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**SOVIET SECRET POLICY IN KAZAKHSTAN
IN THE EARLY 20TH CENTURY
AND ITS CONSEQUENCES**

As a part of the Union of Soviet Socialist Republics between 1917 and 1990, Kazakhstan was subjected to a serious process of social, cultural, and geographical fragmentation. During this period, Kazakhs had a difficult struggle for existence to preserve their national identity. The social, cultural, and economic transformations that Kazakh society faced in this process should be analyzed comprehensively. Because emotional approaches are an important obstacle to a full understanding of Kazakhstan's past, this situation is further complicated by severing the country's historical ties, falsifying archival records, and the systematic destruction of its past. Since the collapse of the Soviet Union, researchers have gained access to geography and have been able to study it, which has led to more objective and innovative approaches to the subject. This new research provides an important opportunity for a deeper understanding of Kazakhstan's history and the transformations of its society.

Key words: Cultural, Kazakh Society, Transformation.

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**XX ғасырдың басындағы Кеңес Одағының
күпия саясаты және оның Қазақстанға тигізген салдары**

1917–1990 жылдар аралығында Қазақстан Кеңестік Социалистік Республикалар Одағының құрамында болып, әлеуметтік, мәдени және географиялық тұрғыдан терең фрагментацияға ұшырады. Осы кезеңде қазақ халқы ұлттық бірегейлігін сақтап қалу жолында күрделі тарихи сынақтарды бастан өткерді. Қазақ қоғамының осы кезеңдегі әлеуметтік, мәдени және экономикалық трансформацияларын кешенді түрде талдау қажет. Өткенді объективті тұрғыдан сараптауға эмоционалдық ұстанымдар ғана емес, сондай-ақ тарихи байланыстардың үзілуі, мұрағаттық деректердің бұрмалануы және тарихи мұраны жүйелі түрде жою секілді факторлар да кедергі келтіреді. Кеңес Одағы ыдырағаннан кейін зерттеушілер Қазақстан аумағына кеңірек қол жеткізіп, бұл мәселені ғылыми тұрғыдан зерделеуге мүмкіндік алды, нәтижесінде тақырыпқа деген неғұрлым объективті және инновациялық тәсілдер қалыптасты. Бұл жаңа зерттеулер Қазақстан тарихын және оның әлеуметтік трансформация үдерістерін тереңірек түсінуге маңызды ғылыми негіз қалыптастырады.

Түйін сөздер: мәдениет, қазақ қоғамы, әлеуметтік трансформация.

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**Секретная советская политика в Казахстане
в начале XX века и её последствия**

В период с 1917 по 1990 год, когда Казахстан входил в состав Союза Советских Социалистических Республик, страна пережила значительные социальные, культурные и географические изменения, приведшие к глубокой фрагментации общества. В это время казахский народ вел непростую борьбу за сохранение своей национальной идентичности. Социальные, культурные и экономические трансформации, с которыми столкнулось казахское общество в этот период, требуют всестороннего анализа. Объективному осмыслению прошлого препятствуют не только эмоциональные оценки, но и разрыв исторических связей, фальсификация архивных данных и систематическое уничтожение исторического наследия. После распада Советского Союза ис-

следователи получили возможность изучать регион, что способствовало появлению более объективных и инновационных подходов к данной теме. Эти новые исследования открывают перспективы для глубокого осмысления истории Казахстана и трансформации его общества.

Ключевые слова: культура, казахское общество, трансформация.

Introduction

Justification for Topic Selection, Aim and Research Methodology

The history of Kazakhstan has been shaped by a series of social, cultural, and political transformations, and these processes have profoundly affected people's lives. Since the mid-18th century, Russia's expansionist policies towards Kazakh lands radically changed the ethnic and cultural structure in the region. While the Russians aimed to colonize Kazakhstan, the Kazakh people started a struggle for independence against this process, but often these resistances were bloodily suppressed. This process caused the Kazakh people to suffer great cultural, social, and economic losses. With the establishment of the Soviet Union, Kazakhstan experienced the beginning of a new era but policies implemented by the Soviet regime made the life of the people even more difficult. The Soviet administration introduced a series of reforms aimed at erasing the cultural identity of the Kazakh people, including alphabet change, suppression of religious beliefs, cultural assimilation, and displacement. The Baku Turkological Congress in 1926 decided to abolish the Arabic alphabet and replace it with the Latin alphabet to suppress Kazakh culture, which deeply shook the cultural unity of the Kazakh people. In the early 1930s, the Soviet Union's collectivization policies turned into a major disaster for the Kazakh people; famine caused by forced displacement and collectivization of lands led to the death of millions of people. The famine catastrophe in Kazakhstan has gone down in history as a process in which the Soviet administration consciously aimed to destroy the Kazakh people. However, the documents of the period were illuminated by the repressive regime of the Soviet Union and the true face of this tragedy was often hidden.

This article aims to examine these painful processes in Soviet-era Kazakhstan and the social and cultural effects of the Soviet government's policies on the Kazakh people. The events that took place in the period from the intervention of Tsarist Russia in Kazakh lands to the collectivization policies of the Soviet Union provide important clues to understanding how the Kazakh people shaped their cultural identity and social structure. The cultural

and socio-political pressures imposed by the Soviet regime left indelible traces on the historical memory of the Kazakh people, and the resistance of the people and the disasters they experienced became a great tragedy not only for Kazakhstan but also for other peoples in the Turkestan geography.

The policies in Kazakhstan during the Soviet Union period had a wide sphere of influence and were not only limited to geographical boundaries, but also profoundly affected the social, cultural, and economic structure of the region. The practices during this period greatly shaped the lives of the people in direct connection with serious human rights violations and forcibly confiscated means of production. The Soviet government under Stalin's rule exerted intense pressure on the Kazakh people, and a process intertwined with migration movements, resource shortages, and various economic problems was experienced. To make the cult of Stalin dominant in Kazakhstan, the people were systematically declared 'enemies of the people' and subjected to forced migration. This process, together with the social and economic difficulties of the Kazakh people, reveals the deep effects of Soviet rule on the people. Although the Communist Party of Kazakhstan aimed to increase the effectiveness of state organs and modernize society with the promise of solving the country's backwardness problem, the imposing, totalitarian, and socialist practices of the Stalin administration laid the foundations of an oppressive regime contrary to these goals. The socialist propaganda and the authoritarian administration's understanding have led Kazakhstan away from democratic values and dragged the people towards an oppressive regime.

In this context, most reforms initiated for social change and innovation have failed and a sustainable socio-political vision has not been established. The political environment shaped by systematic repression not only deepened social unrest but hindered economic and cultural development. As a result, the policies of the Stalinist regime in Kazakhstan have devastated the people economically, socially, and culturally, leaving traces of a period that shaped the society with deep scars. This article aims to examine the traces of the Soviet Union period on Kazakhstan and the effects of social traumas experienced in this process in more depth.

This study has been prepared based on archival research, source classification, and information obtained from individuals who witnessed the Soviet era.

Kazakhstan Before the Russian Occupation

According to archive records, the word 'Kazakh' was first mentioned in Russian documents in 1534. The Kazakhs, who resemble the Mongolian race in terms of their physical appearance, are said to be descended from the Kipchak tribes living under the rule of the Golden Horde State, according to a generally accepted view in the scientific world. In the 15th and 16th centuries, the Kazakhs, who formed a political entity by taking advantage of the internal and external disturbances of neighboring states, established the Kazakh Khanate in a wide geography extending from the east of the Caspian Sea and the north of Lake Aral to the upper reaches of the Irtysh River and the west of the Altai Mountains. This khanate played an important role in shaping the ethnic, social, and political structure in the region (Sabah Gazetesi, 1992).

After this period, the Kazakhs increased their power and carried out regular and continuous expeditions to the Maveranunehr region. These military campaigns were especially intensified during the reign of Tevkel Khan, who ruled between 1568-1598, and the Kazakhs succeeded in occupying Samarkand for a short time. However, by the 17th century, internal conflicts and struggles among the Kazakhs led to territorial losses. Although the Kazakh Khan made attempts to end these disputes and unite the tribes under a common roof, these efforts remained fruitless. During the reign of Pulta Khan (1678-1718), who came to the throne after Tevkel Khan, the Chundarya Kalmyks conquered large areas extending to Turkestan and posed a serious threat to the Kazakh lands. These developments further weakened the political stability of the khanate (Yeni Rehber Ansiklopedisi, 1998).

These developments had profound and negative consequences for the Kazakhs. The Russian Empire first took control of the Lesser Horde, then the Middle Horde, and finally occupied the Great Horde under the rule of the Hokand Khanate. This situation was an important factor that accelerated the process of Kazakhs coming under the rule of Tsarist Russia. In the late 19th century, the Soviet Union, which was established after the Bolsheviks took power, began a period of more severe political and social oppression for the Kazakh people. As a result of Soviet policies, Kazakhs were reduced to the position of second-class citizens in their lands. In

particular, the establishment of resettlement centers in Kazakh homelands and the systematic settlement of the Russian population there deeply affected the demographic and cultural structure of the Kazakh people. This process led to the serious destruction of both Kazakh identity and socio-economic structure (Hayit, 1975).

Instead of submitting to these events, the Kazakh people preferred resistance and started a series of rebellions against the Russians. However, by 1757, the Cossacks, who could not form sufficient military power against the Russian attacks from the north, paid a heavy price for this resistance, and the rebellion was suppressed by the Red Army in a bloody way. The Russian expansion policies in the Kazakh lands have progressed systematically since the beginning of the 18th century. During this period, a series of Russian fortresses built along the Irtysh River ensured military supremacy in the region and enabled the establishment of a strategically fortified line extending to the Ural River. This military build-up greatly weakened the Cossacks' control over their territory and led to an increasingly pronounced Russian domination (Bacon, 1977).

The Russians gradually increased the pressure on the Kazakhs and established full sovereignty in the region. Under Russian rule, Kazakh lands were divided into provinces named Uralsk, Turgay, Ak-molinsk, and Semipalatinsk. To consolidate Russian influence, Russian villages were built in various regions of Kazakhstan until the end of the 19th century. This caused a great reaction from the local population. Kazakhs planned to organize a march to the Tsar's palace to protest against the injustices. However, at this very moment, uprisings against the Tsar began in Russia and the first signs of the 1905 Revolution were seen.

Although the Kazakh people continued to struggle for independence in this process, they could not succeed in these attempts. In the late 19th and early 20th centuries, with the Bolsheviks taking power, the oppression of the Tsarist period was replaced by a stricter Soviet rule. With its strategic decisions, the Bolshevik regime incorporated Kazakhstan into the Soviet Union and made the country a part of the socialist system. This new structure, ostensibly presented under a national identity, was shaped by the strict rules of socialist ideology. Thus, Kazakhstan had to continue its existence under the political, economic, and ideological control of the Soviet Union.

The Period of Sovietisation

Soviet Russia implemented a comprehensive assimilation policy targeting the national identity of

Kazakhs. This policy was shaped by carrying the colonialist and assimilationist practices initiated during the Tsarist period even further. The main goal was the Russification and Christianisation of the Kazakh people. In this direction, Soviet administrators launched a systematic operation aimed at eliminating the elements that ensure national unity.

The military administration restructured its education policies in line with this goal and made a series of decisions aimed at destroying the cultural values of the Kazakh people. An instruction given to the education minister of the period is a striking example of this approach: 'Allowing education in the mother tongue in this region is completely contrary to the fundamental interests of the Russian state. Therefore, the language of instruction in schools in the region will be exclusively Russian.' These policies aimed to weaken the cultural and linguistic identity of the Kazakh people by preventing them from receiving education in their language. Thus, under Soviet rule, Kazakhstan was subjected to a systematic transformation not only politically and economically, but also culturally and socially (Altaylı, 1999).

Following Lenin's takeover, the pressure on the Kazakh people intensified and the policies implemented by the Soviet administration took a more radical form by targeting the national identity of the Kazakhs. The main aim of the new administration was to shape the Kazakhs in the direction of building a different language and nation, which manifested itself as an effort to reduce the Kazakhs to the level of 'micro-nation' from the perspective of 'macro-nationalism.' When we evaluate this approach from a sociological point of view, the Soviet administration aimed to turn the Kazakh people into a new Russian colony geographically and culturally and to remove the people from their own identity. In particular, the Soviet administration banned historical, cultural, and literary works published in Kazakhstan because they carried the idea of nationalism. This practice should be considered as a clear strategy to destroy the cultural memory and national consciousness of the Kazakh people. Lenin personally intervened in this matter and removed the obstacles to Russian policy one by one. This should be understood not only as a step towards erasing the linguistic and cultural existence of the Kazakhs but also as an ideological move to consolidate Soviet domination over the Kazakh people (Akça, 2011).

The prohibition of various religious beliefs and religious services in the Soviet Union, in parallel with the efforts of the Soviet leadership, aiming to establish ideological hegemony, and to intervene

deeply in the economic life of the colonies, migration from Germany to Kazakhstan began in the middle of the 20th century. This situation not only led to an increase in ethnic diversity in the region but also showed that the Soviet regime aimed to shape the demographic structure and economic life of the local population. Patylitsyn, Secretary of the Krasnoarmeysky Party Committee, in a letter dated 2 May 1937, sent to S. Segizbayev, Secretary of the North Kazakhstan Regional Committee, emphasized the increase in migration to the region. 'Recently, emigration to the region has intensified. Not only immigrants from Poland, and Germany, but also collective farmers are buying land,' he states that not only ethnically new immigrants were settling, but also the Soviet administration encouraged the settlement of collective farmers to control agricultural production. This can be considered as part of the Soviet Union's policies to reshape the regional economic structure and create a strategic demographic shift (Gerasimenko, T.I, 2000).

Cultural Assimilation and Russification

The Russification of the Kazakh people by the Soviet regime towards the end of the XIX century left lasting traces not only on ethnic and cultural identity but also on language and alphabet. Since language is one of the most important elements that reflect the culture of a society and transmit it from generation to generation, the importance of the alphabet in this context is demonstrated. Kazakhs used the Arabic alphabet before the Soviet Union and produced many scientific and literary works through this alphabet. In this process, the Kazakh people, despite having a rich cultural heritage, had to reshape their linguistic and cultural identity under the influence of the Russification policies imposed by the Soviets. This historical transformation deeply affected not only the writing system but also the intellectual structure of the people and the forms of cultural transmission.

In the aftermath of the Bolshevik Revolution, Soviet administrators included Kazakhstan in the process of moving the peoples of Turkestan away from the Arabic alphabet, with which they had historically established deep-rooted cultural ties. The Soviet administration argued that the Arabic alphabet was an obstacle to development and that it was an ignorant and backward factor. On this ground, he argued that insisting on the Arabic alphabet created a barrier separating the Kazakh people from the Russians and prevented the people from having a common cultural thought with neighboring countries. The Soviets presented the alphabet change as

a necessity to shape the social and cultural belonging of the people through this linguistic affiliation, which led to an important turning point in the identity of the Kazakhs (Radloff, 1893).

In this context, the Soviet government convened the Turkology Congress in Baku in 1926 and invited scientists and intellectuals from the Turkestan region, including Kazakhstan. At this congress, which was attended by Ahmet Baytursun representing Kazakhstan, the issue of alphabet change was discussed, and it is known that Kazakhs and Tatars showed serious resistance to this change among the people. However, in line with the decisions taken, the Arabic alphabet was abolished in Kazakhstan and Latin letters were adopted instead. All publications written in the Arabic alphabet were ordered to be collected and banned. This practice was rapidly put into practice as a step towards breaking the cultural and linguistic ties of the people in line with the Soviet administration's goal of weakening national and spiritual values. According to the views of Blonski, a Russian pedagogue, the writing of Arabic script from right to left was thought to cause the muscles of the hand and fingers to develop differently, and various methods were sought to counteract this. Blonski argued that to avoid this, a reverse movement should be adopted, which took further shape as part of the Soviet strategies of influence and control over education and culture (Danişmend, 1978).

Collectivization and Starvation Policy (1930-1933)

In the period between the 18th and 19th centuries, the most devastating event in the history of Kazakhstan, beyond the conquest and colonization of the Kazakh steppes by Tsarist Russia, was the halving of the Kazakh population. This situation has gone down in history as a policy implemented not only for the Kazakh people but also for the peoples of the entire Turkestan geography. In the 20th century, it was very difficult to remember a similar social catastrophe in the context of human history. The documents of this tragic situation, which has left a deep impact on the social structure of the Kazakhs, are emerging more and more every day, revealing the lasting traces of the Soviet Union's oppressive rule on societies. How this process shaped the life, culture, and social structure of the people allows us to analyze the effects of the period in a powerful way.

A large number of documents from those years were meticulously destroyed by the NKVD and KGB, the intelligence organizations of the Soviet

Union. However, important research on this period has been carried out by Kazakh historians M. Tati-mov, T. Omarbekov, M. Koygeldiyev, S. Akkuly, A. Gali, and others, and these studies make important contributions to illuminating the dark traces of the period. However, in light of the available information, it can be said that we know only the tip of the iceberg of an unprecedented famine in recent periods of world history. Understanding the full extent of this event will become clearer depending on the full discovery of the Soviet-era archives (Schuyler, 2007).

Indeed, one of the most terrible tragedies in the history of the Kazakhs was the starvation of almost 40 percent of the population. However, it is difficult to find precise data on this catastrophe in archival records. The limited number of documents on this subject in the Kazakhstan State Archives can be explained by factors such as the destruction or biased writing of Soviet-era documents. The Russian administration intervened in every region in the Kazakh steppes where it saw any disturbance, and to achieve its goal, it aimed to reduce the Kazakh population and fill these lands with Russian citizens. To present this as a legitimate action, they tried to justify events in this region, such as the capture of Shymkent, by making a declaration under the pretext of rebellion and unrest by the local administration.

«Russians, as a civilized country, have encountered semi-savage, nomadic tribes in Central Asia without any organization. It is well-known that in such cases throughout history, to secure the borders and trade relations, these neighbors have always been established.» (Olaf, 1994)

When archival sources are examined, there is no information that the Russians living in the Kazakh geography suffered any troubles. This operation is important in terms of showing us that it was carried out systematically and deliberately. It is understood from the sources that the Communist Party used all its powers to carry out genocide against the people. In this regard, American researcher Sarah Cameron wrote a book titled *The Hungry Steppe*. In this book, she discusses the difficult conditions at that time and the struggle against it and says the following:

When archival sources are examined, there is no evidence of any serious distress or mortality rates due to starvation of the Russian population living in the Kazakh geography. This demonstrates that the operation was carried out in a highly systematic and deliberate manner. Cameron emphasizes that although the sensational aspects of the famine in Ukraine are often highlighted in discussions of the famine, the disasters experienced by other ethnic groups are overshadowed: «Other aspects of history

have been overshadowed by the emotional debate about the famine in Ukraine. The Don Cossacks and Volga Germans also suffered disproportionate losses from starvation. In places with a large Russian population, such as the Saratov region, mortality rates due to starvation were also extremely high. However, famine mortality in Kazakhstan was directly linked to ethnicity. While the Kazakh population made up just under 60 percent of the total population, the death rate from starvation was as high as 90 percent.» (Cameron, 2018).

According to various sources, the famine disaster in Kazakhstan claimed the lives of about one million people. This is a scientific fact that reveals the conditions of the period and the difficulties faced by the people. Although there is no direct archival record of Stalin's conscious intention to exterminate the Kazakh people, it is understood that this tragedy was also experienced in Kazakhstan within the framework of the general policies of the Soviet Union. The Soviet government's policies aimed at achieving its larger political and economic goals used this disaster as a tool in Kazakhstan, and starvation led to the death of a significant portion of the population in the region. This process can be considered not only as a local disaster but also as a part of a large-scale social and economic engineering project carried out by the Soviet administration targeting the people of an entire region.

Conclusion

Extended Summary

This paper comprehensively analyses the population movements, cultural pressures, and socio-political events such as the famine disaster in Kazakhstan between the 18th and 20th centuries, especially during the Soviet Union. The expansionist policies of Tsarist Russia towards the Kazakh lands since the mid-18th century had serious effects on the cultural identity, social structure, and lifestyle of the Kazakh people; the increase in the Russian population in the region directly affected the lives of the local people. In 1757, the process that started with the entry of the Russians into the Kazakh lands led to the struggle of the Kazakh people for independence, but this resistance was bloodily suppressed by Russia, especially in the early 19th century.

As Russia's sovereignty in the Kazakh lands increased, the living spaces of the Kazakh people were further reduced to change the demographic structure in the region, and Russian settlers were settled in their places. In the early 20th century, the Kazakh people started uprisings against the Tsar; however,

these resistances were not successful. After the Bolshevik revolution in 1917, the Soviet administration took direct control of Kazakhstan, further deepening the colonial oppression experienced in previous years.

The Soviet administration implemented an intensive assimilation policy aimed at Russifying the Kazakh people, and this was seen in the areas of language, culture, religion, and education. The Kazakhs' use of the Arabic alphabet was considered «backward» by the Soviets and replaced with the Latin alphabet; works reflecting the cultural and religious identity of the people were banned and suppressed. This process can be considered as an attempt to erase the Kazakh identity. Similarly, the oppression of the Soviet Union on the Kazakh people, as a strategy aimed at destroying ethnic unity, left deep marks in the memory of both the local people and other Turkestan peoples in the region.

The oppression of the Soviet administration led not only to cultural but also to economic and physical disasters. In the 1930s, the forced displacement and land ownership regulations implemented in line with the Soviet collectivization policies caused the majority of the Kazakh population to face conditions such as hunger and forced labor. By the mid-1930s, the Kazakh population had decreased by half, and the famine during this period caused the deaths of millions of people. This disaster for the Kazakh people was recorded as a tragic event resulting from the policies of the Soviet regime. However, documents from the period were often destroyed or incomplete, and the Soviet government's efforts to hide the truth about these events made research difficult. In this disaster in Kazakhstan, not only the Kazakh people but all the people of Turkestan suffered great losses. However, the dramatic losses experienced by the Kazakh population due to hunger and famine are directly related to ethnicity. According to some studies, while the Kazakh people constitute 60% of the total population, the rate of deaths due to hunger and famine has reached up to 90%. This situation emerged as a ruthless strategy implemented by the Soviet Union to achieve greater political goals rather than a planned genocide.

In conclusion, the suffering that the Kazakh people have experienced under the policies and practices of the Soviet Union since the beginning of the 20th century is a reflection of the destruction of the cultural and social structure of not only the people but also the geography of Turkestan as a whole. This process has left indelible marks on the historical memory of the Kazakh people and created difficulties in rebuilding their cultural identity.

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