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Loyalty, solidarity and duplicity: clan systems in the 1928 drive against rural elites in Kazakhstan

Isabelle Ohayon

In 1928, the Communist Party of the Autonomous Soviet Socialist Republic of Kazakhstan began a drive against the traditional Kazakh elites in rural and pastoral communities. This was part of a national policy conducted by the new First Secretary of the Kazakh CP appointed by Moscow in 1925, Filipp Isaevich Goloshchekin, within the context of a general hardening of relations between the State and country areas at the end of NEP in the USSR. The programme to liquidate the *bai* (rich) followed on from the land reforms decided in 1924 and was intended to reorganise local authority in the sedentary, nomadic and semi-nomadic districts (*raion*) and *auls*,¹ and to sovietise the *auls* by favouring sedentarisation. After mediocre success with this operation, the Party's Central Committee blamed the most influential families in the *auls*, the class known as 'major semi-feudal *bai*' (*krupnyi polufeodal'nyi bai*), and began a drive to confiscate their property and neutralise them. Similar but less systematic operations were also organised in the other Central Asian republics with the shared intention of eliminating traditional and local forms of authority.² What might be called 'de-*bai*-isation', by analogy with dekulakisation,³ was one of the measures for sovietising the *auls*, alongside sedentarisation, to which it was intended to contribute.

This drive derived its theory and some of its methods from the principle of 'class struggle' and was intended to lead to the 'dominated classes' eliminating the wealthiest livestock owners and local power figures who were impeding sovietisation. But in their application, the procedures for identifying and expropriating the individuals stigmatised by the drive came up against the clan principle structuring Kazakh society, and which the drive specifically condemned. Clan affiliations organised social life by defining allegiances and solidarities, and were continually used both to further and to obstruct the Party's programme of repression. This article analyses how the class principle and the clan principle interacted, how they were opposed or combined, belonging as they

1 *Aul* referred at that time both to the traditional nomadic village (*yurt* camp) and an administrative unit corresponding to the village area or municipality, a subdivision of the district.

2 See, on the drive against the *manap* (Kyrgyz clan chiefs), Dzhumadil S. Baktygulov, *Sotsialisticheskoe preobrazovanie kirgizskogo aula (1928–1940)*, Frunze, 1978, pp. 130–40; Isabelle Ohayon, 'Lignages et pouvoirs locaux: l'indigénisation au Kirghizstan soviétique (1920–1930)', *Cahiers du monde russe*, 49, 2008, 1, pp. 145–82.

3 See Niccolò Pianciola, 'Nomadi e collettivizzazione delle campagne nel Kazakistan sovietico (1928–1934)', Master's thesis, University of Turin, 2001.

did to various contradictory forms of loyalty and solidarity. It also examines what this interaction reveals about the central and republic-level Soviet authorities' strategies of social change, the nature of authority at the local level and the effectiveness of national policies.

The anti-*bai* drive, which lasted some eight months starting from September 1928, affected fewer than 700 families, or roughly 5,000 people.⁴ But this relatively small number makes it possible to have accurate details about its practical implementation. It can be used to examine how the persecution system was established in the particular world of rural Kazakhstan, how it exploited existing tensions, built on local social practices, and, ultimately, what criteria it used to recruit or divide various groups in Kazakh society. The support this drive received from Kazakh rural society is of particular importance, given the number of people arrested and condemned: it raises the question of the objectives of an apparently small-scale operation and the place of this operation in a wider system. The case study begins by analysing the confiscation decree and its stated objectives and the organisation of the persecution apparatus; then it describes with specific examples the reactions of the community to these events; and finally it offers interpretations of the anti-*bai* drive.

Legal and administrative framework for the purge

The decree confiscating the property of the *bai* and their deportation, as promulgated on 27 August 1929 by the Central Executive Committee (TsIK) of Kazakhstan, established two broad target categories for the purge: the major *bai* and the 'semi-feudal' *bai*. The first category was defined by objective criteria of wealth – the capital possessed by a family. This capital was exclusively defined by the possession of a herd of livestock of varying size and whether the family was nomadic, semi-nomadic or sedentary. The authorities' choice of livestock as a main indicator shows that the purge was aimed exclusively at livestock producers, a group perceived as particularly uncontrollable in comparison to the Slav farmers who had settled during the final decades of tsarist colonisation. The second category, established by Article 5 of the decree, defined the status of *bai*, a 'class enemy', according to purely social indicators relating to individuals' political and genealogical origins.⁵ In practice, the two categories of stigmatised individuals often overlapped and, by using Article 5 of the confiscation decree, the purge could cover a wide social spectrum comprising representatives of the old order, such as servants of the tsarist authorities and Kazakh aristocracy (former *volost* chiefs, customary judges, descendants of khans and sultans, tribal chiefs, Gengiskhanid descendants, etc.), anti-Soviet activists (members or sympathisers of the Kazakh autonomist movement Alash

4 Arkhiv Prezidenta Respubliki Kazakhstan (APRK), f. 141, op. 1, d. 2968, ll. 141–48. Information from the First Secretary of the Regional Committee of the VKP(b) [All-Union Communist Party (Bolsheviks)] concerning the confiscation in the Kazakh ASSR of livestock and property from the powerful semi-feudal *bai* and their deportation.

5 *Noveishaia istoriia Kazakhstana. Sbornik dokumentov i materialov (1917–1939)*, Almaty, 1998, 1, pp. 220–21. Extract of the resolution of the TsIK and SNK (Council of People's Commissars) of the Kazakh ASSR concerning the confiscation of *bai* farms.

Orda, declared counter-revolutionary since 1920) and religious authorities (grand mullah or mufti).⁶

The objectives of the anti-*bai* operation were varied. One of the stated aims was to eliminate a rural elite acting outside the Soviet organs, and basing its authority on its economic or political influence, where the two characteristics were often closely connected. The authorities were accusing these elites of corrupting the Soviet system and of using their personal influence and patronage networks within the apparatus to obtain advantages from the administration. In material terms, the anti-*bai* drive was theoretically intended to confiscate approximately 300,000 head of largestock or the equivalent in smallstock, which was a large quantity of livestock in absolute terms but a relatively modest proportion of the total livestock recorded in Kazakhstan (25 million head of largestock).⁷ Similarly, the purge of 700 to 1,000 families was a fairly unambitious objective, given the number of rich households recorded in the statistics:⁸ six per cent of farms or herding groups corresponded to the wealth criteria defined by the purge operation, but only 0.5 per cent suffered *de facto* confiscation.

In political terms, the ambitions of the anti-*bai* drive were numerous. It was used to 'strengthen class struggle' by raising citizens' 'class consciousness' in order to support collectivisation by redistribution of the confiscated property. Furthermore, the seizure of a series of precious objects that were explicitly identified as having historical, archaeological or museographical value led to a reification of tradition in so far as it was expressed in material culture. The operation went even further by extending confiscation to the family tree charts which conveyed the clan identity that it was an essential social duty for each individual to know.⁹ Therefore, by dispossessing certain influential figures of the symbolic and material bases of their authority, the anti-*bai* drive would inflict damage on society as a whole.

What political and administrative means were used to implement the drive? The anti-*bai* operation involved the creation of a confiscation apparatus comprising a main confiscation commission answerable to the Central Committee of the Kazakh ASSR, which collected the results of the *okrug* (equivalent to *oblast'*) commissions, and so-called confiscation cooperation commissions in each *raion* and *aul*, which were placed lower in the hierarchy. It is estimated that there were about 1,000 *raion* and *aul* commissions for the 119 *raions* listed as Kazakh within the Kazakh Autonomous Republic,¹⁰ which implies the involvement of nearly 24,000 people or households. The task of the commissions was to identify within each *raion* or *aul* the number of *bai* likely to meet the confiscation criteria and to produce lists of wealthy livestock breeders. The commissions had access to tax registers, but they habitually used personal statements and denunciations.

6 Tsentral'nyi Gosudarstvennyi Arkhiv Respubliki Kazakhstan (TsGARK). f. 135, op. 1, d. 1, ll. 92–103. Open letter to all VKP(b) cells and communists in the *auls*. Undated document, probably written and sent during the first two months of the confiscation drive, between September and October 1928.

7 Martha B. Olcott, *The Kazakhs*, Stanford, 1987, p. 267.

8 Zhuldusbek B. Abylkhozhin, *Traditsionnaia struktura Kazakhstana*, Alma-Ata, 1991, p. 116.

9 TsGARK, f. 135, op. 1, d.1, l.61.

10 According to *Administrativno-territorial'noe delenie Kazakhskoi ASSR na 1 maia 1929 goda s pokazaniem natsional'nogo sostava raionov*, Alma-Ata, 1929, p. 26.

The commissions were recruited from the local members of the Party and youth organisations, especially the *koschi*,¹¹ who provided the vast majority of the members. According to the reports of the central confiscation commission, the social make-up of the lower-level structures was on average as follows: 60 per cent poor livestock breeders or farmers (*bedniaks*), 20 per cent exploited poor livestock breeders or farmers (*batraks*) and 18 per cent mid-size livestock breeders or farmers (*seredniaks*), with a minority of other unidentified categories (non-farmers).¹² The make-up by nationality was completely homogeneous. Even if it was important to promote class identification by dividing the poorest from the *bai*, the confiscation plan was also designed to solve problems seen as specific to Kazakh society. To avoid any interpretation of the confiscation drive as being anti-Kazakh, the agents recruited were therefore uniformly of national origin. This policy was also part of the strategy to indigenise the apparatus at its lowest levels. Goloshchekin, first secretary of the Communist Party of the Kazakh ASSR, in a telegram to all *okrug* Party committees on 15 October 1928, stressed the absolute necessity of placing only Kazakh communists (*kazakhskii komsostav*)¹³ at the head of confiscation commissions and in any armed detachments that might be required for the operation. In practice, the commissions were run by communist cadres from the *aulsoviet* or *raikom*, assisted by a representative of OGPU. In this way the confiscation apparatus was formed by a strategy of enrolling the poorest and was designed to be firmly embedded in the reality of the *aul*. This embeddedness, however, involved the use of local criteria of social mobilisation that were, in principle, alien to Bolshevik doctrine. To what extent did these criteria work for Soviet policy or rather for resistance from Kazakh society?

Ascription of social identity versus clan affiliation

The first stage in the confiscation commissions' strategy of forcible enrolment was to organise a preliminary propaganda campaign to alert the poorest groups to the need to establish a degree of economic equality between members of the *aul* and thus raise their 'class consciousness'. This campaign was based on using existing social tensions between the *bai* and the poorest, which had been exacerbated since the land redistribution measures decreed in 1924. OGPU reports recorded, for example, in 1926 a large number of conflicts over access to land between supporters and opponents of the law of inheritance.¹⁴ The well placed *bai* or clans also laid claim to collective lands and

11 This equivalent of the Committees of the Village Poor (*kombedy*), a class organisation of *aul bedniak* and *batrak*, founded in early 1921 by the Communist leadership in Turkestan, had the task of raising 'class consciousness' and, as part of the new land redistribution reforms in 1920–24, helping the poorest farmers to set up by providing them with material support where necessary. See *Istoriia Kazakhskoi SSR*, 5 vols. Alma-Ata, 1979, 4, pp. 280–84.

12 TsGARK, f. 135, op. 1, d. 1, l. 320a. Report on the membership of *raion* confiscation cooperation commissions.

13 TsGARK, f. 135, op. 1, d. 1, l. 109.

14 *Rossiiskii Gosudarstvennyi Arkhiv Ekonomiki (RGAE)*, f. 478, op. 1, d. 1967, ll. 60–71, ll. 73–84, 'Information report No. 3 of the OGPU information service of 25 October 1926 concerning the regulation of land exploitation in the eastern national republics and autonomous *oblast*', Alexis Berelovich, Viktor Danilov, *Sovetskaia derevnia glazami VChK, OGPU, NKVD, dokumenty i materialy*, Moscow, 2000, 2 (1923–1929), pp. 465–8.

some even rented some of these plots, while the organs in charge of land tenure matters did not enforce the law, often siding with the most powerful.

Despite the sharp social tensions that divided the richest from the poorest, the ascription of social identity and encouragement to class struggle were not enough to motivate the poorest to oppose the traditional authorities. In *aul* society, clan affiliation was the primary social bond and the predominant aspect of identity. The genealogical position of each family and individual within a social unit, which was also an economic unit, albeit an unequal one, that could provide mutual support, determined that family's relations with all their relatives, and, by extension, with society. This was the obstacle to stratifying Kazakh society by class. The Soviet authorities could not reasonably expect this structural bond and criterion of affiliation to be overturned during a confiscation drive that would divide one part of the *aul* from another.

Last, but not least, this phenomenon, well known to the cadres in local administration, all of them Kazakhs, forced them to consider clan in their strategy for integrating the *batraks* and *bedniaks* in the confiscation procedure. Using information from the poorest, the commissions produced lists of *bai* according to the family groups to which they belonged, so as to base the confiscation operation on analyses of clan relations. The point was, for example, to use conflicts between family groups to motivate involvement in the requisition operation. To produce the lists, however, the *bedniaks* had also to be persuaded to overcome their sense of affiliation if they were to incriminate the *bai*. Similarly, when the confiscated property was being redistributed, the confiscation commissions, in their statements of principles,¹⁵ validated the primacy of family bonds over class relations by excluding from the redistribution any members, even poor ones, of the clan to which the expropriated *bai* belonged.

Consequently the confiscation directives perceived the clan as a social unit within which class considerations took second place to the strength of belonging to a common clan. The clans marked out the practical limits to any policy based solely on class categories. This was recognised by excluding from the share-out certain poor individuals on the grounds that they belonged to the clan of an expropriated *bai*.

Another aspect of the same phenomenon was that the confiscation commission could be used to settle personal or collective grievances based on clan affiliation.¹⁶ Evidence for this includes letters of complaint illustrating the way family relations were abused to expropriate and neutralise clan enemies in order to gain or retain power. This often happened where the traditional clan authority was combined or overlapped with Soviet authority within the apparatus, and there was a mutual use of the prerogatives of both types of authority.

For example, a complaint of 4 January 1929 sent to the SNK of the Kazakh ASSR by Boshai Moinakov of the Syr-Daria *okrug* described machinations against him on clan grounds.¹⁷ He denounced his sentencing as a *bai* to seizure of his property and deportation, although he did not possess enough livestock to be investigated. He accused one of his

15 TsGARK, f. 135, op. 1, d. 1, l. 97. TsGARK, f. 135, op. 1, d. 1, ll. 92–103.

16 On a totally different scale, but along similar lines, see Aleksandr Iu. Vatlin, *Terror raionnogo masshtaba*, Moscow, 2004, pp. 120–30.

17 TsGARK, f. 135, op. 1, d. 12, ll. 68–70.

clan enemies of having taken advantage of his position as a delegate on the confiscation commission to eliminate him. Moinakov stated that he was the scapegoat for the refusal of his clan (Zhaqsybay) to accept subordination to the clan of one Manabai Mankiev, son of the Bagul clan chief, who was one of the fifteen delegates on the commission, all of them Bagul. He added that during the tsarist period he had already been the object of similar machinations leading to his deportation for 'political untrustworthiness' when Mankiev was an elected local official. In that *aul* (number 9 of Ichki-Talas *volost*' in Taraz region), the population comprised twenty-seven Zhaqsybay clan households and 460 Bagul clan households, a ratio confirmed by the *volost*' statistical office. This numerical disparity between clans was reflected in the apparatus, which had always been dominated by the Bagul in both tsarist and Soviet periods. In an attempt to compensate for this imbalance, Moinakov had tried to impose his authority and join the confiscation commission. His enemy had immediately had his name put on the *bai* list and demanded his arrest by armed detachments from *raion* headquarters. The superiors had refused this demand, so he had bribed the head of the militia, who came, together with the representative of the confiscation commission, to requisition Moinakov's property, arrest him and take him to the town, from which he was deported.

This infiltration by the traditional figures of authority targeted by the confiscation drive into the apparatus designed to implement it revealed the power that the 'semi-feudals' retained in the *auls* and the impossibility for society to challenge this chain of authority and solidarity. This 'entryism' as a form of self-defence for clan chiefs and the absence of any protest against it revealed the strength of the bond of mutual dependence within a family group. The strength of this bond, able to challenge the apparatus from within, justified the desire of the Soviet authorities to break it. The plan to destroy clan relations showed how well the Soviet authorities understood Kazakh society and how 'successfully' Kazakhs had been involved in the apparatus, where they had been able to analyse the workings of their own society and find solutions to sovietise it. For although clan solidarity might have hindered the confiscation drive, it was also manipulated to serve it. Overall, the clan structure imposed limits on Soviet authority at this level, which may partly explain the ineffectiveness of one-third of the confiscation commissions, which sentenced no one.

Clout of aul stakeholders in confiscation

The very real prerogatives that the 'poor' wielded on the commissions explain both the purpose of the form of mobilisation chosen by the political authorities and the relative success of their action. Using poor individuals was a pragmatic way of identifying the *bai* and the value of their property. In an open letter to all VKP(b) cells in the *auls*, the *Kazkraikom* noted that, 'against the guile [and fraud] of the *bai*, only the mass of the *aul's bedniaks* and *batraks* [could] resist and bring these facts to light, for they well know what belongs to whom and how the semi-feudal *bai* evade the confiscation law'.¹⁸

18 TsGARK, f. 135, op. 1, d. 1, ll. 92–103, Open letter to all VKP(b) cells and communists in the *auls*.

The typical procedure for mobilising the poor population comprised holding a large number of meetings in all *auls*, more than once a week, in which militant propagandists stirred up the assemblies of *batraks*, *bedniaks* and *seredniaks* that the *koschi* and youth organisations had been given the task to organise. Those present were asked to vote on the requisition of the property of the *bais* identified during the meetings and how it was to be redistributed, and to declare their gratitude to the Party and their determination to fight the class enemy. Next, they were required to join the *bedniak* confiscation cooperation commissions headed by representatives of the local Party cell, and once on those commissions to vote on the strategies to adopt and plan the action to be taken. It is hard to assess the actual numbers of those who attended these meetings and commissions in the absence of data and also because what data we have was produced by the *okrug* administration for the central organs of the ASSR. The exaggeratedly enthusiastic tone of these reports and overblown nature of some statements raise doubts about the figures given for the mobilisation of the poor population. These sometimes exceeded 20 per cent of the rural population of an *okrug*, which is considerable once women and children are excluded.¹⁹

The lack of any strict, systematic records of attendance at meetings and of voting results makes it impossible to draw conclusions. It may be supposed, however, that the rapid, short-term nature of the confiscation drive and the prospect for the poorest villagers of receiving livestock must have caused some excitement among the *bedniaks*, but it is impossible to know to what extent and how far it affected their involvement.

Whatever the actual participation by the least advantaged social categories in the decisions, elections and seizures, it was sufficient for their demands to appear in the correspondence between local administration and the central authorities. These documents report the determination of the poor people's collective to purge a particularly powerful *bai*. Letters from poor *batraks* beg the administration to grant them some of the confiscated livestock,²⁰ showing that the redistribution of property probably motivated the poorest villagers. This even produced situations of high symbolic significance, such as groups of poor people moving into the houses of the *bai* with their livestock and tools.²¹

Reluctance and resistance from aul society

Infiltration of spies into the commissions, and treachery and obstruction on the part of the *bai*, were always played down in commission reports, though these things did happen. The predominant importance of family relations once more threatened the confiscation plan: the cooperation or hostility of family-related groups distorted the strict principle of class revenge. No matter how loyal the members of the commissions and their political commitment, the confiscation apparatus had difficulty in maintaining confidence in the legitimacy of the operation and in overcoming reluctance.

19 *Istoriia Kazakhskoi SSR*, p. 405.

20 TsGARK, f. 135, op. 1, d. 1, l. 6, letter telegram of 12 November 1928. TsGARK, 135, op. 1, d. 1, ll. 292–308, report on the confiscation of the property of semi-feudal *bai* in Kustanay *okrug*.

21 TsGARK, f. 135, op. 1, d. 1, l. 24.

For example, of the 188 delegates on an *okrug* commission responsible for creating the 174 *raion* confiscation cooperation commissions, only six took part in the confiscation of the property of their own relatives.²² As with collectivisation in the USSR as a whole, numerous cases of reluctance were noted among those given the task of carrying out the confiscation, quite unlike the model of Pavlik Morozov, who figured in propaganda from 1932 onward.²³ A number of members of *komsomol* were excluded for refusing to requisition the property of their own families. Some recruits even asked the commission chair not to sentence their *bai* fathers, on the grounds that they were also the fathers of communist children.²⁴ Rumour on the steppe had it that *bai* whose sons were Communist Party members and took part in the commissions would be spared.²⁵ Family attachment put political convictions to the test.

Among the people on the confiscation cooperation commissions who had the 'dirty work' to do, namely going to *bai* houses and expropriating them willingly or unwillingly, there was some disaffection as the drive continued. Men who regularly attended meetings refused to take part in the seizures, on the grounds that they did not need the material compensation, and officially asked to be relieved of the task. The category of militants most severely criticised in administrative reports and elsewhere was the membership of youth organisations, particularly the *komsomol*. They were accused of failing to assert themselves as good organisers and leaders of the young *bedniaks* and *batraks*. The members of the *koschi* union, also young people, were subject to the same criticism. The chief delegates of commissions blamed them for the weakness of their committees, the low attendance and their youthful argumentativeness. They ascribed to them and others the defection of many partisans and some commission members, followed by open or covert desertion to the *bai* camp.²⁶ The ineffectiveness of the Soviet steppe associations and the failure of their activism were mainly due to the youth of their members and the lack of credibility of their generation in the eyes of Kazakh society. Cases were reported of young union chiefs submitting to the opinions and orders of confiscation commission leaders, although they were required to take the initiative, involve themselves and assert themselves as independent in the eyes of the *aul* community. Generations were as important in Kazakh society as family relations, so that the duty of respect and loyalty to older people also theoretically included their political positions. The roles of generation and clan primacy were two aspects of social organisation that resisted Soviet purge policy based on the ascription of social identity.

Tricks and strategies for avoiding confiscation

The *bai* adopted various strategies to defend themselves and keep part of their inherited property. In particular, the *bai* examined the criteria laid down in the confiscation decree, and used that knowledge to evade and disobey. The decree defined the status of *bai* in

22 TsGARK, f. 135, op. 1, d. 1, ll. 5–7.

23 Catriona Kelly, *Comrade Pavlik: The Rise and Fall of a Soviet Boy Hero*, London, 2005.

24 TsGARK, f. 135, op. 1, d. 9, l. 224.

25 Ibid.

26 TsGARK, f. 135, op. 1, d. 1, l. 6.

terms of the size of the herd owned by a household, according to whether it was nomadic, semi-nomadic or sedentary. This standard was weighted by the number of dependents in each household and its relation to the total number of animals. On average, there had to be at least sixteen head of livestock per person. This rule gave rise to the most common form of fraud, whereby the *bai* either artificially inflated the size of their household by including relatives who usually lived separately, as long as these had little livestock, in order to lower the average number of animals each; or else they would divide their household into as many new farms or herding groups as necessary for the size of each herd to fall below the confiscation threshold.²⁷

So the confiscation commissions found themselves in embarrassing situations they could only settle with approval from the central leadership. For example, the Aktiubinsk *okrug* commission reported the case of a household registered by the tax department as a number of independent taxable households, which requested to be considered as one economic unit. The reason was that the people included were widows, the *bai* mother-in-law (*ögej sheshe* and *toqal sheshe*)²⁸ and, in particular, his father's mother-in-law, or 'grandmothers' by marriage, and many women of marriageable age or with young children who had previously been recorded as belonging to separate households. When the confiscation commission accused the *bai* of combining different families, the women threatened to leave the farm or herding group on condition that they could withdraw their economic contribution, 45 per cent to 50 per cent of the herd. This would have nullified the identification of the head of the family as a *bai* subject to confiscation, because the size of his herd would no longer meet the standard.²⁹ Faced with this type of subterfuge, the local administration often referred the case to its hierarchy, namely the chair of the central commission, Eltay Ernazarov, and responded according to the plausibility of the situation. At local level, the confiscation commission did dare cast doubt on the rules of mutual family support, regarded as legitimate by Kazakh society. A similar case of principle was also often observed, whereby a large family herding group was divided into as many parts as the *bai* family head had sons and sons-in-law.³⁰ In all these cases of evasion, the *aul* soviet chair could be held responsible or passively complicit if he did not denounce these schemes, all the more so since all the *raion* and *aul* commissions had been warned of possible subterfuges on the part of the *bai* by a directive sent to all VKP(b) cells in the *auls*.³¹

The second most popular way for the *bai* to hand over the smallest possible number of animals to the commissions was to organise a degree of redistribution among their patronage clients. Some *bai* divided up a large part of their herd among the *bedniaks* they knew. For example, *bai* Amonov in Temir *raion*, Aktiubinsk *okrug*, gave 100 head to the poorest people in Magadzhan *raion* and Khobdinsk, anticipating in a way the redistribution the *raion* commissions were supposed to make.³² This type of situation

27 TsGARK, f. 135, op. 1, d. 1, l. 292.

28 The two mother-in-law statuses were *ögej sheshe* (wife's mother), and *toqal sheshe* (father's last wife).

29 TsGARK, f. 135, op. 1, d. 1, ll. 22–24, letter from I. M. Kuramysov to E. Ernazarov, of 29 September 1928.

30 Ibid. p. 22.

31 TsGARK, f. 135, op. 1, d. 1, l. 98.

32 TsGARK, f. 135, op. 1, d. 1, l. 23.

was a matter of concern to the local commissions, who had no control over the principles of distribution and in most cases the *bai* acting in this manner were indeed punished. The authorities considered that this redistribution was in fact being used to conceal temporarily the livestock until the confiscation drive was over. The resistance of the Kazakh *bai* disrupted the administration's plans: the discrepancy between the quantity of confiscated livestock provided for in the plan and the number actually confiscated was more than 80,000, namely 144,474 instead of the 225,972 planned for the year 1929.³³ In a telegram to Goloshchekin in Moscow, the Vice-Secretary of the Kazakh Communist Party explained the discrepancy between the livestock recorded by the tax administration on 1 January 1928 and the quantity actually confiscated as due to the *bai* strategies of massive sales of their herds, one of the forms of resistance commonly observed, along with smuggling to Siberia and Kyrgyzstan.³⁴

Almost all the *bai* households subjected to confiscation, roughly 700 were sentenced to forced displacement within the borders of the Kazakh Republic. There was a range of penalties according to the seriousness of the charge and the degree of resistance put up to the confiscation agents, but all were stripped of their civil rights. The 'semi-feudal' *bai*, representing the former political and social authorities, were all without exception sentenced to three years' imprisonment in the displacement zone to which their families were also assigned. Those who were found guilty of fraud suffered the same punishment as political offenders, roughly half the total number of expropriated *bai*. Most of the rich livestock owners who had been 'cooperative' were simply displaced to another *okrug* and put under house arrest on the decision of the regional administration, also for three years. The 'luckiest' ones, who had asked the confiscation services not to separate them from their 'homeland' and their relatives and who could prove advanced age or critical health, were sent to a neighbouring *raion* (fewer than 40 households).³⁵ For the vast majority, these sentences of deportation were enforced in conditions of extreme hardship for the *bai* families, who were deprived of all resources and required to move by their own means an average of more than 1,000 km from their homes in the middle of winter.

Interpretations

The Soviet authorities were more interested in the political status of the *bai*, clan chiefs and traditional authorities in the workings of Kazakh society than in the economic destabilisation of the *aul* communities. Strictly political reasons better explain the confiscation of the goods of a category of people whose importance in the general economy was actually slight. The undermining of the symbolic and social capital of the *bai*, their political legitimacy and social authority, although virtually none of them occupied a position in the Soviet apparatus, was a key element in the total domination

33 *Nasil'stvennaia kollektivizatsiia i golod v Kazakhstane v 1931–1933 gg., sbornik dokumentov i materialov*, Almaty, 1998, p. 35.

34 TsGARK, f. 135, op. 1, d. 1, l. 5.

35 Isabelle Ohayon, *La sédentarisation des Kazakhs dans l'URSS de Staline, collectivisation et changement social, 1928–1945*, Paris, 2006, pp. 96–9.

of the Soviet governing model over any other parallel system of political allegiance. This categorical refusal of a double system – which the tsarist empire had accepted and even promoted by instituting customary law courts – could not tolerate the persistence in a non-institutional sphere of social life of chiefs and powers of influence produced by a model of society perceived as feudal, with social codes which the new regime found it hard to control and which were also incompatible with the new ideology. It can be seen that the anti-*bai* drive was part of the same chronological sequence as the purge of the Kazakh Communist Party, particularly the former autonomist leaders, so that the attack on the *bai* was a local, rural aspect of the liquidation of the ‘nationalists’. It was certainly part of the same wave of repression in 1928 aimed at the Kazakh elites educated under the tsarist imperial regime.

The methods of the anti-*bai* drive were clearly designed to bind together the people of the *auls* against the social enemy of most of them in a struggle defined as being of ‘class’, intended ideally to raise citizens’ class consciousness. The discourse used to that end possessed *de facto* performative effectiveness since it often preceded the acts and reality of social relations. The drive gave tangible existence to the categories of *batrak*, *bedniak*, *seredniak* and *bai* so carefully defined by the regime, by relating membership of a particular category to practical consequences in confiscation and redistribution of confiscated property. The active participation of a relatively large number of *aul* inhabitants in the confiscation commissions presupposed that the lowest categories should take the responsibility of defining and then assigning the social identity of the *bai* and by implication of the non-victims, at the same time as they accepted or adopted their own assigned identities as *batrak*, *bedniak* or *seredniak*. To some extent, the anti-*bai* drive achieved its objective of ‘consciousness raising’ among the masses by formalising their demands according to class criteria.

Although this is not necessarily contradictory, this ‘class’ policy came up against specific local patterns of thinking: principles of loyalty and primacy linked to generations and clans. The Soviet authorities at local level, even more than at republic level, were not so naive as to believe that social classes alone delineated the divisions in the Kazakh *aul*. They used their close knowledge of Kazakh society to exploit clan rivalry to advance the anti-*bai* campaign. Not only was the presence of traditional authority figures in the apparatus tolerated, but the criterion of clan affiliation was to be used to serve the denunciation of the *bai*. At the same time, this clan mentality served personal objectives among the local Kazakh members of the confiscation commissions. These members enjoyed a two-fold legitimacy of clan and institution to settle old scores. The ‘mechanisms’ of the anti-*bai* drive in its actual practice, quite unlike the ideal of class struggle, reveal how the Soviet system could take root in a particular society: namely by absorbing its rules and local norms, despite its own initially dogmatic principles. This was to some extent not only the price to pay for the policy of indigenisation but was simply due to the ethnically homogeneous nature of the livestock herder community the Soviet system faced. The operation of the local indigenised apparatus in this campaign can be seen as the result of a mutually beneficial exploitation by the republic’s Soviet authorities and the clans. Each side used the forms of legitimacy that the other could provide. On the one hand, the local leaders gained from their position in the apparatus a power that came from their status as representatives of a State whose capacity for

violence the community had already experienced. On the other, the republic authorities credited those who claimed clan authority with a certain effectiveness in enforcing directives and representing herder societies.³⁶

Despite the Kazakhstan ASSR authorities' ability to involve society in their policy and consequently to accept pragmatic compromise, they did harbour the ambition of transforming that society. The anti-*bai* drive was part of a wider process that included sedentarisation. During the years that followed Goloshchekin's arrival as first secretary of the Kazakhstan Party, there can be seen in the dominant political thinking an increasingly close correlation between sedentarisation of nomads and the destruction of the clan principle and more generally of forms of traditional loyalty. Sedentarisation was designed as the instrument for a shift from a natural economy to a socialist economy, as Goloshchekin himself put it at a Kazakh Party plenum in 1927.³⁷ This concept was part of the Marxist evolutionary doctrine of the history of societies, involving a hierarchy between herding and arable farming, whereby nomadism was seen as a subsistence economy unable to guarantee the group's development; it was a concept, too, that looked forward to collectivisation and the priority given to grain production. At all events, sedentarisation was legitimated by the superiority of the model of the economy and society that it represented.

Not least, and here the *bai* expropriation campaign makes sense, Goloshchekin's 'theory' was linked to the case for class struggle, intended to be the instrument for raising people from the natural state to the socialist state, and consequently both the means and the end of sedentarisation: 'Sedentarisation is the means of destroying semi-feudal, patriarchal and clan relations by liberating poor and mid-status families from their exploiters by class struggle'.³⁸ Here an interdependence is implied between social structure – the system of institutions and values – and the means of production – the economic basis – or, in Marxist terms, between superstructure and infrastructure. The direct corollary of this theory is that by acting on one element, one changes the other. In other words, it is possible to achieve sedentarisation by acting both on herding and clan structure. The two aspects of sedentarisation made this a programme for total social transformation.

Consequently, the anti-*bai* drive served the longer-term purpose of imposing control on the *auls* and transforming them economically and socially. That it was led by the Party first secretary, Goloshchekin, an associate of Stalin, implies a concerted campaign by the central authorities and the Kazakh Party leadership. Although we have no direct written evidence for this relationship, the crucial year, 1928, when the anti-*bai* drive occurred, indisputably places the campaign in the general move inspired from above towards harsher treatment of rural areas, following the 'grain collection crisis'. Faced

36 On the position of the central authorities towards the societies administered and the importance of native-born networks, see Alexander Morrison's article in this volume, 'Factions in the Native Administration of Russian Turkestan'.

37 F.I. Goloshchekin's speech to the 6th plenum of the *Kazkraikom* VKP(b) on 20 November 1927, quoted in Manash K. Kozybaev, *Kazakhstan na rubezhe vekov: razmyshleniia i poiski. Sotsializm: nesbyvshiesia nadezhdy*, 2 vols, Almaty, 2000, 2, p. 89.

38 *Narodnoe khoziaistvo Kazakhstana*, 1930, 3–4, quoted in *O chem ne gorovim, Dokumental'nye rasskazy*, Alma-Ata, 1990, p. 34.

with the fall in supplies that put an end to NEP, the Stalinists turned to confiscatory methods like those used under war communism and a series of repressive measures, approved by a circular from the Politburo on 14 January 1928 ordering local authorities to ‘arrest the speculators, *kulaks* and those who disrupt the market and price policy’.³⁹ The inadequacy of forced grain and livestock supplies meant, for the herders of Central Asia, an increase in the number of coercive directives that, by attacking the rural elites, intended ultimately to extend arable areas and bring the inhabitants into line. A similar campaign was launched at the same time against the *manaps* (‘clan authorities’) and *bai* of Kyrgiizstan. Like the extraordinary measures for grain collection and purging of *kulaks* in the Soviet Union’s grain-growing regions and the similar strategies of resistance observed elsewhere in the USSR, the anti-*bai* drive was a foretaste of the massive ‘dekulakisation’ that would hit all rural areas. In Kazakhstan it was the first major offensive against herding society before sedentarisation, since these measures were not an end in themselves but part of a wider purpose of ‘total modernisation’ of the *auls*.

39 Nicolas Werth, *Un État contre son peuple*, in Stéphane Courtois. (ed.), *Le livre noir du communisme*, Paris, 1997, pp. 53–379 (p. 202).