

INTRODUCTION

Saturday morning just before show time, on a little side street off Panfilov Park, children line up with their parents in front of the kiosk of the Kazakh State Puppet Theater. A printed placard outside the theater announces today's show, "Prazdnik Prodalzhaetsya"—"The Holiday Continues." It is 2005, but this show is a remnant of the Soviet era, its colorful cast of character—one from each former republic—still popular with the young theater-goers. This central area of Almaty is beautiful, the gingerbread trimming on the nineteenth-century pastel colored buildings mingling with the grey concrete fixedness of Soviet-era structures. The ragged, imposing stateliness of the state puppet theater seems to borrow its grandeur from disparate eras, as if theater has just arrived, hobbling but upright, into the present.

Time is often described as marching inexorably forward—or flooding in like the tide, mighty and unstoppable, washing over the landscape. This book is rather an exploration of the way that time meanders and eddies, lingering here and there in pools, collecting in the present in unexpected forms. We perceive time unevenly, piecemeal, in flashes and fragments. Emotional or whimsical engagements with the past and the future—memories, regrets, projections, and hopeful reveries—crowd into our present, framing our histories and our predictions for future happiness. This book concerns the political significance of temporality in Kazakhstan and its reverberating effects in the personal lives of Kazakhstanis. I am particularly interested in what we can learn from temporal juxtapositions, instabilities, and contradictions. Kazakhstan's political, religious, and secular celebrations in Almaty, the focus of this book, provide a particularly rich source for examining temporality. Like political holidays in many countries, whether newly established or with a long history, public celebrations in Kazakhstan often present utopic visions of the future while staking claims to the past. Like dreams, such images and

music continually refract and echo, carrying temporal meanings about nationhood, about our possible or promised futures. Public holidays are further complicated temporally by the fact that they may mark events through refractions of radically different historical and political views. In Kazakhstani holiday concerts, films, and interviews, these unstable and contradictory temporal framings can help illuminate social and political instabilities and uncertainties in post-Soviet Kazakhstan.

I first came to Kazakhstan as a student of the Kazakh language in the summer of 2003, my toddler daughter in tow, in anticipation of future ethnographic research there. Since that time I have spent nearly four years in Kazakhstan and neighboring regions in Xinjiang, China, and western Mongolia, in numerous research trips from 2004 to 2015. My initial plan, to cover a calendar year's worth of celebration, gradually expanded to an exploration of how temporality and political ideology intertwine in Kazakhstani culture, particularly in music, film, and television. What began as an ethnography of live holiday concerts on the square, children's puppet shows, and school plays, grew to include televised programming, seasonal music videos, advertising, and habits of holiday viewing. As much as possible, I have worked with a wide swath of interlocutors, preferring not to privilege performers, but rather to draw from interviews and conversations with Kazakhstanis of disparate professions and economic status. At the same time, my work with musicians, including interviews, music lessons, and research trips to various music schools around Kazakhstan, has helped to provide a fuller picture of Kazakhstani music history, pedagogy, and cultural import and reception. In addition to working with many Kazakhs and ethnic Russians, I have also spent a good deal of time with Korean, Jewish, and Uighur communities in Almaty, in an attempt to convey a sense of the astounding diversity of Kazakhstan's population. To research cross-border ties and differences, I spent several months in the fall of 2005 and the winter and spring of 2006 conducting research with Kazakhs in western Mongolia and Xinjiang.

THEORETICAL ENGAGEMENTS

In theorizing political, conceptual, and experiential aspects of time in twenty-first-century Kazakhstan, I draw on theories of temporality from cultural anthropology, philosophy, and archaeology. I am interested in the ways scholars from different fields contemplate the nonlinearity of time, various-

ly describing it as layered, folded, pointillistic, and “percolating,” as the past bubbles up to the surface to meet the present. Taken together, these descriptions paint a picture of a turbulence and disorder—a chaotic multiplicity of temporal experiences. Scholars have also examined how power and time are intertwined, as imperial pasts continually press on the present—a powerful imprint, affecting the social and political shape of the present. *Steppe Dreams* examines the political, public aspects of temporality, particularly during state holidays, while simultaneously investigating the personal, interior, and emotional aspects of the way time is experienced.

Among the temporal aspects I examine are the political and economic facets of temporality (the “precarious present”), and the affective outcomes of failed or unstable socioeconomic systems. Anna Tsing theorizes the social, environmental, and economic conditions of the precarious present. “Modernization was supposed to fill the world—both communist and capitalist—with jobs,” Tsing writes (2015, 3), but what remains is this state of precarity, in which “survivors” face both the ideological void of broken promises and expectations, and the harsh reality of “much more irregular livelihoods” (Tsing 2015, 3). In considering Tsing’s ethnographic study, which examines the ways in which the marginalized imaginatively survive in the “ruins” of late capitalism, I suggest that postsocialist and postsecular societies represent a particular strain of precarity growing out of the turbulence of the post-Soviet transition and its aftermath. I find Tsing’s theorization of precarity particularly useful in discussing Kazakhstanis’ ways of coping with crises of faith and survival, particularly in my investigations of evangelical conversions, missionizing and worship in postsocialist Kazakhstan (chapter 5) and the reinvigoration of older practices like faith healing and shrine pilgrimage (chapter 7).

Steppe Dreams examines the way in which the Soviet past continues to press on the present in Kazakhstan, and the ways that this affects Kazakhstani citizens. In considering the enduring Soviet legacy in Kazakhstan, I have found Ann Laura Stoler’s theorization of *duress* relevant. Stoler’s *duress*—the continued durability of imperial formations—aptly describes how Soviet ideologies and institutions continue to influence Kazakhstani culture (Stoler 2016, 1). While Stoler’s concept of *duress* is concerned with how the press of the imperial past exerts influence in the present to create and maintain social, political, and ecological dynamics, I consider its cultural applica-

tions to help elucidate how post-Soviet societies are shaped in part by their Soviet pasts. In Kazakhstan, as I will discuss, both institutional and ideological structural remains endure through Kazakhstani society, influencing both social and political arenas (such as demographic policy)—as well as cultural spheres such as the teaching and patronage of music and the arts. Stoler argues that some of the most pressing issues of the present—social inequalities, economic and ecological disasters—are features of our current global landscape whose etiologies are steeped in the colonial histories of which they have been, and in some cases continue to be, a part” (Stoler 2016, 3). If many of the present conditions of inequality, precarity, and economic instability, are “tied to . . . imperial formations” (3), I am interested in how Soviet social and political structures continue to exert influence in Kazakhstan. My examination of enduring modes of habit, celebration, place-naming, and the persistence of Soviet ideologies (such as “Friendship of the Peoples”) expands on Stoler’s concept of duress, as I consider the durability of ideological and temporal structures from the Soviet era.

Another central concern of this book is the way that the state—and its citizens—envision the future. In this, I have been inspired by the work of Sara Ahmed, who theorizes the political and economic aspects of temporality, stressing futurity and expectation rather than the influence of regimes past. In my work on pilgrimage (chapter 7), I examine how hopes for the future intersect with economic and social precarity among my interlocutors. In other words, I am interested in how changing government policy, economics, and social structure affect individual lives on a personal level. In this way, Ahmed’s discussion connecting happiness to capitalism intersects with my interest in studying the effects of the transition to market economy in the postsocialist world. In examining the expectations and the work of pursuing happiness in a capitalist context, Ahmed takes up an aspect of modern precarity (2010; 2011). Her examination stresses the sense of contingency involved with happiness—the “hap” of happiness, that considers the thwarted expectations of stability and bounty in an uneasy market economy. Ahmed’s theorization of happiness in a capitalist society is inherently connected to this struggle with precarity; happiness for some is not an attainable goal, but rather an endless pursuit.

Along with Ahmed’s work on affect and happiness, scholarship on the affective aspects of time includes Edward Casey’s theorization of *perdura-*

nce, emotion and commemoration (Casey 2000); and Vincent Crapanzano on imaginative horizons (Crapanzano 2004). Casey's theorization of perdurance, a lastingness of the past in the present, is particularly useful in thinking about the continued relevance of past historical events, and their commemorations in the present. Elaborating on the concept of perdurance in my study of the May 9 commemorations of Victory Day in Kazakhstan (chapter 6), I show how reframings of central tropes of the Great Patriotic War (World War II) help to maintain the relevance of the past in the present. Crapanzano attends to the intersections of affect and temporality, but focuses on the anticipations of the future. I engage with Crapanzano's theories of horizon in my examinations of the utopic imaginings of Kazakhstan's future, particularly as a mediator between East and West (chapter 7). I also consider the role of futurity in shrine pilgrimage, especially in the ways that pilgrims try to enact their own futures, to imagine their desires into being through pilgrimage.

To elucidate how temporality becomes entangled with place, *Steppe Dreams* explores how multiple temporalities adhere to particular places and objects. In the varied theorizations of scholars such as Erika Doss and Shannon Dawdy, time swirls around monuments and structures anchored in place, their temporally inflected meanings gathering on the surface, as palimpsests and patinas, and in the layers of earth from eras past. Erika Doss in her *Memorial Mania* (2010) theorizes time by considering historical monuments as palimpsests, revealing layers of different times and multiple meanings. I am interested in how places (and emplaced objects) from both the recent and ancient pasts—such as the public square, memorial statues, and Kazakhstan's petroglyphs—accumulate significance, and how these meanings resonate in the present. The anthropologist Shannon Dawdy advocates thinking in terms of archaeological time in her study of post-Katrina New Orleans (2010) and uses the concept of *patina* (2016) to describe how the past collects in meaningful ways on objects and places. I use similar ideas in my description of Independence Day in Kazakhstan, in looking at how the public square and its memorials have accumulated clashing meanings from the commemorations of disparate events in the center of Almaty.

In my discussion of Nauryz in chapter 4, I take up archaeological conceptions of time in examining how symbols from Central Asia's ancient past—and the histories of the ancient steppe peoples who carved them—have been

“unearthed” and brought to bear in the present in significant ways. The archaeologist Christopher Witmore, working with a conceptualization of archaeological time, describes time as “folded, chiasmic, entangled” (Witmore 2006, 269). He submits the concept of *percolation*, which describes the past as bubbling up in unexpected, uneven ways, creating disorder in temporal layers. Witmore argues that we should be thinking about even distant temporalities as proximate precisely because of this tendency for the past to become entangled in the present, particularly in ways that are linked to place. “The fabric of the Roman road and the contemporary infrastructure of Paris are proximate,” Witmore explains, in that place, function, and a continuity of transport infrastructure link these two temporalities (281). Witmore therefore advocates attending to “a non-modernist notion of time where entities and events quite distant in a linear temporality are proximate through their simultaneous entanglement and percolation” (267). I build on Witmore’s concept of percolation to examine how images of ancient petroglyphs and stone sculptures found in Kazakhstan are used in the service of nation-building, particularly around the Central Asian New Year, Nauryz.

In ethnomusicology, there is a growing body of scholarship on temporality (Berger 2010; Born 2010; Friedson 2009; Hawkins 2016; McGraw 2013; Porcello 1998; Savage 2009; Slominski 2015; Stone 2008, 2010), which varies from phenomenological approaches to time in music performance (Berger, Friedson, Porcello, Stone) to studies of time perception on a larger scale, notably Jonathan Shannon (2007) on temporality and emotion, and ethnographies of popular music and queer temporality (Hawkins 2016; Slominski 2015), which build on Halberstam’s theories of queer time (Halberstam 2005). This book contributes to this body of work by focusing on ethnographic treatments of temporality, with a focus on conceptual, ideological, affective, and experiential aspects of temporality in popular culture, rather than focusing specifically on time in music performance.

As an ethnography of Central Asia, this book owes a debt to anthropologists and cultural historians of Central and Inner Asia such as Laura Adams, Alexia Bloch, Bruce Grant, Caroline Humphrey, Paula Michaels, and Douglas Northrop whose work first inspired my interest in this region (Adams 2010; Bloch 2003; Grant 1995; Humphrey 1999, 2002; Michaels 2003; Northrop 2004). It is also in dialogue with recent scholarship, particularly the rapidly growing body of work on Islam in Central Asia, which contrib-

utes to a fuller, more variegated picture of Muslim belief and practices in this region (Dubuisson, 2017; Féaux de la Croix 2016; Liu 2012; McBrien 2017; Montgomery 2016; Schwab 2012). This book contributes to a growing body of ethnomusicological scholarship of Central Asia (Adams 2010; Daukeyeva 2016; Elemanova 2001; Harris 2008; Koen 2011; Levin 1996; Merchant 2015; Muhambetova 1995; Post 2007; Rancier 2014; Rapport 2014; Sultanova 2014; C. Wong 2012), which not only examines issues specific to music performance but also illuminates topics such as migration (Rapport 2014), gender (Merchant 2015), the environment (Post 2007), and belief (Amanov and Mukhambetova 2002; Sultanova 2014).

A BRIEF HISTORICAL OVERVIEW OF KAZAKHSTAN

Sparsely populated and expansive, Kazakhstan's arid steppes and mountain ranges contain plentiful pasturelands but relatively little arable land.¹ Until the twentieth century, Kazakhs were mainly nomadic herders (of horses, sheep, camels, and other livestock), moving seasonally among several pasturelands. Though few Kazakhs in Kazakhstan now live in this way (it is more common among Kazakhs in Mongolia and northwest China), the nomadic past and the connection to the land looms large in the Kazakh imaginary.

Kazakhs originated from a group of Turkic peoples in the Chagatai *ulus* (polity) during the Mongol Empire (thirteenth and fourteenth centuries). Around 1465, a separatist group of some 200,000 subjects, led by Zhanibek and Kirai, considered the founders of the Kazakh nation, left Transoxania to push north beyond the Syr Darya River into what is now southern Kazakhstan (Olcott 1995, 4).² This separatist group, then indistinguishable from Uzbeks in their language and Turkic-Mongol ethnic makeup, became known as Kazakhs. The soil in Transoxania was fertile enough to support the settled oasis communities that came to typify Uzbek lifeways, but aridity increased farther to the north. The separatist group that became known as Kazakhs adopted more nomadic lifeways than their southern relations and relied on herding rather than agriculture. Eventually, it was this key difference that came to typify Uzbek and Kazakh lifeways. Mobile pastoralism became central to Kazakh identity, whereas Uzbeks identified with settled oasis culture. Indeed, although the origin of the word *Kazakh* remains in dispute, some claim that Kazakh actually means a "vagabond" or "rogue" people, in reference to their separatist, nomadic roots. Other scholars believe the term *Ka-*

zakh to be related to the Turkish verb *qaz*, which means “to wander” (Olcott 1995, 4).

Several natural borders partially enclose Kazakhstan: the Caspian Sea to the west, the Syr Darya River and the Qyzylqum Desert to the south-southwest, the Tian Shan Mountains to the south and east, and the Altai Mountains in the northeast. The northern border, however, is free from any natural barrier, a crucial feature in the history of Russian encroachment into the Kazakh steppe. This fertile northern Kazakh land (which supports wheat and other grains) was populated by Russian settlers in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries and remains an area with heavy concentrations of ethnic Russians. On the eastern border with China, a break in the Tian Shan system of mountain ranges functioned as a crucial escape route at numerous tumultuous points in Chinese and Soviet history, when Kazakhs fled across the mountainous borderland (in both directions) to safer pasturelands.³

KAZAKH CLAN GOVERNANCE AND IMPERIAL RUSSIA

While the designation *Kazakh* appears as early as the sixteenth century, it was not used as a term of self-identification until much later; rather, clan and horde allegiances were of primary concern in early Kazakh history. Kazakhs are organized in three hordes (kz. *zhuz*), each headed by a leader, or khan, and composed of many smaller kinship groups called *clans*.⁴ Indeed, clan and horde identities still hold great relevance for Kazakhs and continue to significantly influence political power in Kazakhstan.⁵

Early in the eighteenth century, imperial Russia first made inroads into Kazakhstan to control trade caravans, and during the nineteenth century, Russia built a series of forts across the Kazakh steppe (Svanberg 1999, 135). Though initially Russian involvement in Kazakh territory was largely economic and military in nature, Russian and later Soviet involvement in Kazakhstan became more invasive and influential in Kazakh cultural life. At first, Kazakh Muslim practices and religious schools were allowed to continue largely without interference. At the end of the nineteenth century, however, in response to the rise of a nascent Kazakh nationalist movement, Russia began to establish more control in cultural and educational spheres. Russian literacy schools were given primacy over Islamic schools, and pilgrimages to Mecca were made more difficult. In addition, Russian rulers began to encour-

age the settlement of Russians in Kazakhstan by granting them tracts of land for cultivation.⁶ The continued settlement of Russian farmers in Kazakhstan would have disastrous consequences for Kazakh mobile pastoralists while strengthening Russian control in the region.

The early twentieth century was a time of great upheaval on the Russian-controlled Kazakh steppe. Russian agricultural policies led to waves of Kazakh emigration into China and the Fergana Valley. Revolutionary fervor sweeping Russia spread to Kazakhstan, as fledgling socialist movements, Kazakh elite national movements, and Kazakh peasant rebellions intertwined in the early twentieth century (Anderson 1997). Among Kazakh elites the popular trend of sending their sons to Moscow to receive “enlightened” education—and thereby gaining exposure to Western European and Russian nationalist ideas—also contributed to the rise of Kazakh nationalism. One such effort, the Alash movement, would resurface after the fall of the Soviet Union in newly independent Kazakhstan.

THE SOVIET ERA

After the establishment of the Soviet Union in 1917, the Soviet push to collectivize land and livestock in Central Asia through the 1930s and 1940s (a process mirrored throughout the Soviet Union) met with disastrous consequences and massive loss of life among Soviet Kazakhs. Although the devastation wrought by collectivization was not unique to Kazakhs (the centralized governing mechanism made state-run agriculture highly inefficient; inadequate harvesting, storage facilities, and distribution systems led to the monumental waste of foodstuffs and widespread famine), Kazakhs’ experience under collectivization differed from that of their European counterparts, due to the eradication of nomadic lifeways. In 1929 the Soviets launched a twin campaign aimed at forced sedentarization (settlement) and collectivization of Kazakh herds and land. As Kazakhs were forced to settle on pastureland that could not accommodate their livestock, great numbers of their herds starved. This, combined with the agricultural disaster wrought by land collectivization, led to the unparalleled Kazakh famine (ашаршылық) in the 1930s. Soviet records from this time are sketchy, but most scholars agree that at least 1.5 million Kazakhs, or nearly 40 percent of the total Kazakh population, died as a direct result of collectivization (Cameron 2018). Thousands more fled to Afghanistan and across the Tian Shan Mountains to Xinjiang to escape So-

viet control and starvation. The Kazakh Soviet Socialist Republic, the second largest in the Soviet Union, after Russia, was formally established in 1936 with Alma Ata as its capital.

The Soviet era left an indelible mark on Kazakh culture, education, language, and religion—indeed, in all areas of life. Collectivization, sedentarization, deportations of whole communities of ethnic Koreans, Germans, Poles, and Chechens into Kazakhstan before and during World War II, and the widespread persecution of indigenous religious leaders wrought large-scale destructive change to Kazakh lifeways, and decimated the Kazakh population.⁷ Added to the devastating population depletion, the changes brought to Kazakh lifeways by forced settlement and collectivization were profound, as migratory life had been central to Kazakh experience. The historians Nurlat Amrekulov and Nurbulat Masanov argue that “along with a nomadic way of life and culture, Kazakhs lost their pride, basic values and worldview orientations” (Amrekulov and Masanov 1994, 137; as quoted in Rorlich 2000, 263). Practitioners of older belief systems of shamanism and Tengrism (nature worship specific to Central and Inner Asia) were persecuted, eroding the core of Kazakh pastoralist life. Further changes wrought by the influence of Soviet ideology left a lasting imprint on Kazakhstani arts, media, and habits of celebrations.

ALMATY IN THE SOVIET ERA

During much of the Soviet period, Kazakhstan’s capital, Almaty or Alma-Ata, as it was formerly known, was a small, provincial city. Nevertheless, arts and music flourished in Almaty, and an opera house, several theaters, and a conservatory were established (late 1930s–1940s). During World War II, Mosfilm, the monumental Soviet film industry, was moved to Almaty (1941–1943), marking the beginning of the Kazakhstani film industry. Many Almatyites fondly view the 1960s and 1970s in Almaty, under the leadership of Dinmukhamed Konaev, as a golden period when theater, opera, ballet, and the Kazakh film industry flourished, as the Almaty conservatory and the Academy of Sciences supported a new generation of scholars, writers, and musicians. The fall of the Soviet Union brought an influx of foreign capital, and by the beginning of the twenty-first century, Almaty had replaced Tashkent as the cultural center of Central Asia, and a new generation of wealthy entrepreneurs and oil companies had transformed the capital into a cosmopolitan

city, with soaring rents and a steeply growing gap between the wealthy and the working class.

INDEPENDENT KAZAKHSTAN

Among the important problems faced by newly independent Kazakhstan were the low numbers of ethnic Kazakhs in Kazakhstan. In January 1995 Kazakhs constituted 44 percent of Kazakhstan's total population (Olcott 1995). Following independence in 1991, The Kazakhstani government encouraged the repopulation of Kazakhs from the diaspora, partly through the implementation of new immigration policies. After independence new presidential edicts issued quotas for repatriated Kazakhs—designated “returnees” [Kz. *oralman*, pl. *oralmandar*], and new immigration laws concerning these returnees were established. These laws specifically indicated that those returning to Kazakhstan must be ethnic Kazakhs, and excluded groups like Uighurs who had fled Kazakhstan along with their Kazakh compatriots in the 1930s (Cummings 1998, 142).

Another development around Kazakhstani independence was the second-wave mobilization of the Kazakh elite, echoing that of the late nineteenth to early twentieth centuries. In the late 1980s, just before Kazakh independence, several Kazakh political organizations and movements were formed, including Azat (Freedom), Alash (a re-formation of the older movement), and Qazaq Tili (Kazakh language) (Zardykhan 2004). These groups protested Russian cultural, linguistic, and political hegemony, culminating in a 1986 demonstration that came to be known as Zheltoksan (December). It took place on December 16, the same day that would become Kazakhstan's Independence Day five years later, in 1991.