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Zholdybalin R.M. *

¹PhD Candidate, Nazarbayev University, Kazakhstan, Astana,

E-mail: rustem.zholdybalin@nu.edu.kz

ORIGINS OF THE KAZAKH NATION-BUILDING PROJECT: A THEORETICAL PROBLEM

Abstract

With the transition from Soviet Marxist interpretations to internationally recognized approaches in Kazakh historical studies, there is an increasing need to reassess key historical issues through new theoretical lenses, such as the nation-building process in pre-Soviet Kazakhstan. While many recent studies draw on Benedict Anderson's concept of nationalism, which emphasizes the role of print capitalism in shaping national identity, its relevance to the Kazakh context remains debatable. This paper revisits foundational questions about the origins of Kazakh nationalism by re-evaluating both classical and lesser-known theories of nationalism. The goal is to assess how each theoretical framework explains the unique historical trajectory of Kazakh national identity formation. The paper's originality lies in its systematic application of classical theories to a non-Western case, offering deeper insight into the emergence of Kazakh nationalism. By doing so, it highlights the complexities of nationalist movements shaped by both colonial influences and internal socio-political transformations.

Keywords: nation-building, national identity, national idea, historical memory, national code

Жолдыбалин Р.М. *

¹PhD кандидат, Назарбаев Университеті, Қазақстан, Астана,

E-mail: rustem.zholdybalin@nu.edu.kz

ҚАЗАҚ ҰЛТ ҚҰРЫЛЫСЫ ЖОБАСЫНЫҢ БАСТАУЫ: ТЕОРИЯЛЫҚ МӘСЕЛЕ

Аңдатпа

Кеңестік марксистік көзқарастардан халықаралық деңгейде танылған заманауи әдіснамаға көшу барысында қазақ тарихын зерттеу саласында маңызды бетбұрыс байқалуда. Осы өзгерістер аясында қазақ тарихындағы өзекті мәселелерді жаңа теориялық шеңберлерде қайта қарастыру қажеттілігі күн өткен сайын артып келеді. Сол күрделі мәселелердің бірі — кеңеске дейінгі дәуірдегі қазақ ұлтын қалыптастыру үдерісі. Соңғы жылдары жарық көрген көптеген зерттеулер Бенедикт Андерсонның ұлтшылдық жөніндегі танымал тұжырымдамасын сын көзбен қарастырмастан қолданады. Бұл тұжырымдамада баспасөздің ұлт қалыптастырудағы рөлі ерекше атап көрсетіледі. Алайда, бұл идеялардың қазақ шындығына сәйкес келуі күмән туғызады. Бұл ғылыми мақалада қазақ ұлтшылдығының тарихи бастауларына қатысты іргелі сауалдарды қайта қарастырып, классикалық әрі кең таралмаған теорияларды саралау арқылы олардың қазақ контекстіне қаншалықты сай келетінін анықтау көзделеді. Зерттеудің бірегейлігі — ұлтшылдық туралы классикалық тұжырымдарды қазақ тарихи болмысымен ұштастырып, ұлттық бірегейліктің терең әрі көпқырлы табиғатын ашып көрсетуінде. Теориялық тұрғыдан байытылған бұл еңбек отарлық қысым мен ішкі өзгерістерге жауап ретінде пайда болған қазақ ұлтшылдығының күрделі сипатын жан-жақты сипаттап береді.

Кілт сөздер: ұлттық құрылыс, ұлттық бірегейлік, ұлттық идея, тарихи жады, ұлттық код

Жолдыбалін Р. М. *

¹кандидат PhD, Назарбаев Университет, Қазақстан, Астана,
e-mail: rustem.zholdybalin@nu.edu.kz

ИСТОКИ КАЗАХСКОГО ПРОЕКТА НАЦИЕСТРОИТЕЛЬСТВА: ТЕОРЕТИЧЕСКАЯ ПРОБЛЕМА

Аннотация

С переходом от советских марксистских взглядов к международно признанным подходам в изучении истории Казахстана растет потребность в переоценке исторических проблем в новых рамках. Одним из ключевых вопросов является процесс национального строительства в дореволюционном Казахстане. Во многих недавних исследованиях некритично применяется концепция национализма Бенедикта Андерсона, в которой подчеркивается роль печатных СМИ в национальном развитии. Однако уместность слепого применения данной концепции в казахстанском контексте вызывает вопросы. Целью данной статьи является пересмотр основополагающих вопросов об истоках казахского национализма путем переоценки как классических, так и менее признанных теорий национализма, чтобы определить, как каждый теоретический подход применим к этой исторической проблеме. Новизна статьи заключается в тщательном применении классических теорий национализма к казахстанскому контексту, что обогащает наше понимание формирования казахской национальной идентичности. Объединяя эти теоретические основы, исследование дает всестороннее представление о том, как возник и эволюционировал ранний казахский национализм, отражая сложности незападного национального движения в ответ на колониальные вызовы и внутренние преобразования.

Ключевые слова: национальное строительство, национальная идентичность, национальная идея, историческая память, национальный код

Introduction. Academic and official discourses asserted that before the arrival of “civilized” Russians the Steppe had no installed statehood, no borders, and no developed sedentary culture. The renowned first-ever Kazakh intellectual, Shoqan Walikhanov, partially shared these discourses with his kinsmen. A man of double allegiance toward the Empire and the Kazakh people, he started challenging these discourses by revealing the richness of Kazakh culture and heroic past. The sudden death of a promising scholar put a major setback to the upcoming declaration of the voice of others, i.e. colonial Kazakhs, on their views on their past, for decades. Upon the revival of the trend, the newborn Kazakh intelligentsia challenged imperial notions of the Kazakh past, as one that had no significance, like ancient cultural and political tradition. The other notion – of the land inhabited “historically” by nomads – was the most sensitive issue for Kazakhs and a vital part of intelligentsia’s nation imagining projects before and after the Revolution. This way, the native intelligentsia played a key role in creating a new identity within the challenges of colonial rule of the crumbling Russian Empire of the early 20th century.

The question is, which theories of nationalism most closely describe the historical development of the Kazakh intelligentsia and the project of Kazakh nation-building at its early stages? This paper aims to analyze the historical development of the Kazakh intelligentsia through the lens of prominent nationalism theories, providing a comprehensive understanding of their national consciousness and political dynamics. I seek the ways the nation is constructed; the literature review of the theory of nationalism contains a rigorous list of different views toward the nation’s origins, focusing on those who highly regarded intelligentsia rather than over-relying on an economic basis in a Marxist way.

I begin with Miroslav Hroch's concept of the development of small nations, which helps to understand how the native intelligentsia, emerging from diverse social backgrounds, challenged colonial and traditional authorities in their quest for national identity. While it is challenging to justify the rise of capitalism in the Kazakh steppe as a precondition for national awakening, I find Hroch's definitions of the intelligentsia (as well as its typology) and patriotism suitable for the study of Kazakh nation-building. He illustrates the periodization of national development in three stages, which I rely on. Next, Eric Hobsbawm represents partly a historiographic attitude toward nationalism: the first chapter of *Nations and Nationalism* is an overview of the classical liberal theory of nationalism, i.e. is a piece of intellectual history, while the following chapters combine the intellectual development of nationalism with its contextualization. What is even more valuable for my study, is that this historiography deals with the ideas that early Kazakh nationalists could get acquainted directly or, more possibly, in a version refined by Russian publicists. Anderson's classical study on nationalism is mostly concentrated on the phenomenon of print capitalism, which disregards the early stages of Kazakh intelligentsia; we could argue, however, that the official news media of the colonial administration was the milieu of development for the early Kazakh publicists.

Ernest Gellner emphasizes the interplay between high culture and political organization. Anthony Smith's approach to national mythology and the role of the native intelligentsia in reconstructing a nation's past illustrates how Kazakh intellectuals engaged in myth-making to assert their historical and cultural legitimacy. Partha Chatterjee's work on anti-colonial nationalism is most valuable for establishing three stages of nationalist thought. Finally, Armstrong's concept contributes to the discussion by the notion of nomadic and sedentary cultures as different in their nature of nostalgia and development of nascent identity.

Methodology. The paper explores the applicability of various theoretical concepts of nationalism to the problem of Kazakh nation-building in the early 20th century. The exploration went through three stages: first, we review the key theoretical concepts in the scholarly literature on nationalism. Second, we point to the concepts of nation-building in the history of the Kazakh national movement that they assist in addressing. Third, we show how certain concepts may be tackled and used in the exploration of Kazakh nation-building. This approach provides a theoretical foundation for a more nuanced research of nationalism within the Kazakh context.

The analysis itself consists of historical and historiographical methods. The sources for the study are classical and (and more obscure) theoretical works on nationalism.

Discussion. International scholarship applied classic theories of nationalism, such as Anderson's and Hroch's, toward the problem of imagining the nation through the development of ethnic media and the appearance of national intelligentsia [1; 2; 3]. These studies were brave attempts to scope the mystic history of the pre-revolutionary Kazakh national foundation within the internationally recognized academia, contrary to outdated Marxist narratives of Kazakh historiography. However, that was also an application of the theoretical models, presumably designed for studying the development of national movements in the Western world, and overlooked some of the local nuances. Therefore, academic theories on nationalism must be reassessed to better understand how they apply to local contexts.

Generally, the scholarship accepted the idea that Kazakh intelligentsia played a key role in the development of the national identity via their activities as intermediaries between the empire and their people [4; 5]. Most studies tie the nation-building process with Soviet national politics [6; 7; 8]. On the other hand, Dina A. Amanzholova states that this process was interconnected, with the Soviet nation-building project in Kazakhstan inheriting the narratives of the Alash movement in their vision of the nation [9]. Others find the rich influence of Tatar intermediaries in developing the native political tradition [10; 11], or expose the diverse nature of Kazakh intelligentsia's education and influences [12]. Overall, the Russian imperial legacy is assumed as the main base for the development of the modern national identity among Kazakhs, assuming the key role that Western education played in nurturing the intellectual elite of the future Alash movement [3; 13]. Some historians search for

the roots of Kazakh identity in the pre-modern feudal statehood and the nomadic clan system [14; 15]. Recent studies, however, come back to claim the birth of Kazakh national identity not earlier than during the implementation of the Soviet nation-building project in the 1920s [16].

A central focus of local historiography on Kazakh nation-building is the Alash movement, which represents a significant chapter in the struggle for Kazakh autonomy. Scholars expose the local historiography's tendency to build the history of the early 20th century around Alash, particularly its Qazaq newspaper editorial board. They show that Andersonian fashion in the studies of Kazakh nationalism is quite confusing, because Qazaq, in its heyday, reached just 3,000 copies, which could hardly imagine a nation out of up to 6 million Kazakh population. They claim that there was a competition of ideas on how to reorganize the social life of Kazakhs, and the modernist vision of Alash intellectuals prevailed in 1917 due to its compatibility with the post-February autonomist agenda. Recent studies question the impact of ethnic news media on the forging of national identity and emphasize the twofold nature of the colonial intermediaries [17].

My paper aims to delve into classic and contemporary theoretical literature on nationalism, to draw a theoretical framework for the studies of Kazakh nationalism, and to identify, which theories and concepts are most suitable for the explanation of the phenomenon of the Kazakh nation-building project at its beginning.

National Consciousness. The most relevant theory to the study of the development of the early Kazakh national idea is Miroslav Hroch's concept of the development of small nations, as contrary to 'bigger' nations that often created colonial empires. According to the author, the nation is made of people's consciousness, their ideology (nationalism), their will, and their spirit in a Herderian sense [18, p. 3]. A nation is a constituent of the social reality of historical origin (the changes during the transition from the feudal society of estates to the capitalist society of citizens), rooted in fundamental reality. In the case of Kazakh nationalism, this transition is depictable in the critique of both the colonial oppression and the backwardness of the native social reality; thus, the intelligentsia was challenging both colonial and traditional authority. Originated from all layers of society (but mostly with exclusive access to advanced education, whether in Russian or higher Islamic schools), it represents the 'third estate', which in the Kazakh context could be correlated with the vast majority of impoverished and underrepresented nomadic masses, and acts on behalf of it. Oppressed nationalities had two or more alternatives during the capitalist transformation, and by choosing the national movement, they faced the resistance of the ruling nations (for whom the transformation was a natural process) [18, pp. 8-10]. In the first stage of national development, intellectuals show a scholarly interest in the native culture, following the example (and often challenging the approach) of the imperial ethnographers. At this stage, they are isolated, which we see in the examples of the first generation of Kazakh intelligentsia (Valikhanov, Altynsarin, Abai, or lesser-famed Babajanov, Zhangir Khan, and Shormanov); the source of their activities is the affection for region and cognition [18, p. 22]. The next, vital, stage is the patriotic agitation, which ferments national consciousness; this stage is manifested in the famous Dulatov's poem "Awake, Qazaq!", which became a slogan of the patriotic movement. The scholarly research expanded and became both national and scientific; bombarded by both their own and ruling national ideologies, the audience obtains an indivisible unity with objective relations between members of the nation as a result of the activism of patriotic (i.e. spreading national ideas) agitation [18, p. 13]. In the latter stage of a national movement, the masses react to patriotic impulses and organize a movement over the territory: this is an early-born and thus tragic story of Alash Orda. Notably, Hroch describes intelligentsia as a group of educated members of society living by intellectual labor, divided into elite, emancipated, and wage-labor layers [18, p. 16].

Proto-Nationalism and Language Nationalism. Eric Hobsbawm sees nations as ones created by nationalism, which is a congruency of a political and a national (in Gellnerian definition). He places *proto-nationalism*, a sentiment of collective belonging around either living spaces or the mindset of state/institution-linked groups, in political elites. That concept applies to the part of the early Kazakh intelligentsia that collaborated with the colonial administration and had little concern over the big, i.e. national, community in general, but who are placed anachronically in nationalism by the historiography.

Hobsbawm's theory also traces the evolution of the concept of the nation as a result of political inertia, like the acceptance of language as an "objective" indication of nationality that converted the census into the contest of nationalities, or the inclusion of social agenda into nationalist rhetoric as a result of social developments of the early 20th century [19, pp. 100-102]. In the period preceding the Great War, nationalism transformed by accepting the rights of people's self-determination, rising to prominence of ethnicity and language, and shifting the political rights of nation and flag [19, p. 102]. The factor accelerating national determination was the social developments: a combination of social and national demands was more effective than a single nationalist appeal [19, p. 125]. That explains volumes of Alash's determination to provide social changes.

Liberal bourgeois theory of the nation classified people as a nation by having a historic association with the state, a cultural elite with a "national language", and a capacity for conquest [19, pp. 37-38]. These notions would approve the interest of Kazakh nationalists in history. Pointing out that "nation" is a modern term and was used, the same as "language" and "state", in a different manner until recently, Hobsbawm brings the example of the term developing shown in Hungary. That put forth questions for the scholars, such as what resembling terms early 20th-century Kazakh literati used and how these words evolved in comparison to older times/ which words with similar references they replaced.

Russification and Colonial Pilgrimage. Benedict Anderson explains the nation as a political, limited, sovereign community imagined by the masses [20, pp. 6-7]. The causes for this imagining were print capitalism, colonial provincialism and pilgrimages to metropolises, new national print languages emerged, and the "Russification" processes. Like the last one, imperial enterprises, like census, map making, and archaeological endeavors, helped in national determination too.

Anderson points out the differences between pre-national communities and nations; the conceptions of "messianic" and "empty" time fit into my notion of the construction of the historical narratives by Kazakh intellectuals as a part of their "patriotic" (devotedly engaging in the spread of national consciousness) activities. The decline of both religious communities and the dynastic realm also could fit the argument on prerequisites of the national formation of Kazakhs in the 20th century. Imagining flowers in two forms – newspapers and novels; there are plenty of studies on Alash literature and journalism in local scholarship that await the theoretical re-legitimation via *Imagined Communities*. As the author states, the novel's actors are being embedded in "societies" and in the minds of readers, playing at once. Newspaper imaginarily links the plots, which derives from calendrical coincidence and the relationship between the newspaper and the market. Unlike other products, a book is a unique, self-sufficient item that is duplicated on a grand scale [20, p. 34], while the newspaper is a radical form of book printing by its scale, which became a ritual for the masses.

The author pays big attention to the role of vernaculars in developing new types of communities. Print languages played a significant role in shaping national consciousness by creating unified fields of exchange and communication between sacred and spoken languages. This helped readers become more aware of the limitations and scope of various languages. Additionally, the process of printing brought a new level of stability to languages, fostering a sense of historical continuity and tradition. Furthermore, print languages established new forms of communication that differed from older administrative dialects, emphasizing dialects that were more closely aligned with the printed text.

National movements pirated the blueprints of nationalism created by the French and American revolutions. As a response to the threat of exclusion in newborn nations, the power groups adapted popular nationalism into the conservative policy of "official nationalism". Both ideas are applicable in my study from a point of view that Kazakh intelligentsia appear as students in Russian and Tatar organizations, those potentially adopting notions of nation from abroad, and from a stance that many intellectuals would either try to create the national state or participate in Bolshevik project of nation-building. Therefore, they probably tried to replicate "official nationalism" as a program of obtaining legitimacy in this part of the crumbling Empire.

The growth of administrative changes within imperial realms happened due to technological progress, the conscription of bilingual colonized peoples into administration, and the spread of

modern education. Because of the expansion of the state and capitalism, bilingual native intelligentsia, unattached to the bourgeoisie, appears [20, pp. 115-116, 140]. Another source for the consolidation of the intelligentsia is the colonial education and bureaucratic systems: there is a chance, therefore, that the Alash movement is a product of lone individuals with similar ideas gathering in some imperial place like Orenburg. Finally, Anderson inspires us to study the notions of census and mapmakers on what Kazakh is and where its ethnic realms are; Bokeikhan, e.g., was part of such expeditions.

Emerging High Culture and Scripturalist Revisionism. While Anderson speaks extensively on different types of nations, I mostly take his notions of those created in colonial realms and those classified as ethnically monolithic. Ernest Gellner, in contrast, simplifies the typology of nationalism into three categories based on power dynamics, access to education, and shared culture: Habsburg, Eastern, and Diaspora. The first two arguably fit particularly to the Kazakh nationalism. Gellner views nationalism as based on the fusion of culture and polity, and parasitic in terms of state and nation [21, pp. 6-11], with the latter being a product of industrialism and early capitalism. He focuses on social and economic preconditions for the emergence of the nation. In an agrarian society, the culture was defined either horizontally – by class, or vertically – to form small communities; the high culture was a monopoly of clerisy, but then started to pervade the whole of society.

While the author supports Anderson's notion of print capitalism as a key factor in imagining a community, he gives a central role to the division of labor in industrial society, which arises from the need for constant cognitive and economic growth and enforces the rise of educational systems that replaced the tiny stratum of educators. Modern society is homogenized via education, making culture transmitted via schooling instead of folk tradition and thus replacing kinship linkage with a new mass consciousness [21, pp. 32-36]. This huge task becomes a monopoly of the state, stabilizing the state-culture bond; the newly dominant high culture is reliant on state protection. This vision of nationalism as a crystallizer of a nation out of older cultures predetermines the studying of a national movement in a bond with the autonomist aspirations of Alash and their Bolshevik counterparts. Gellner promotes the Renanian definition of a nation as one willing to persist as a community. Nation worships itself via symbols borrowed from the folk culture. New units such as nations emerge via principles of *barriers to communication* and *inhibitors of social entropy*. At the early stage of crystallization, previously low cultures are being transmuted into literate high ones. At the late stage, social discontent/differentiation uses cultural differentiation to create new barriers.

Gellner's framework is particularly relevant to the Islamic world, offering an alternative source of inspiration for Kazakh nationalism beyond Russian colonial influences. His observation about how Islam uses a pre-industrial clerical tradition as a national and socially pervasive idiom could provide valuable insights for the Alash movement. Specifically, he notes that while Islamic nationalism employs an existing religious tradition for national identity, many nationalisms in sub-Saharan Africa represent a different approach. These African nationalisms often do not perpetuate or create a local high culture due to the rarity of indigenous literacy, nor do they elevate traditional folk cultures into politically sanctioned literate cultures, as seen in European contexts. Instead, they frequently adopt an alien European high culture [21, p. 81].

Myth-Creating. Anthony D. Smith examines how ethnicity affects the process of nation-building. He characterizes ethnic communities as groups united by common ancestral myths, shared historical experiences, and cultural traits, with a bond to a specific territory and a sense of collective identity [22, p. 32]. Another important definition is ethnicism - a collective movement of ethnic resistance and cultural restoration with an active sense of ethnocentrism. It appears with a double threat of internal division and external challenges to the community, including military, socio-economic challenges, and cultural contact. Ethnic consists of six components: a common myth of descent, a shared history, a distinctive shared culture, an association with a specific territory, and a sense of solidarity. The bases of ethnic formation could be sedentarization, organized religion, and warfare.

Myth-symbol complexes (consisting of myth, symbols, and memories) stand at the center of every ethnicity. Genealogical and ideological types of descent myths play a crucial role when nations emerge from competing mythologies and symbols, which are frequently linked to various classes or regions [22, p. 58]. Mythomoteur - a constitutive political myth - is both dynastic and communal. The author distinguishes lateral and vertical ethnic communities; a tribal confederation, the closest to early modern Kazakhs, stands for the latter type, also called intensive and based on closure, in comparison with elite-based extensive communities. A key idea is that achieving national unity depends on having both a strong sense of togetherness or brotherhood and a defined, secure and acknowledged territory or homeland [22, p. 148].

While developing Anderson's vision of print capitalism's appearance being a turning point in the conversion of ethnicity into a nation, Smith points out that the communication between faceless individuals within the community remained impossible: print technology was a one-way communication. That fact underscored the crucial role of the intellectuals in crafting a compelling message. The emerging national identity needed a vision of ethnic solidarity between elites and the general population, framed as a historical narrative that uncovers and showcases a unified past like a museum exhibit. This approach aimed to inspire a deeper sense of collective purpose and community in response to the fragmentation and alienation caused by modern industrialism and scientific advances [22, p. 173].

Chapter Eight speaks volumes about the intelligentsia's quest to reconstruct the golden age. This concept was already applied toward Kazakh nation-building regarding the Kazakh intelligentsia who sought to claim territories and antiquity for their people by delving into the Kazakh past [23]. Examples of voluntaristic interpretations of history by nationalists exhibit nationalism as an effective technology for constructing communal attachments. The present needs to predetermine interpreting the past and inventing traditions, and usually, intelligentsia reconstructs the already living myths and motifs. The community is located through poetic spaces (landscape - terrain) and golden ages (history – origins, age of heroes). History combines didactic and dramatic criteria of rediscovering the past through the narrative of salvation. Smith brings up eight typical components of the myth of ethnic origins and descent. The creation of a nation, he sums up, is a recurring activity that includes re-interpretations of the past and is a product of intra-social and institutional dialogue. Every generation renews the national mythology with chosen ethnic moralities and re-enters the legends and landscapes of the living past. This recurring activity is dictated by the need for immortality through the memory of posterity, and the memory is a precondition of destiny, which in turn is symbolized by national myths and genealogies. In the same way, nations seek inner antiquity.

The Nation as an Anti-Colonial Project. Partha Chatterjee's study on colonial nationalism describes three stages of developing nationalist thought. In the first stage, intellectuals accept colonial thinking, which we see in examples of Valikhanov, influenced by the Orientalist take of backward Asian people, and Altynsarin, who supported the hostile rhetoric of Il'minskiy toward Muslim clergy and curriculum. The nascent nationalism stage is the most applicable to the study of Alash intellectuals. In the second stage, intelligentsia manoeuvres to criticize modernity [24, p. 51], which applies to 'reactionary romanticists' among traditionalist counterparts of Alash. The failure to accommodate the independent national state explains why Kazakh intelligentsia never reached the final stage of *arrival*, or acceptance of the idea of a powerful nation-state. Another fruitful notion is the idea that colonial nationalists adapted the colonialists' appeal to reason and pragmatism in forging an agenda. In the last stage, nationalists inherit the predecessors' mass movement but not their attitude toward modernity. They advocate for the strong state as the only provider of social justice and coordinator of society, and socialism as the system where life is governed by society's productive forces. This position is naturally close to those intellectuals who joined the Bolsheviks.

Chatterjee explains this evolution in the pragmatism of nationalist endeavor, and the Marxist turn as the only alternative for post-colonial thinkers who sought out colonial epistemology but could not create a new one. He speaks extensively about the relationship between capitalism, colonialism,

and knowledge production. Nationalists, he claims, resolved the problem of colonial capitalism particularly: instead of being submissive to metropole capital, they created a nation-state that placed the people-nation on the global market and, simultaneously, created opportunities for the capital to step in further in the national economy. This alliance created an epistemic privilege of “development”. Nationalism subordinates to the world order and its epistemology, however, with reluctance. An incomplete resolution of the conflict between people-nation and capital emerges in ethnic separatist and anti-modern revivalist/utopian movements.

Nomadic Nationalism? John A. Armstrong is a must-have reading before being acquainted with Smith’s theory (as the latter implies by accepting the former’s definitions of nation and nationalism, and his focus on elements of myth, symbol, and memory) [22, p. 2]. Armstrong borrows the Les Annales School’s *longue durée* concept of a time dimension of many centuries. Primary effects of ethnic boundaries exist in the minds of subjects, and secondary ones are maps and norms in a rulebook, which are major indicators of boundaries. Mostly symbolic boundaries are created by words. Even differently styled minarets can be symbols, referring to periods of local greatness [25, pp. 7-8]. The author underlines the significance of nostalgia as a kind of collective memory that expresses the desire to go back to a past era of greatness [25, p. 16]. He then goes into showing differences in nostalgia between sedentary and nomadic peoples’ descendants as a way to express the attachment to a way of life, also showing how Muslim culture evolved from the bedouin traditions of Arabic deserts. Early Islamic poets, he says, hailed the nomadic lifestyle of deserts they never visited [25, pp. 16-18]; that rhymes with an urban-raised Bokeikhan defending the nomadic lifestyle in a battle with pro-sharia *Aiqap* writers. At the same time, Armstrong speaks extensively about the nomads of Eurasian steppes, namely Turkic and Mongol “tribes” (a term that he disapproves of). Nomadic tribes, he claims, were less assimilable [25, p. 51]. Nomadic agglomeration (“tribe”) accepted the leaders’ genealogical myth, which in Eurasian Steppes was a clan myth; the roots of Islam in Arab culture greatly shaped its links to genealogical myths [25, p. 16].

This is a unique reference to post-nomadic nations' formation in a theoretical work on nationalism: moreover, he is aware of Kazakhs as well. Unfortunately, his notion that Kazakhs have a camel as the totem (unlike other Turkic peoples with a wolf as the one) [25, p. 31], seems to rely on some superficial scholarship without a proper reference. He views the Russian frontier as a battleground between Islam and Christianity that played a significant role in shaping unique forms of ethnic identity [25, p. 92]. This is a notion mainly in Ukraine and the North Caucasus; while there should already be studies on the Steppe as a region of breakage of two religions, it might be fruitful to measure this confrontation’s effects on identity-forming in Kazakh lands, or at least, of the local nationalists.

Conclusion. Recently, much has been said about the nation-building in Kazakhstan, both about the pre-Revolutionary and Soviet periods. Unlike the previous approaches, the new scholarship tends to apply the newer theoretical framework toward the local context, which brings it to the ideological conflict with the old Marxist historiography of Kazakhstan. My study, however, shows that the classical works on nationalism in international scholarship have also delved from the same Marxist idealistic roots, and therefore are easily applicable to the knowledge already gathered within the local historiography. Unlike the previous era, the new theoretical conceptualization of a problem like the history of Kazakh nation-building should not be censored within strict frameworks, and have to be agile and skeptical at the same time to implement different achievements of various schools of theoretical thought.

As the literature review stated, the scholars are already concerned about the limitations of some theoretical concepts' applicability within their Western-contextualized frameworks on the example of the nomadic, mostly illiterate, society. Andersonian print capitalism, e.g., works poorly within the context of a non-significant readership. That is why I had to step back and look at how many theories are there around and which fit better to various problems of the problem of the origin of Kazakh nation, with a notion of the nation as a modern constructed identity. This work's novelty lies in its rigorous application of classical theoretical frameworks on nationalism concerning the unique

dynamics of Kazakh nationalism. I found that different angles of theory, such as schools of constructivism and symbolism, have much to say if are deconstructed and adapted within the concrete problems of the «Alash» studies. Consequently, this work contributes to a further discussion of the national identity building in the era that nowadays is usually associated with the Alash movement.

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