowed down towards the second half of the decade.\textsuperscript{226} By 1935, 70.8\% of households and 84.7\% of cultivated land were transferred to the collective farms.\textsuperscript{227} Poorly provisioned and subjected to frequent requisitions, many of the newly established kolkhozes were not viable without state support. A meeting held by the republican Obkom admitted that “the kolkhozes organized before spring 1930 united poor (bedniatskii) households, were consumptive in nature, and did not play any measurable role in agricultural production.”\textsuperscript{228}

The more immediate and visible outcome of collectivization was the drop in livestock population. As collectivization had funnelled more land and animals towards the state, the livestock population dwindled. The loss of animals began in 1927 and continued until the end of the next decade. Over half a million livestock was lost between 1927 and 1928.\textsuperscript{229} Between 1929 and 1930 the population of cattle fell by 24.4\%, horses

\textsuperscript{222}“Iz materialov k otchetu Kirobkoma VKP(b) 4 oblastnoi partiinoi konferentsii o kolkhoznom stroitel’stve, rabote sel’skokhoziaistvennoi kooperatsii i rabote kdo, ianvar’ 1929-mai 1930 g.” in ibid., 16.
\textsuperscript{223}“Rezoliutsiia 1 respublikanskogo s’eza kolkhoznikov po dokladu predsedatelia pravleniia kirkhokhoczsentra o zadachakh kolkhoznogo stroitel’stva v Kirgizii, 16 fevralia 1931 g.” in ibid, 91.
\textsuperscript{224}S. I. Il’iasov and V. P. Sherstobitov, eds., Istoriia sovetskogo krest’ianstva Kirgizstana (Frunze: Ilim, 1972), 178.
\textsuperscript{225}“Iz dokladnoi zapiski Kirobkoma VKP(b) v TsK VKP(b) o khode kollektivizatsii v republice, 21 sentiabria 1934 goda” in Abdykarov, Baktygulov, and Dzhamankaraeva, 134.
\textsuperscript{226}Danilov, Manning, and Viola, Tragediia sovetskoi derevni: Kollektivizatsiia i raskulachivanie. Dokumenty i materialy v 5 tomakh, 1927-1939, 46.
\textsuperscript{227}Ploskikh, 226.
\textsuperscript{228}Iz materialov k otchetu Kirobkoma VKP(b) 4 oblastnoi partiinoi konferentsii o kolkhoznom stroitel’stve, rabote sel’skokhoziaistvennoi kooperatsii i rabote kdo, ianvar’ 1929-mai 1930 g.” in Abdykarov, Baktygulov, and Dzhamankaraeva, 16-17.
\textsuperscript{229}Ploskikh, 223.
by 18.5%, and sheep and goats by 15.5%. By 1934, only 2,100,000 head of livestock remained of 7,715,000 head counted in 1928, indicating a loss of 73%.

How to explain such a dramatic fall in the livestock numbers? The official explanation pointed to manaps, who sold and slaughtered animals, as the main culprit. While the sale and slaughter of animals did indeed take place, it cannot account for such a massive loss. In fact, a great many livestock were slaughtered simply to avoid starvation. To explain the high mortality of the livestock we need to look at both the impact of collectivization and sedentarization on native society and the attendant circumstances that contributed to it.

Nomadic economy, as Niccolo Pianciola argues, is different from sedentary farming in that a group of households, rather than a single household, form the productive unit. Nomadic communities pooled resources to weather the hardships of the pastoralist lifestyle, such as droughts, early frost, harsh winters etc. The bulk of these resources was provided by the richest members of the group – bais and manaps. According to the 1927 statistical survey, manaps constituted 9.8% of the total Kyrgyz population, but owned 59.7% of all livestock. The removal and dispossession of bais and manaps had therefore robbed entire communities of the means of survival. Furthermore, the expansion of grain cultivation affected almost exclusively the native population. Because the Russian settlers were already engaged in grain growing any expansion of grain cultivation had to be made at the expense of pasture land and hay growing areas.

To a certain extent, the grain quotas succeeded in making the nomads grow grain. Faced with the forced requisitions, the majority of Kyrgyz bartered their animals for grain and expanded grain cultivation to fulfil the quotas. This left them, however, woefully unprepared for any exigency that could and did arise in 1927, when the early frosts, known in Kyrgyz and Kazakh as jut, led to a massive die-off of animals. In itself, jut was not necessarily a curse; hay was traditionally grown by the pastoralists of Central Asia to supplement or replace grazing in the winter time. In 1907, for example, the Kyrgyz of the Przhevalsk uyezd (Karakol canton in 1927) and the Pishpek uyezd (Frunze canton)

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231 Baktygulov, 88.
232 Pianciola, "Famine in the Steppe," 140.
233 TsGA KR, f. 105, op. 1, d. 465, l. 34. *Manaps' ownership of land, on the other hand, was relatively proportional to their demographical weight. According to the same survey, manaps owned 12.3% of land.*
harvested over 4 and 7 poods of hay per head respectively. In comparison, in 1927 the Kyrgyz of the Naryn canton harvested only 0.6 poods of hay for every animal they had. Predictably, the loss of animals, which the nomads used to exchange for grain resulted in the famine that primarily affected the native population. By 1933, the famine had become noticeable enough for the OGPU to report about the mass border-crossings into China and recognize the “mass excesses and abuse” of local authorities as one of the two main causes of the “food supply difficulties.” Some families voted with their feet. Three hundred Kyrgyz families from the Alai valley (in the south of the republic) fled the country in 1933, taking with them 30,000 sheep and 15,000 cattle. Mass crossings to China became commonplace. In July 1933, the OGPU reported that 40-50 kolkhozniks (collective farm workers) attempt to cross the border daily, an unknown number cross it illegally.

The estimates of the loss of human life as the result of famine suggest that the famine claimed lives of every sixth and every nineteenth ethnic Kyrgyz in the Frunze canton and in the Issyk-Kul basin. Compared to the mortality among the native population of the neighbouring Kazakhstan, the scale of famine in the Soviet Kyrgyzstan appears relatively small. Its long-term impact, however, was significant. Demographic statistics shows clearly that the Kyrgyz suffered disproportionately from the exigencies of collectivization; from 1926 to 1959 the Uzbek and Tajik population of the Kirghiz ASSR more than doubled, growing by 105% and 115% respectively. The Kyrgyz population, on the other hand, grew only by a quarter, or 25%. The collectivization had therefore been implemented at the expense of the native nomads, who both paid for – by providing the bulk of the resources – and fell victim to it.

235 Dzhut 1927-28 g., (Frunze: Kirgizskoe statisticheskoe upravlenie, 1928), 8.
236 Iz spetssoobschensia sekretso-politicheskogo otdeла OGPU SSSR o golode v Kirgizskoi ASSR po dannym na 1 iiulia 1933 g., 1 iiulia 1933 g., TsA FSB RF f. 2, op. 11, d. 47, l. 236-237, accessed 20 December 2015. http://istmat.info/node/31431.
237 Baktygulov, 88-89.
238 Iz spetssoobschensia sekretso-politicheskogo otdeла OGPU SSSR o golode v Kirgizskoi ASSR po dannym na 1 iiulia 1933 g., 1 iiulia 1933 g., TsA FSB RF f. 2, op. 11, d. 47, l. 236-237, accessed 20 December 2015. http://istmat.info/node/31431.
239 Shargul' Batyrbaeva, "Demograficheskie poteri kirkizskogo naseleniia v gody goloda v nachale 30-kh godov XX v.," Izvestiia Tomskogo politekhnicheskogo universiteta, no. 6 (2004): 173.
240 Niccolo Pianciola argues that the difference in the loss of life between the two very similar republics was largely the result of the economic regionalization of Central Asia. Thanks to the inclusion of a part of the Ferghana Valley into its territory, Kyrgyzstan was grouped in the economic region together with the cotton-growing Uzbekistan, Tajikistan, and Turkmenistan, and, as the result, was not subjected to the same livestock procurement quotas as Kazakhstan was. In 1931, only 13.6% of the Kyrgyz ASSR livestock was set for requisition, approximately half of the quota set for the Kazakh ASSR. Niccolò Pianciola, "Stalinist spatial hierarchies: placing the Kazakhs and Kyrgyz in Soviet economic regionalization," Central Asian Survey (2016).
241 Ploskikh, Istoriia kyrgyzov, p. 220. The largest demographic growth was experienced by the European population. From 1926 to 1939 the Russian and Ukrainian population of the republic grew by 160.1% and 114.1% respectively. Such a demographic explosion was, however, due to the large scale European immigration into the republic. The growth of the Tajik and Uzbek population, on the other hand, was largely natural. Vsesoiuznaia perepis’ naseleniia 1926 g. Vol. 8, p.199-204. TsGA KR, f. 105, op. 12, d. 572, l. 2
Conclusion

As Lynne Viola reminds, 1927 was a transitional year for the Soviet regime.\textsuperscript{242} It brought the closure of the NEP and marked the beginning of the “Great Turn” in political and economic life of the union republics. In practical terms, the “Great Turn” entailed both the consolidation of state authority in the rural society and the breakneck industrialization financed though the extraction of resources from the peasant countryside. In order to achieve these objectives in the largely pastoralist countryside of the Kirghiz ASSR, the central government forcibly sedentarized nomadic communities by seizing their livestock and land as a part of the campaign of debaization. At the same time, to boost grain production, the Soviet leadership revised the land and water reforms of 1921-1922, restoring land ownership rights to the European population of the republic. Combined with the concentration of irrigated agricultural land in the hands of the settlers, collectivization led to famine that affected primarily the nomadic population of Soviet Kirghizia.

\textsuperscript{242} Lynne Viola, The War Against Peasantry, p. 9-56
Chapter VI

Between Nation and Revolution: the Soviet Historiography of the Uprising of 1916

In addition to boundaries nations also need national histories. In the young Soviet republic of Kirghizia national history was written around the tragic events of 1916. Indeed, the commemoration, if not celebration, of the uprising occupied a significant, if not central, place in the public and political life of the republic. As “the uprising of national liberation,” urkun – exodus, as it was colloquially known among the ethnic Kyrgyz – was the subject of a range of academic as well as general audience publications. In addition to published archival documents, a number of monographs and numerous articles in scholarly periodicals, educational booklets and articles in the republican print media, the events of 1916 provided the plot for several historical novels in Kyrgyz published before the war, including “Adzhar” by Kasymaly Baialinov, published in 1928, Aaly Tokombaev’s “The Bloody Years” (“Kanduu zhyldar”) released in 1935, “A Long Journey” (“Dolgii put’”) by Mukai Elebaev, published in 1936, and a relatively popular novel in Russian by Dmitry Furmanov – a one-time head of the Revolutionary Military Council (Revvoensovet) in Semirechye who put down the 1920 garrison uprising in Verny – titled simply “The Mutiny” (“Miatezh”), among many others. The first Kyrgyz operetta “Life, Not Death” (a rather awkward Russian translation of the original Kyrgyz “Adzhal Orduna” – “In Place of Death”) had likewise centred around the uprising of 1916. The operetta, first staged in 1937, had clearly targeted the more cultured urban audience. To reach the countryside, a simpler stage piece was composed and staged by the “kishlak-village” theatre of Kolpakov. Similarly, a lot of effort and financing had gone into organizing the 10th, 15th, and 20th anniversaries of the uprising.

In light of such a literary and cultural cornucopia of works devoted to the rather disagreeable topic of the inter-ethnic conflict, the question arises as to why the events of 1916 were put at the foundation of the national identity in inter-war Soviet Kirghizia? I draw on Stephen Kotkin’s suggestion that “the revolution was…consolidated by the skilful cultivation of a renewed national identity” to argue that the Soviet historiography of the uprising of 1916 was crucial to the co-production of ethnic and political loyalties in early Soviet Kyrgyzstan.1 As such, the Soviet historiography of the uprising of 1916 was an integrative mechanism that combined class loyalties to the self-proclaimed

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1 Kotkin, Magnetic Mountain: Stalinism as a Civilization, 230.
workers’ and peasants’ state with loyalties to an ethnic group and “homeland.” Although – as the next chapter will demonstrate – the merging of the two forms of self-identification was not seamless, the historiography of the uprising, which should be more properly seen as a complex of informational and educational practices of shaping, enacting, and actualizing new forms of collective Soviet identities, successfully reconciled the rhetoric of class and nation.²

The urgent need to attract the population of national peripheries to the implementation of broad social transformations prompted the authorities to identify effective means of mobilization. The Soviet historiography of the uprising became one such means. It is possible to distinguish two formative periods in the historiography of the rebellion: until the end of the 1920-s and from the early 1930s until the end of the decade. The first period offered a fundamentally nationalist understanding of the rebellion and engaged in sharp criticism of imperial Russia and Russian settlers. This early Soviet historiography of the uprising of 1916 and other national movements in general emerged primarily as a response to the urgency of shaping collective forms of identity within the framework of institutionalized national autonomies. The convergence of nation and class in the course of the second stage of Soviet state-building, discussed in the next chapter, ushered in campaign of total mobilization demanding complete identification of individual Soviet ethnic republics, or “homelands,” with the common Soviet fatherland (otechestvo).

The writing of national histories was an indispensable part of the Soviet policies of nation and state-building in the region. As an instrument of political consolidation in the ethnically diverse national peripheries of the USSR, national histories were designed to cultivate a sense of belonging and involvement in the revolution and personal responsibility for national and, by extension, socialist construction. The conscious turn to the past in the framework of nation-building in the borderlands points to the instrumentalist approach of the Soviet leadership to the pre-revolutionary history of the region; state sponsored understanding of the past facilitated state building and generated popular loyalties for the regime.

The choice of the uprising of 1916 as the foundation of the national identity of the Soviet Kyrgyz appears illogical given the efforts of the Soviet authorities to build a multi-ethnic state and curtail ethnic conflicts. Yet, the emotional charge – the uprising had occupied “a bright place” (iarkoe mesto) in the history of the Kyrgyz – the uprising’s

mass nature (*massovost’*), and its popularity among all Kyrgyz (*obshchenarodnost’*) made it an attractive vehicle for popularizing the idea about the revolutionary nature of national movements and their merging with the socialist revolution.\(^3\) The central role of the uprising in the implementation of early Soviet nationalities policies is reflected in the resolution of the special commission convened on the eve of the uprising’s tenth anniversary. “The tenth anniversary of these events is of great significance for Kirghizstan and may be a good moment to instil nationalities policies of Soviet power into the consciousness of the broad toiling masses of Kirghizstan.”\(^4\) “In the territory of Kirghizstan,” the resolution continues, “the events were most important, in other areas of the former Dzhetsusu (Semirechye) oblast the uprising was of a less intense nature. Therefore, these events affected the Kyrgyz people more than anyone else. In the history of the Kirghiz, 1916 occupies a very bright place.”\(^5\)

In the official interpretation, the uprising appears as both national and – owing to its anti-colonial nature – revolutionary.\(^6\) “The uprising of the native peoples of Central Asia in 1916” informs one of the articles published as a part of the celebration of the tenth anniversary of the uprising, “was a broad mass movement against the colonial policies of Russian imperialism,” which “should be written into history with capital letters like revolutionary movements in the history of Russia.”\(^7\)

The adroit blending of the rhetoric of nation and revolution in the resolution is illustrative of the logic of early Soviet nation-building, according to which “the recognition of national autonomy (*natsional’naia samostoiatelnost’*) by revolutionary Russia will succeed better at giving (the native peoples) access to Russian culture and the ideas of the Russian revolution, than any forced implantation (*vnedrenie*) will be able to do.”\(^8\)

What is particularly noticeable about the early Soviet historiography of the uprising is the emphasis on nation, rather than class, although class analysis was to become dominant already by the end of the decade. Indeed, in 1920s the uprising is understood first and foremost as a national movement caused by “the desire of the oppressed nationality to overthrow – through independent and mass struggle – the yoke

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\(^4\) Kaptagaev, 232-33.

\(^5\) Ibid.


\(^7\) Shestakov, “Vosstanie v Srednei Azii v 1916 g.,” 114.

\(^8\) *Narody Vostoka: Kirgizy*, (Samara: Tipografiia Politotdela Turkfronta, 1919), 24.
and chains of slavery and pave the way to the political freedom of the nation, to self-
determination and economic independence.\(^9\)

In a strong indication of the highly politicized nature of national historiographies, a number of early analyses of the uprising are authored by the native leaders of the Central Asian republics, such as Iusup Abdrakhmanov and his Semirechye-born Kazakh colleague and friend, Turar Ryskulov, the then deputy chairman of the Council of People’s Commissars. Reflecting on the uprising, Abdrakhmanov, who wrote widely on the subject both as an academic and as a politician, gives an essentially nationalist interpretation of the uprising by suggesting that the uprising was directed against “the dominant nationality.”\(^10\) Ryskulov’s assessment of the rebellion is equally nationalist: “the contradictions resulting from the tsarist colonial oppression served as the reason…forced the native toiling masses to rise, first of all, against the Russian authorities. Moreover, in their attacks the rebels did not distinguish between Russian tsarist officials and Russian peasants and workers, and secondly, the rebels attacked the native wealthy only insofar as they were accomplices or supporters of Russians. All this shows that the uprising was directed against Russians in general.”\(^11\)

In an even more nationalist interpretation of the uprising, some historians paint a flattering portrait of the pre-revolutionary indigenous elites, many of whom were co-opted by the Soviet government. A historian from the “centre,” Andrei Shestakov describes the leaders of the uprising, many of whom were of manap background, as “the oldest, most experienced people trusted by the masses.”\(^12\) Piotr Galuzo, a well-known authority on Turkestan, assigns manaps the role of initiators (zastrel’shchiki) of the “national-revolutionary movement.”\(^13\)

In the final analysis, the identification of nation with revolution legitimized the revolution as an institutional recognition of the “national autonomy” of the non-Russian minorities. According to Shestakov, the uprising “expanded the political horizons of the native population” and prepared it for the revolution, which “cut the economic knot tied in Central Asia by the tsarist government.”\(^14\) Read this way, the revolution, which, as Akhmet Baitursynov has rightly noted, terrified the native nomads, emerged as the

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\(^9\) Chekaninskii, 77.

\(^10\) Abdrakhmanov, 190.


\(^12\) Shestakov, “Vosstanie v Srednei Azii v 1916 g.,” 106.

\(^13\) Galuzo, Turkestan-kolonija, 143.

\(^14\) Shestakov, 113.
continuation of the struggle for national independence and ties “the revolutionary struggle for socialism with the revolutionary programme in the national question.”

Beginning from the first half of the 1930s national historiographies experienced a gradual but significant shift. Moscow’s expectations of a future war had made national and ethnic allegiances and political loyalty to the regime an immediate and pressing concern. In preparation for war, the central government pursued campaign of popular mobilization, which blended national and pan-national Soviet identities. The drastic turnabout in national historiographies of the Soviet republics in the second half of the 1920s and early 1930s is a comprehensive example of the ideological campaign to write national histories consistent with the larger history of the Soviet Union. By the beginning of the second decade of Soviet rule, the official historiography of the uprising of 1916 was, like many other national historiographies, subsumed into a grand narrative of the gathering of the Soviet Union’s multi-ethnic population within a collectively shared homeland. The goal of this radical shift, which saw many historians struggle to cope with the new agenda, was to create intra-state loyalties and secure political cohesion of the union state while obscuring cross-border solidarities. As such, the changing national historiographies positioned individuals within nations and nations within the Soviet Union, in an attempt to establish – through the common narrative of revolutionary struggle – close ties between the centre and the periphery.

Under the combination of encouragement and coercion, historians in the Soviet Union’s national republics began to incorporate the formula of class struggle into their analyses of national movements. In this new take on national movements, class struggle paralleled and often eclipsed the narrative of national struggle that dominated national historiographies of the previous decade. Where national historiographies of the NEP (New Economic Policy) understood the revolutionary struggle of the Tsarist Russia’s minority peoples as first and foremost a national struggle between the colonists and the native peoples, for national historiographies of the Great Turn class struggle was the main driving force of the revolution both in the centre and in the borderlands. Although arguments of national struggle had not been entirely dismissed, they were embedded in a broader account of the revolution. The sense of national belonging developed by national

16 A number of historians have explored this fundamental shift in the Soviet historiography and the attendant rehabilitation of Russian national culture. The first and best known work on the “Great Turn” is, of course, Nicholas Timasheff’s “The Great Retreat: The Growth and Decline of Communism in Russia.” For more recent studies, see Geoffrey Hosking and Robert Service, eds., Russian Nationalism: Past and Present, and David Brandenberger, National Bolshevism: Stalinist Mass Culture and the Formation of Modern Russian National Identity, 1931-1956; Propaganda State in Crisis: Soviet Ideology, Indoctrination, and Terror under Stalin, 1927-1941; Epic Revisionism: Russian History and Literature as Stalinist Propaganda,
historiographies of the 1920s melded with a new unifying narrative of class struggle that sought to inculcate a strong sense of Soviet citizenship.

In approaching the shift in national historiographies in general and the historiography of the uprising of 1916 in particular, I propose to take seriously the terms employed by the participants of the debate. In their professional capacity, Soviet historians merged scholarly pursuits with political activism. Their attempts at establishing a definitive analysis of the uprising were driven equally by the political objectives and the revolutionary ethos of transformation while simultaneously trying to balance their personal beliefs with the demands of the central state. That history was highly politicized in the Soviet Union is hardly a secret. Yet, it also offered personal rewards to those who wrote it. By pointing to the historical injustices, the native communists like Abrakhmanov sought to improve the plight of their kinsmen; to the historians from the centre, history bore evidence to the progressiveness of the Soviet state, which had abandoned the imperial ways of its predecessor. That the scope of the debate widened and the personal stakes involved grew higher toward the closure of the second decade of Soviet power is a testament to its importance.

As “a mighty weapon of civic upbringing (grazhdanskoe vospitanie),” history served the practical purpose of institutionalizing new ways of thinking and creating the generation of “unwavering revolutionaries.” Similarly to the collectivization drive and the programme of rapid industrialization, the rewriting of national histories was a part of the state-sponsored campaign to strengthen domestic cohesion in the face of looming war. Although the war scare of 1927 did not materialize, war, in the Soviet leadership’s view, was a matter of time and preparation to war – a matter of survival. The need for the political consolidation of the vast and ethnically diverse country compelled the regime to look for the new universal language of mobilization. Soviet patriotism became such a language and history was its tool.

The notion of the native land, the “socialist fatherland,” whose “independence” was assured by the joint efforts of Soviet power and the “vast masses of workers and peasants,” was first spelled by Stalin in 1931. In his address to the best-performing industrial personnel of the country, Stalin expatiated on the new doctrine in unequivocal terms. “In the past,” Stalin explained, “we had no fatherland, nor could we have had one.

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18 According to Lowell Tillett, “because of the Bolshevik identification with the historical process, history is both more political and more vital than in other societies.” The Great Friendship, p.5
19 Pravda, 1930, quoted in David Brandenberger, National Bolshevism, p. 31
But now that we have overthrown capitalism and power is in our hands, in the hands of the people, we have a fatherland, and we will uphold its independence.”

The universalism of the socialist culture did not, however, mean the abrogation of korenizatsiia and Soviet nationalities policy in general. Instead, the Soviet Union would “develop the national culture of the peoples of the USSR, their national languages, schools, press, and so forth, on the basis of the Soviets,” and by so doing, “adapt” the national culture “to the interests and requirements of socialist, to the interests and requirements of the proletarian dictatorship, to the interests and requirements of the working people of all the nationalities” of the country. Indeed, as Stalin reasoned on the eve of the war with Nazi Germany, “combining a healthy, properly understood nationalism with proletarian internationalism” would most effectively rally the peoples of the Soviet Union to the defence of their socialist fatherland. As such, “proletarian internationalism should be grounded in such a nationalism in the individual countries…Between nationalism properly understood and proletarian internationalism there can be no contradictions.”

In essence, this “revolutionary patriotism” was a form of civic nationalism aimed at the solidarization of the population of the national republics with each other and the state in general. By combining the revolutionary rhetoric and the appeals to national sentiments, the Stalinist patriotism sought to mobilize the population for the purposes of defence of both the national and common, Soviet “fatherland.”

Soviet historians were given the task of harmonizing national historiographies and developing an image of the fatherland formed as the result of the historically determined, joint struggle of the peoples of the Soviet Union for class and national liberation. Merging class struggle with national struggle was not easy and demanded compromises and conscious omissions on the past of historians. Often, these omissions and compromises were made after active interference of the central government, which sought to correct and excise the ideologically inappropriate content of national historiographies. The example of Iusup Abdrakhmanov is particularly instructive in this respect.

Along with the content of national historiographies, the chronology of the development of “national liberation movements” had undergone significant changes.

22 Diary of Georgi Dimitrov, 1933-1949, p. 163. For a survey of Stalin’s thinking on “revolutionary patriotism,” see Erik Van Ree, The Political Thought of Joseph Stalin, p. 230-235
frame various national movements, including the uprising of 1916, in terms of class struggle, historians introduced the concept of class stratification into the history of pre-revolutionary Central Asia. Put simply, if class struggle was impossible without classes and the uprising of 1916 was a class struggle, then the native society had exhibited all signs of class divisions before the uprising and, by extension, the revolution. At the same time, because there were class divisions in the native society, kulaks and other “agents” of tsarism were joined by exploiters from among the local population. “The double oppression and plunder by the Tsarist government and the local national bourgeoisie… cleared the way for the development of peasant proletariat (obatrachivanie), impoverishment, and ruin of (native) households” according to Shestakov.23 Thus, “the native toiling masses, bukara (“this rabble,” or chern’ – black – in Abdrakhmanov’s translation)” owe their existence to the “class struggle among the Kirghiz.”24

Rather expectedly, the “national bourgeoisie” who role was evaluated in largely positive terms in the historiography of the first half of the 1920s could no longer be the leaders of the class uprising. In the wake of the “Great Turn,” it is the toiling native masses who become the driving force of both national and class movements. The class nature of the rebellion, contend Piotr Galuzo, Aleksei Shetakov, and Baialy Isakeev, was apparent in the social origins of the uprising’s participants, “the peasant and pastoralist masses and the toilers of the cities,”25 “the broad peasant masses of both the settled farmers and the nomads,”26 and the “the most active and progressive elements of the batrak (rural proletariat) poor groups of the population.”27

Similarly, class struggle also accounts for the “friendship of nations” between the Kyrgyz and Russian proletariat in the later historiography of the uprising, which was largely absent from the NEP-time historiography of national movements. The purging of ethnic conflict from national historiographies was perhaps the most difficult feat of conceptual juggling Soviet historians had to perform. As some of the following examples demonstrate, many historians were at pains to reconcile class with nation. Galuzo, for example, suggests that, on the eve of the uprising, “the line of struggle against all Russians shifted to struggle against all exploiters irrelevantly of their nationality.”28

of this shift, “in the Ferghana Valley, the area most advanced in terms of class divisions in the native population, the native peasants attacked primarily their own (native) administrators and only then the Russian officials.”

Shestakov, who in his 1926 article argued that nearly the entire population of the targeted Russian settlements was murdered by the rebels, had, by 1931, come to argue that the rebels “shot with cherry stones” rather than bullets and “as a rule, did not kill women or children, taking them captive instead.” He also points to “not a few cases” when Russian peasants taken captive joined or helped the rebels.

The selective forgetting of mutual acts violence was instrumental to projecting images and messages of unity and the sub-national Soviet identity. Three articles written by Iusup Abdrakhmanov provide a useful vantage point from which to examine the new model of inter-ethnic relations in the context of growing tensions with the outside world. The first article published in 1926 is a short, but dense polemical piece on the nature of the uprising, which Abdrakhmanov believes to be “national,” with “elements of class struggle,” but without true class content. He also discusses the role of Russians peasants (muzhiki), the “practical colonizers” (prakticheskie kolonizatory), whose interests coincided with those of tsarism.

Abdrakhmanov’s article was published on the occasion of the uprising’s fifteenth anniversary and reiterates the key positions of the first article. Abdrakhmanov continues to argue, for example, that the “uprising was nationalist,” because “first, it was directed against tsarism and assumed the character of an uprising against all Russians as the exploiting nation, and, second, because any revolutionary movement in backward countries,” where “peasantry is the driving force of the revolution, can only be the revolutionary movement of national liberation.”

In an odd pacing, Abdrakhmanov’s third article was published in September 1931, only a month after the publication of the second article. The introduction to the article, which informs the readers that “in connection with the decision of the Bureau of the Obkom of the VKP(b)” and “the Bolshevist criticism” of the previous article “comrade Abdrakhmanov” admits that he committed “grave political mistakes of nationalist nature,” makes it clear that the article was written under pressure. Among the mistakes admitted by Adbrrakhmanov are “pitting nation against nation, blurring the shared nature

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31 Ibid.
obshchnost’) of class interests of the toiling masses of Russian and Kirghiz peasantry, denying the possibility of their joint struggle against tsarism, imperialist bourgeoisie, kulaks, bais, manaps” etc.\(^{34}\) In lieu of the apparently outdated interpretation of the uprising of 1916, Abdrakhmanov offers a rather typical for the “friendship of nations” definition. “The national liberation nature the uprising of 1916,” according to repenting Abdrakhmanov, “follows…from the fact that it was a war of national liberation against the domination of the Russian military-feudal imperialism in Central Asia, which created here the system of the most barbarian and shameless exploitation and robbery, and delayed the economic, cultural, and political development of the peoples of Central Asia.”\(^{35}\)

Of particular interest is the neutralization of the ethnic identification of the colonial authorities. “Russian imperialism” loses its face and re-merges instead as an ethnically neutral political regime. The Russian peasant (muzhik) – the “practical colonizer” in Adbrakhmanov’s original definition – is replaced with the “kulak settler” of unclear nationality in the later works of Soviet historians. The loss of ethnic identity by the “exploiting nation” had helped Soviet historians to create images and models of cooperation and mutual aid between the Soviet peoples. In contrast to the canons of historiography of the uprising during the NEP period, the later historiography of 1916 emphasizes the class, not ethnic, nature of the conflict. In a 1932 article, Baialy Isakeev, a friend of Abdrakhmanov and his fellow official, draws attention to the selective nature of the rebels’ attacks. Rather than attacking all Russian settlers, “the rebels…struck the wealthy kulak dwellers (‘segments of the population’ in the original) of Russian villages.”\(^{36}\) Russian peasants and Kyrgyz pastoralists, similarly adds Abdrakhmanov, “were equally oppressed by tsarism, bourgeoisie, and kulaks without regard for nationality” and could be not enemies to each other.\(^{37}\)

Despite the ethnic neutrality of Russian settlers who were no longer presented as enemies, the range of potential enemies considerably widened, encompassing not only tsarism, bourgeoisie, and kulaks, but also – beginning with the collectivization campaign – bais and manaps, the wealthy exploiters of the Kyrgyz poor.\(^{38}\) In significant ways, the new historiography of the uprising cast the pre-revolutionary Kyrgyz elites in an even more malevolent light than kulaks and bourgeoisie. Not only did bais and manaps not

\(^{35}\) Ibid, p. 203.
\(^{36}\) Isakeev, Kirgizskoe vosstanie 1916 goda, p. 29
\(^{38}\) Zorin, Kirgizskai a ASSR. Moscow: Bor’ba klassov, 1936, № 8. p. 14.
share the class interests of the broad masses of the native population, but they also participated in the “advantages of colonial domination” and “played treacherous role” in the struggle for national liberation.\(^{39}\) In other words, the class enemy was simultaneously a national enemy.

Enemy images had a broad application in the Soviet official culture; they helped cultivate images of positive proletarian heroes. In the historiography of the uprising of 1916, enemy images in the persons of “Chinese, Kashgar, Mongol, and Uzbek khans and feudal lords, Russian tsarism and local manaps and bais” who for centuries exploited and abused the “long suffering Kirghiz people” were contrasted with the “union of Central Asian peasantry and Russian proletariat and peasantry.”\(^{40}\) Of significance in this example is the union of Russians and Kyrgyz united in struggle against class and national oppressors and exploiters.

On the other hand, it is clear that in this union, the native population of Central Asia and the uprising itself are given an important, but ultimately secondary, subordinate role. To cite Galuzo and late Abdrakhmanov, “the country of colonial slaves of Russian imperialism entered upon the revolutionary path,”\(^{41}\) but “the heroic struggle of the colonially dependent peoples of Central Asia, devoid of the united proletarian leadership, had the character of localized protests, and was, as the result, suppressed.”\(^{42}\)

The Soviet historiography of the uprising of the 1930s makes it clear that exclusively national struggle was doomed to failure without the class revolution. The ability of the native peoples of Central Asia and their republics to “independently handle the tasks of socialist construction” is nothing but an “illusion,” according to Mikhail Tsvibak.\(^{43}\) For “only in the closest bond with the all-Russian proletariat and its party, can the toiling masses of the former colony, organized by us into the national republics, follow the path of socialist construction.”\(^{44}\)

The uprising of 1916 succeeded because “it led, in its development, to the unification of the revolutionary forces of Russia and Central Asia.”\(^{45}\) Merging “into a single stream with the revolution in Russia and under the leadership of the latter,” the national movement “developed into the socialist revolution.”\(^{46}\) Furthermore, “the mass

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\(^{41}\) Ibid, p. 15.


\(^{43}\) Tsvibak, Klassovaia bor’ba v Turkestanie. Moscow: Istorik-marksist, 1929, № 11. p. 114

\(^{44}\) Ibid.


\(^{46}\) Ibid, p. 3.
protests of the toiling peasants (of the East) weakened the positions of imperialism, facilitated the resolution of the revolutionary tasks, and helped the Russian proletariat to successfully undertake the revolution.”\textsuperscript{47} Therefore, “the uprising of 1916 – the most grandiose uprising in the history of the peoples of Turkestan and Kazakhstan – was of great importance to the revolutionary movement in Russia in general.”\textsuperscript{48}

On the other hand, the Soviet historiography of the uprising of 1916 of the second decade of Soviet power strongly suggests that the Bolsheviks were the true saviours of the Kyrgyz for “only the October revolution, the overthrow of the dictatorship of bourgeoisie, and the installation of the dictatorship of proletariat saved the lives of the toiling Kirghiz.” Only the October revolution “solved those tasks that the uprising of 1916 had set of itself” and provided the proletarian guidance and leadership: “continuing their struggle…in the union with the Russian proletariat and under the guidance of the Bolshevik party, the workers and peasants of Central Asia overthrew the yoke of the Tsarist autocracy and Russian imperialism, and the local exploiting classes.”\textsuperscript{49}

The shift in the national historiography of the uprising of 1916 in the 1930s naturally entailed the loss of much of communal remembrance of the uprising of 1916. Elevated to the status of the central foundational myth of Soviet Kirghizia, the official commemoration of the native rebellion, or “the movement of national liberation” to use the Soviet definition, was revised more than once in accordance with the state-sanctioned dogmas of the friendship of nations. Yet, threads of communal remembrance of the uprising remained in unofficial, personal memories of those lived to witness and participated in the events.\textsuperscript{50} By highlighting inconsistencies and ruptures in the personal recollections of participants and witnesses of the uprising – collected, ironically, as a part of the continuing state-sponsored historiography of the uprising – I would like to both suggest that alternative interpretations and worldviews continued to exist alongside the official paradigm and to open avenues for the as yet poorly studied field of memory studies in Central Asia.

Although oral histories of the uprising were first collected already during the first decade of the Soviet rule, it was not until 1953 that a comprehensive effort was made to probe into the communal memories of the participants and witnesses of the uprising. This effort was a part of the series of conferences held in the five Central Asian capitals

\textsuperscript{47} Isakeev, Kirgizskoe vosstanie 1916 goda, p. 45.
\textsuperscript{48} Ryskulov, Leznaiia, Vostanie 1916 g. v Kirgizstane: Dokumenty i materialy, sobrannye L. V. Lesnoi. Moscow: Gosudarstvennoe natsional'no-ekonomicheskoe izdatel'stvo, 1937, p. 3.
\textsuperscript{49} Isakeev, Kirgizskoe vosstanie 1916 goda, p. 42, 37.
\textsuperscript{50} Sally Cummings argues that the cinema of the so-called Kyrgyz “wonder years” served as a vehicle of articulating the trauma experienced by the Kyrgyz during and after the uprising.
devoted to the study of the “character of national movements” between 1951 and 1954. The three-day conference in Frunze in 1953 was attended by approximately 250 leading Central Asian historians. The general tone was set by a noted historian from the centre, Anatoly Piaskovskii of the Institute of History in Moscow, who emphasized the progressiveness of Central Asia’s annexation and the mutual struggle of the toiling masses against Tsarism. This view was supported by Anna Zimma, a professor at the Kyrgyz State University, who added that the otherwise progressive revolt “was usurped in some places by feudal-clerical elements” and that “representatives of the exploiting aristocracy set the more backward elements of the native population against the Russian people, striving to kindle hatred between people,” but this could not diminish the growing friendship of the Kyrgyz and Russian peoples.

The conference proceedings were published later that year, but no mention was ever made of the extensive oral history research conducted for the conference. This sensitive data consists of 136 interviews conducted with elderly people who were survivors of the uprising, the majority of them Kyrgyz, in the six oblasts of Soviet Kyrgyzstan. The research project was clearly designed to address several contentious questions: the reasons for the uprising, its leadership, the economic situation of the ethnic Kyrgyz, the relationships between the Kyrgyz and the Russians, and the possible role in the uprising of the celebrated folk poet Toktogul. Of course, the seemingly arbitrary ban on the use and publication of these invaluable insights into the memory of the uprising is directly related to the controversies surrounding oral history research within the Soviet Union.

Certainly, some of the common threads that appear on a closer examination of the transcripts fall in line with the official historiography of the uprising. Among these, class rhetoric is probably the broadest denominator used by the interviewees in their evaluations of the uprising. Interestingly, while some of the interviewees are identified as working as hired labourers prior to the October Revolution, no information is given for any other interviewees concerning their class origins. A handful of interviewees had been long-term members of the Party and this is reflected in their recollections of the uprising, the rhetoric of which is well versed in the official Soviet language of class struggle. Jurabek Abdrasulov (b.1899), a party member since 1920, affirms that during the uprising “the people have divided into two groups – the rich and the poor.”

52 Ibid.
53 Ibid.
(b.1900), a party member since 1940, also intimates that “when the mobilization decree of the tsar Nicholas II was issued, there was widespread discontent with the politics of Tsarism and the local bais.” However, irrespective of their origins or party affiliation most interviewees mention the oppression of the Kyrgyz masses by bai-manaps. Others point to the unfairness of the conscription process, which aggravated a long-held discontent with the colonial administration’s policies and in part triggered the uprising. All interviewees discuss the violence of the colonial administration. Yet despite the wide use of the proletarian idiom, many interviewees approach the subject of interethnic relationships with caution and sometimes outright confusion.

This confusion is particularly salient in the accounts of the ethnic Russian interviewees. Fiodor Tkachenko (b.1890) echoes the conclusions of the Frunze conference; for him “the goal of the rioters was to get rid of the Russians as the colonizers, but bais and manaps worked together with the Russian officials.” However, his uneasiness with the official take on the uprising is obvious in his disagreement over the nature of the leadership; he states that “at the time, the poor could not be at the head of the uprising, (as) the tension was fuelled by the mullahs.” Reflecting on the economic divide between the native population and the settlers Anton Firern (b.1879) reminisces that “the Kyrgyz population bore all the hardships, while the Russians did not pay any taxes.” Yet despite the apparent unfairness of the arrangement and the fact that the Russian settlers who paid no tax were less likely to be poor than the Kyrgyz, he also states that “the Kyrgyz and Russian poor lived peacefully.” A fellow settler, Artiom Glushko (b.1876) recalls that “there were no poor among us; when we arrived here in 1897 we were all given 12 hectares of land… (we) were given this land for free.”

An even more contradictory account is given by Ostap Glushko (b.1885) who implicitly rejects the suggestion that the uprising was directed against the native aristocracy. He states that he does “not remember Kyrgyz killing their bais in 1916” and that “Russians were killed there (in Semirechye), but the Russian soldiers suppressed it, and our (Russian) people have been sleeping in a church for a while.”

In spite of the ethnic violence he stresses that the Russians and Kyrgyz “lived peacefully together and were not feuding with each other.” Similarly, Ivan Novikov contends that he did not “remember the national hostility, but the poor Kyrgyz did not like the poor Russians and even threatened them.” On the other hand, there is little confusion in the account of Dorofei Pechenenko (b.1884) who states bluntly that “the Kyrgyz massacred indiscriminately all Russians and burned down Russian villages: Chervakh, Beshnadal, Karakol, Blagodatnyi.”
Similar discomfort at trying to reconcile the Soviet vision of the progressive role of the Russian Empire in Central Asia emerges in the memories of the Kyrgyz respondents. A group of elderly collective farm workers in the Frunze oblast recalls that “until 1916 the Tsarist government was not unfair to the Kyrgyz.” Still, that the administration was anything but just towards the Kyrgyz becomes clear in the course of their interview, as they remark that “along the Aksu river, on its banks, in the west, on both sides of the Aksu mountains, at the foot of the mountains, where our cattle were grazing, the Russian kulaks built their castles. And other Russian kulaks also took away our lands, which they turned into the reserve fund, and if our animals grazed there, they took ransom for sheep and cows. During the 1914 war of Russians with Germans, only the poor (Kyrgyz) bore all the hardships.”

The antagonism inherent within Soviet historiography between the rich and the poor is equally problematized in many of the interviews. Momut Kabirov (b.1897) alleges that “bais, too, participated in the uprising, but the majority (of the rebels) were poor…the Kyrgyz and the Russians were feuding with each other.” Junush Borsukbaev (no date of birth provided) confirms that “the head of the rebellious Tynymseit tribe was Baizak, who was one of the biggest feudal lords of Tynymseit” and who “was regarded as a “national hero” by both the feudal lords and the poor.”

Given the way in which the conflicting versions of the past play out in the personal recollections of the interviewees, it is not surprising that it is in the stories of interethnic violence (or rather their suggestive absence) that the tension between the official history and communal memory becomes most apparent. Whilst in the majority of the interviews little is said of the violence, which is hinted at but rarely stated, those accounts that do tell of violence are particularly unforgiving of the Soviet interpretation of the uprising. Sharshebai Galiev (b.1894) recalls that “when night fell and Russian soldiers came, they robbed us, took whatever they liked,” and “violated Kyrgyz girls and young women.” Gendered violence also figures prominently in the account of A. Dobridneva (b.1903) who states that “on the day of uprising, the Kyrgyz killed all Russians they caught in field” and “took young Russian women away with them. Sazanovka was burned completely.” The story of another group of the elderly Kyrgyz from a collective farm in Frunze oblast highlights the powerlessness and dehumanization of the native population in the hands of the colonial authorities and the Russian settlers: “the Russian kulaks of Sarypul, Kara-Balta, Poltavka, Petrovka, Belovodsk, and especially Sosnovka robbed…and shot the Kyrgyz as if they [the Kyrgyz] were ducks.”
Conclusion

As this chapter demonstrated, the task of the Soviet historiography of national movements was to legitimize the October revolution, which it had clothed in “national garb” and positioned as at once both the continuation and the resolution of national struggle. The logical chain of “national struggle leading to class struggle leading to the national uprising leading to the proletarian revolution” implied a hierarchy of historical events, in which the October revolution occupied the central role. The growing concerns of the Bolshevik leadership with the hostile encirclement of the Soviet Union in the second half of 1920s and early 1930s led to a major ideological shift in national historiographies. Some of the more contentious moments of the uprising 1916, such as ethnic violence and the role of native elites in the rebellion, became subject to selective forgetting. At the same time, the continued existence of the communal memories of the uprising and the attendant ethnic and highly gendered violence suggests that the official historiography of the uprising was challenged at the grassroots level.
Conclusion

The central question that this thesis sought to answer, put most simply, is: how and why was the south-eastern corner of Central Asia, the area known in Kyrgyz and Kazakh as Jetysu and Russian as Semirechye, that is, “the region of seven rivers,” first conquered by the Russian empire and later reincorporated into the reconstituted Bolshevik Russia? By examining the relationship between the center and the periphery, this thesis sought to contribute to the current debates on colonialism and state formation. Organized around the cross-cutting themes of empire, state, nation, violence, and modernization, this thesis stressed the key proposition – that sovereign power, whether empire or nation, is predicated on the control of territory and population. In identifying control of territory and population as the foundation of state sovereignty, this thesis argued that Russia, Tsarist and Soviet alike, was a state actor whose actions were grounded in the pursuit of security. Similarly, this thesis built on the argument made by Peter Sahlins that state sovereignty is at once upheld and tested at the borders. Taking Semirechye as a case study this thesis highlighted the dynamic of state-building in the borderlands and revealed the critical continuities between the Tsarist and Soviet practices and ideas in governing the region.

Divided into three parts, each part addressing a different period in the modern history of Semirechye, this thesis examined the consolidation of Russia’s control over the region. The first part of this thesis investigated the emergence of Semirechye as the empire’s new frontier. It argued, in particular, that for the Tsarist policy makers, Semirechye’s importance derived from its frontier position and that its conquest should ultimately be seen as a part of the broader campaign of the imperial state to secure the empire’s borderlands from penetration by competing powers. The transition from conquest to governance saw the simultaneous integration of Semirechye into the empire’s political and military space and its exclusion from the empire’s civil order. I contended that the resulting ethnic segregation and inequality in status between the native population and European settlers was closely linked to the emergence of ethnicity as the normative basis of statehood. The privileging of the ethnically Slavic Russian-speaking population as the “core” nationality of the empire and the perceived need to further secure the ethnically different – and potentially hostile – periphery prompted the central authorities to resettle the region with the peasants of the “ruling nationality.”

54 Sahlins, Boundaries: The making of France and Spain in the Pyrenees.
Inevitably, the agricultural colonization of the region led to conflicts between settlers and the native pastoralists whose land was seized for resettlement. World War I had put further strain on the native population of the region. The attempt of the metropole to draw on the human resources of the colony by mobilizing the native male population into labour battalions proved nearly fatal for the colonial rule in Semirechye, where the nomadic Kyrgyz and Kazakhs launched a series of surprise attacks on European settlements. The second part of the thesis thus focused on the uprising of 1916 and its aftermath. Questioning the established view that the rebels sought to settle scores with colonists for the injustices of colonial rule, this thesis discussed both the broader social and material conditions of the uprising and the local and contingent factors that precipitated the conflict. Substantively, this thesis traced the continuous dynamic interaction between the rebels and the settlers as well as the punitive expeditions mounted by the colonial administration and has shown that each side to the conflict came to perceive the other as an existential threat in the course of violent clashes. Mutual fear then prompted the rebels and the settlers alike to seek destruction and dispossession of the rival group.

Like the settlers, the colonial authorities, too, were motivated by what they saw as a threat to the “Russian enterprise,” to quote the military governor of Semirechye, Mikhail Fol’baum. The plans of the government to resettle the remaining nomads in the geographically isolated and resource poor uezd of Naryn reflected these fears. The native rebellion in the distant colony engendered the long-standing concerns among the Russian statesmen and colonial administrators about the ability of the metropole to maintain power in the borderlands. The solution, developed by the Governor General of Turkestan, Alexander Kuropatkin, envisioned the creation of ethnically distinct territorial units and complete segregation of the settler and native population. Intended in part as a punishment, these measures were also employed by the authorities as a part of the colonial state-making. The reallocation of prime land to militarized Cossack settlements and the removal and concentration of the suspect nomadic population in the area amenable to containment and control were the means with which the government sought to maintain and enforce state security.

The third chapter of the thesis examined the aftermath of the uprising, which bled into the civil war in the wake of the two revolutions in the metropole. It found that the experiences of the local communities on both sides of the ethnic divide determined the distinctive contours of the conflict in the colony and that the patterns of ethnic antagonism established during the uprising continued and increased as competition for resources
intensified. Similarly, this chapter concluded that despite the disintegration of the central state, power remained in the hands of the colonial administration and the settlers, who sought to preserve the status quo and bolster the presence of the colonial state by mobilizing the human and natural resources of the colony. The mobilization of the settlers armed by the colonial administration during the uprising proved instrumental to the reconquest of Semirechye by the Bolsheviks, who were able to exploit the land hunger in the settler society and direct the majority of the settlers against a small group of primarily Cossack landowners and the native population.

At the same time, the mobilization of the native population in the face of the growing pressure from the settler society led to the consolidation of collective identity. The primary distinction between the native pastoralists and European farmers crystallized into a stronger identification of the former with a distinct territorial, social, and ethnic entity. It is this corporate sense of solidarity—explicit in the demands made by both the civil-war and Soviet native elites for territorial autonomy and greater political representation—that was critical to the emergence of the ethnic Kirghiz autonomy examined in the third and final part of the thesis. Focusing on the state-building efforts of the Soviet regime in Semirechye the concluding chapters of the thesis analyzed the policies targeted at incorporating the region more firmly into the Soviet state, increasing agricultural output, and creating loyal citizens.

The fourth chapter of the thesis looked at the campaigns of land and water reforms and national delimitation to argue that the redistribution of land and political development along ethno-territorial lines helped the regime attract considerable support among the native population and consolidate the political boundaries of the state. While the fourth chapter examined some of the productive aspects of the Soviet state-building project, the fifth chapter explored its more repressive policies, including the campaign of regionalization, which concentrated the prime agricultural land in the hands of the grain-growing European minority, and the collectivization campaign, which led to the destruction of the native pastoralist economy. Both of these, this chapter argued, were implemented to secure and increase the production of grain and reorient the native population to grain cultivation for the purposes of national defence.

Finally, the sixth chapter examined the Soviet historiography of the uprising of 1916 in the first half of the 1920s and the shifts in its representation throughout the 1930s to explore the larger issues of the relationship between politics, the uses of history, and the construction of identity. This thesis argued that the Soviet historiography of the uprising of 1916 was an integrative mechanism that combined class loyalties to the self-
proclaimed workers’ and peasants’ state with the loyalties to an ethnic group and a political territory.

Beyond the discussion of the vagaries of state-building in Central Asia, this thesis sought to contribute to the broader debate about the nature of state power in the colonial context. Following Marco Buttino’s proposal to treat famine as a political tool, this thesis revealed a nexus of state building with control of resources. In the colonial context, this nexus assumed a particularly malicious nature as the central government stripped the native population of resources necessary for the extension of state authority over the colony and the conduct of war. In Semirechye, the state authorities first of Imperial and later Soviet Russia sought to accumulate resources by dispossessing, expropriating, and displacing the native nomads. The seizure of agricultural land from the indigenous nomads by officials of the colonial Resettlement Administration made possible the large-scale colonization of the region and paved the way for conversion of the former pasturelands into grain-producing areas. Similarly, the collectivization and forced settlement of nomads allowed the authorities to extract resources from the native population, convert the remaining arable land into grain production, and forcibly transfer the native labour freed in the process from stock breeding to grain cultivation. At the same time, the land reforms of 1921-1922, widely heralded as the comprehensive decolonization of the land and water relations in Semirechye, had in fact preserved the existing asymmetry in land ownership.

This thesis has also sought to provide a corrective to the theories of Soviet nationalities policies developed by scholars such as Terry Martin, Francine Hirsch, Adeeb Khalid and others. While agreeing with the general proposition that Soviet nation-building was employed by the Bolshevik regime to recruit and mobilize the native population for the purposes of the building of socialism, I attributed the “affirmative action” principles of Soviet nationalities policy to the instrumental imperatives of the young Soviet state rather than the ideological maxims of Marxism-Leninism. In so doing, I drew on the recent studies of transnational history of frontiers by Alfred Rieber, Michael Reynolds, Dominic Lieven and many others, to argue that the Bolshevik leadership sought to foster national identities within the framework – and the political boundaries –

of the Soviet state as a means of constructing a protective “rim” of Soviet nations around the country’s industrial, political, and ethnic “core” of European Russia.57

This suggestion carries in turn broad implications for further discussion of Soviet nation-building in the region. By arguing that the primary motivation of the state-led national construction was the survival of the Soviet state I likewise contended that the Bolshevik nationalities policy ought to be regarded as a strategy of extending control over the territory and the population of Semirechye. Consolidation of state power, rather than ethnic or class equality, ostensibly espoused by the Bolshevik leadership, guided the implementation of the policies of nativization (korenizatsiia), and border delimitation.

In referring to the Soviet nationalities policy as a tool of asserting control, I, once again, departed from a commonly held view, first proposed by Adeeb Khalid, that the developmentalist and ethnically inclusive ethos of the Soviet project was radically different from the colonial organization of power, which enforced the political, cultural, and material cleavages, or “distance” as Adeeb Khalid puts, it, separating the rulers and the ruled.58 Instead, this thesis argued that the Soviet policy of ethno-territorial resettlement, known as regionalization, was compatible with the logic and principles of the colonial resettlement under the Tsarist administration. The resulting ethno-territorial division of the republic reproduced, in every practical sense, the colonial policies of racial segregation; it justified and institutionalized the existing socio-spatial inequalities and concentrated the economic, political, and cultural capital in the hands of the settler population to the exclusion and marginalization of the native population. In effect, the creation of self-administered minority ethno-territorial units served to insulate and protect the privileges of the European minority, while simultaneously putting a check on the political and economic demands and ambitions of the native majority.

At the same time, this thesis found common ground with historians of the Soviet nationalities policies, including Adeeb Khalid and Terry Martin, in arguing that the Bolshevik project of comprehensive transformation brought the welfare of the non-Russian peoples of the former Tsarist empire to the forefront. In this respect, the Soviet approach to governing and managing the ethnically diverse populations of the borderlands was radically different from that of the Tsarist Russia. Seeking to expand the social support basis in the ethnically “alien” regions and consolidate the Soviet state in the national peripheries, the Soviet leaders promoted the more inclusive notions of state

57 Alfred J Rieber, Stalin and the Struggle for Supremacy in Eurasia (Cambridge University Press, 2015); Reynolds; Dominic Lieven, Empire: The Russian empire and its rivals (Yale University Press, 2002).

loyalty, fostered civic identification with the union state, and encouraged economic growth in the border regions. Furthermore, in contrast to the colonial administration, the Soviet leadership did not strive to simply replace the native peoples of the borderlands – whose loyalties were suspect – with the presumably loyal Russian population, but sought instead to cultivate these loyalties among the native peoples. By the same token, the recruitment and socialization of the indigenous elites within the framework of the *korenizatsiia* campaign eliminated the need for local notables, who acted as intermediaries between the state and the native peoples, and allowed the fledgling regime to legitimize its state-building project in the borderlands. In significant ways, as this thesis aimed to show, the Bolshevik programme of socio-economic development and modernization of the region owed as much to the emancipatory ethos of the Soviet project of transformation as to the more pragmatic agenda of providing external security of the state through the maintenance of domestic stability.

Building on the suggestion that the Bolshevik leadership sought the creation of an assertive state, capable of mobilizing the population and resources necessary to impose and maintain the territorial integrity and sovereignty of the Soviet state, this thesis also argued that the state carefully measured and sponsored the participation of the native peoples in the state-building project to the extent that it permitted the cultivation of productive population and allowed the central state to extract labour and natural resources of the national republics without encountering heightened resistance. This was accomplished through the cultivation of new collective political identities with the purpose of inculcating loyalty to the state. To canvass the production of these identities I examined the Soviet historiography of the uprising of 1916. I argued that the uprising of 1916 was critical to the formulation of the distinctly ethnic Kyrgyz identity and served, at the same time, to bolster the legitimacy of the Soviet government in the region. Thus, the historiography of the uprising performed three valuable functions: first, by grounding ethnic identities in the imagined, to use Benedict Anderson’s term, experience of participation in the October revolution through the actual participation in the uprising of 1916, Soviet historians embedded the particularistic ethnic Kyrgyz identity within the universalist collective Soviet identity; second, commemoration of the uprising of 1916 as a part of the wider revolutionary movement that culminated in the October revolution of 1917 had rendered the Soviet re-conquest of Semirechye in more legitimate accommodationist terms; and finally, like political and geographic borders, territorially circumscribed ethnic loyalties ensured the survival of the young Soviet state in potentially hostile surroundings.
By focusing on the production of political loyalties this thesis also revealed the importance of population to state-building. Both the Tsarist and the Soviet leadership viewed creation of a productive and loyal population as critical to securing and “building” the state in the country’s borderlands. It is with this purpose that the colonial government funnelled millions of Russian peasants to the colony. Similarly, despite their anti-colonial rhetoric, the Bolshevik policy makers engaged in the deliberate population transfers; in the course of the Soviet reconstruction of the region, Soviet Kirghizia attracted more military, refugees, colonists, and civil specialists than before the revolution. The growing European population of the region physically connected the Central Asian borderland with Moscow and served as a conduit of the centre’s ideas and policies.

To conclude, the purpose of this thesis has been, to quote Theodore Weeks, to examine “what the incorporation of the non-Russian periphery shows us about the nature of the Soviet state.” As a study of the relationship between imperial power and the nomadic herders of Semirechye, this thesis contributed to the burgeoning scholarship in the wake of “imperial turn,” that is, the study of social and political histories of non-Russian peoples and the complex interactions between the centre and the periphery.” In analysing the “configurations of territory, populations, and power” in the colonial context, this thesis illuminated the centrality of borderlands to the formulations of sovereignty. Similarly, this thesis has also revealed the intersection of imperial and spatial histories of the Central Asian borderlands. At the same time, by examining the continuities between the colonial and Soviet mechanisms of controlling population and spaces, this thesis has demonstrated that empire and nation-state are neither mutually exclusive nor radically different. Indeed, both are essentially forms of statehood that shared structures and practices of managing cultural and ethnic diversity. The Soviet Union was simultaneously an empire in that it was a highly centralized state exercising power over ethnically diverse peripheries and a sum of nation-states, though with severely limited sovereignty.

59 Weeks, ”Nationality, Empire, and Politics in the Russian Empire and USSR: An Overview of Recent Publications.”
60 Michael David-Fox, Peter Holquist, and Alexander M Martin, ”The Imperial Turn,” *Kritika: Explorations in Russian and Eurasian History*, 7, no. 4 (2006).
61 Baron, ”New spatial histories of twentieth century Russia and the Soviet Union: Surveying the landscape.”
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