**Paths Not Taken:**

***How did Nomadism Affect Border-Making during National Delimitation in Central Asia?****[[1]](#footnote-1)*

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The dissolution of Tsarist power had an immediate impact on the political structures of Central Asia. As imperial frameworks broke down new autonomies were imagined and asserted. This continued after the Whites were routed in the Russian Civil War. A Kazakh Republic took the place of the old Governorates of the Steppe.[[2]](#footnote-2) A Turkestan Republic was created to its south as successor of the imperial Turkestan Krai. The People’s Republics of Khorezm and Bukhara remained formally independent as successors of the respective emirates, but debates on the appropriateness of these structures, and what should replace them, began immediately. Within four years they were gone. The first years of Soviet rule were therefore formative for the political structures of today’s Central Asia. The new regime replaced territories that predated the Russian Revolution with national republics and economic districts that were expected to facilitate Socialist progress.[[3]](#footnote-3) In this article, we revisit these formative years when different paths seemed open and even basic political terminology was in flux.[[4]](#footnote-4)

The national delimitation of 1924 has already been described in detail with the agency of local Bolsheviks as a prominent feature of the story.[[5]](#footnote-5) It is tempting to view this event retrospectively from its outcome, side-lining unrealised possibilities. However, while the big decisions of 1924 transformed the political landscape in the most dramatic set-piece manner, they should be seen as the major episode in a larger continuum of change involving many actors. Autonomies were asserted in the revolutionary period, were contested and (re)negotiated, and continued up to and well beyond the end of the 1920s, making Soviet borders and the degree of disruption they caused contingent rather than overdetermined.

Avoiding a deterministic view, we ask how this process was affected by the region’s nomads. Nomads, who had no single place of settlement, posed particular challenges when defining nations and, especially, drawing borders. What spatial technologies of governance did the Soviet state have at its disposal and how were these technologies used? Was the imposition of borders sensitive to the realities of nomadic life? Were there alternatives within national delimitation that would have made Central Asia’s territorial structures more accommodating to nomads?

One of the main issues for the Bolshevik government after the end of the Civil War was how to approach the colonised populations, including those with a non-sedentary way of life. Despite dissenting voices, the Soviet administration became more and more prone to solving the “nationality question” on a territorial basis, encouraging national districts and even national rural soviets to form. Every recognised minority on Soviet soil should eventually receive a certain defined territory.[[6]](#footnote-6) Beginning with the question of what to do with national minorities that did not settle in compact territories, such as the Jews, nomads posed a major problem to Soviet officials. The different, even competing methods for dealing with the latter problem and its broader methodological and historiographical implications stand at the core of this article.

**Spatial Technologies of Governance**

Since the earliest days of Bolshevik rule, Lenin’s government faced the challenge that a progressive urban based party ruled over a largely rural population that the party deemed “backward”. A functional territorial-administrative structure would eventually allow the revolutionaries to gain access to all parts of the population and to mobilise them for the socialist project.[[7]](#footnote-7) In this sense the territorial-administrative structure appeared as a crucial, spatial technology of governance.

While all the experts involved agreed on the significance of such technologies, territorialisation based on national differences was not uncontested. Two other lines competed with the claim for national-territorial self-determination. First, some Bolsheviks suggested the creation of “red guberniias”, that is, parts of the old imperial administrative structure should be kept under the new regime and urban proletarian centres would be used to push Soviet power into the margins.[[8]](#footnote-8) Second, experts in Moscow, mainly at Gosplan, promoted a territorial structure that was grounded in energy production. In their eyes, the nationality question should be solved separately. Their ideas were subsumed under the term *raionirovanie* (regionalisation or districtisation).[[9]](#footnote-9) Alongside these two lines, of course, the national communists kept insisting on the slogan for (territorial) national self-determination. Stalin also used this slogan albeit for his own ends.[[10]](#footnote-10)

These three lines of territorialisation were competing with one another in debates over borders throughout the 1920s. In these debates, it often seemed unclear what administrative (*administrativnyi*), national (*natsionalnyi*) and state (*gosudarstvennyi*) borders would mean for the practices on the ground. This offered many possible paths for regional development.[[11]](#footnote-11) Whereas the first option of “red guberniias” soon fell out of favour, the latter two would eventually become the spatial technologies applied (and entwined) all over the Soviet state, including Central Asia.

Even though the old ‘divide and rule’ narrative of the national delimitation has been convincingly rebuffed, and even though the early Soviet Union’s internal borders were not designed or generally policed to prevent cross-border migration, borders still mattered enormously *in situ* precisely because they did divide.[[12]](#footnote-12) They divided citizens’ experience of the Soviet state, deciding which privileges they were allocated, what resources would be given to them or taken from them, who would speak on their behalf, to whom they should petition for clemency, and whose side the state might take in a conflict. And although the legacies of Soviet economic planning remain visible in Central Asia today, it is the national borders which have so famously and visibly outlived the Soviet project and continue to generate controversy.[[13]](#footnote-13)

It is complicated enough to border space into distinct territories given the challenges of environment and topography. The presence of people naturally adds a second layer of complication, and where those people lack a single place of settlement that complication is multiplied. Nomads often have a deep and enduring attachment to their land, but their use of it is necessarily temporal and flexible.[[14]](#footnote-14) From various non-Soviet instances, it is clear that the introduction of modern state borders tends to mix badly with pastoral nomadism.[[15]](#footnote-15) So-called natural boundaries between communities were rare enough even without the tendency of those communities to move around. Peter Sahlins, Charles Maier and then Madeleine Reeves have underlined that borders are a key venue for the ‘totalizing’ effect of the modern state, where jurisdiction and authority become territorially fixed and identities become ‘fastened’.[[16]](#footnote-16) But the relationship is not unidirectional. Nomadic pastoralism can affect border-making just as surely as borders can obstruct nomadism, especially in a polity like the Soviet Union where ‘ethnographic knowledge’ of lifeways and customs was so important to governing strategies.[[17]](#footnote-17)

**People and Perceptions of Progress in Central Asia**

Nomadic pastoralism is a way of life wherein communities migrate regularly between pastures to allow their herds of animals to graze. Come the revolutionary period, nomadic pastoralism in Central Asia had already been buffeted by the long-term effects of settler colonialism, the First World War, and St Petersburg’s response to the multiple revolts of 1916.[[18]](#footnote-18) Communities had settled, changed their pastoral practice or emigrated beyond the reach of the Tsar. Yet still nomadic pastoralism persisted into the first decade of the Soviet era with some of its fundamental features intact. Nomads moved their herds of livestock between pastures, sometimes migrating only a few times a year, sometimes almost constantly. They produced animal products to sustain themselves and to trade.

The nomadic economy was tightly connected with that of urban centres such as Tashkent, the imperial hub for the whole region. Central Asians might move between nomadic and urban communities seasonally or at key moments in their lives, and a community that migrated less often was not necessarily closer to a sedentary existence. Nomadism was not a quality specific to a few but a lifeway which many moved into and out of.[[19]](#footnote-19) To the extent that nomadism functioned as an identity, then, it was fluid, and channelled as much by heritage and custom as the habits of daily life. It might be more appropriate to talk of nomadism as a form of ‘groupness’ in “the sense of belonging to a distinctive, bounded, solidary group”.[[20]](#footnote-20)

The 1926 census estimated that around 13.8 million people lived in Central Asia; a little more than 9 percent of the entire Soviet population.[[21]](#footnote-21) Even though the region was one of the pillars of the Soviet federal state, the Bolsheviks in Moscow knew little about it. Thus, they had to rely on imperial expertise and co-opted regional elites.[[22]](#footnote-22) One of the convictions which united the uneasy coalition of “European” Bolsheviks and Central Asian communists was a progressivist view of society. They tended to believe that Central Asian society could be changed through political will, rapidly and for the better. Traditional, allegedly backward, structures and practices would eventually be replaced by more and more enlightened, rational orders in society, economy and culture, and there was scarcely a more salient candidate for replacement than pastoral nomadism, which was deemed inefficient and antagonistic to social and economic progress of all kinds.[[23]](#footnote-23)

Although the Bolsheviks did not struggle so much over their goals, they argued over the means to achieve these goals. These arguments were involved and hard-fought: academic experts argued over whether any other kind of pastoralist or agricultural enterprise could prosper in the most arid regions, and whether there was a meaningful place for nomads in a modern socialist society.[[24]](#footnote-24) Could arid stretches be made into productive farmland, as had the American Midwest? Opinion was divided.[[25]](#footnote-25)

**National Delimitation, Process and Event**

For the Soviet administration, this question was contingent on the realisation of those early national territories that were to come out of post-tsarist Central Asia. National republics were seen as more propitious for economic and social progress; rational territorial structures which appeared as a precondition necessary for every modernisation strategy. But before their shapes could be determined and their borders demarcated, their populations had to be agreed upon.

There were various candidate markers for determining national belonging in Central Asia and their relative significance came and went, but a large, simple binary distinction was available: the division between sedentary and non-sedentary ways of life.[[26]](#footnote-26) Thus, the first intersection between delimitation and nomadism was in the identification of national populations. Reaching around the urban centres and sedentary agricultural regions of Russian Turkestan were huge stretches of nomadic pastoralist territory, from the Karakum Desert in the far west, across the Kazakh Steppe, and south-eastwards to the Tian-Shan mountain range. The Tsarist ethnographic tradition built from a foundational distinction between sedentary and nomadic, separating out the *Sart*, for example, from the Kazakh.[[27]](#footnote-27) Using this epistemological framework, the Soviet administration encouraged more nuanced ethnic distinctions based on language, aspects of everyday life (*byt*) or tribal structures.[[28]](#footnote-28)

So a national delimitation would reflect the division between nomadic and sedentary, but certain models of delimitation would have reflected it differently, depending on how both nationality and nomadism were conceived. In the Transcaucasian Federation (ZSFSR) for instance, federal institutions handled cross border issues such as seasonal migration between the three member republics.[[29]](#footnote-29) Would Central Asia take such a path?

Initiatives for national delimitation came not only from above, from the party leadership in Moscow, but primarily from the co-opted indigenous Bolsheviks.[[30]](#footnote-30) Indigenous cadres also treated nomadic and sedentary practices as an important cleavage in Central Asian life, and they tended to see nomadic regions as less developed or modern than the region’s sedentary core, but their understanding was in general more nuanced. For many who lived there, nomadic heritage was a key component of their groupness, bound up with conceptions of tribal loyalty, values, cultural norms or anti-colonial resistance.[[31]](#footnote-31) It might be ‘more Turkmen’ to migrate, for example, even as Turkmen practice varied from fully sedentary to highly mobile in the late imperial era.[[32]](#footnote-32)

Yet the indigenous Bolsheviks did not form a coherent political force.[[33]](#footnote-33) They often came from diverse parties and groups of elites with different ideas based on different experiences during the late imperial period. Turkmen leaders talked of a federation of states containing different zones of tribal authority. The Kazakh party Alash declared an autonomy during the Civil War that encompassed both Turkestan and Steppe Kazakhs. Siberian non-Russian intellectuals to the north called for greater regionalist autonomy and public consciousness.[[34]](#footnote-34)

This meant that, once absorbed into the Communist Party, Central Asians divided into factions. One faction, particularly representing those who would later join the ranks of the Uzbek institutions, favoured a separation of Central Asia according to national criteria. A rival faction, dominated by those who identified as Kazakh, favoured the creation of a Central Asian Federation, including the Kazakh ASSR,[[35]](#footnote-35) Turkestan, Bukhara and Khiva. Their main argument was that the prospective Uzbek republic would get the main economic assets (i.e. the cotton growing areas) and most of the urban centres of the region, whereas the prospective Kyrgyz and Kazakh entities would include the nomadic arc; mainly underdeveloped steppe or mountainous areas and barely any urban settlement, with the exception of the Semirech’e region.

Turar Ryskulov, in 1923 head of the Turkestani government, tried to preserve Turkestan as a federal entity and solve the problems related to the nationality question under this institutional roof. He saw the plans for *raionirovanie* as one tool to ease tension between the communities and thus deal with the nationality question:

“The old order of capitalist Russia was based on a system of colonial exploitation. It did not pay the slightest attention to the development of industry or culture here. In the Soviet Republic we have to turn this order upside down, because all Soviet Republics represent one whole, united in a Soviet Federation. […] Subsequently, the principle of *raionirovanie* is meant to order Soviet Russia and according to this principle all attempts to solve the national question must be built upon.”[[36]](#footnote-36)

This meant that the future order would be based on existing economic dependencies and Turkestan would remain a part of the RSFSR. Its borders should not intersect with traditional irrigation systems or paths of annual migration. With such a solution of the nationality question, the state would support the cultural development of all people in Turkestan.[[37]](#footnote-37) Borders might have been less reflective of single ethno-national identities and therefore less totalizing in the way they categorised administrative duties and jurisdictions, creating interstitial spaces for nomads to roam.

Politicians from Bukhara, most prominently among them Faizulla Khodzhaev, supported the idea of a national delimitation, as they thus could enlarge their own power base within a prospective Uzbek republic.[[38]](#footnote-38) The Communist Party of Bukhara now propagandised the idea of a distinct Uzbek nationality that could date its roots to Timur’s empire and that defined itself by a sedentary lifestyle and distinct culture from the other Turkic tribes of Central Asia. Hence, on 10th March 1924, the Central Committee of the CPB proclaimed:

“This is why the general debate gets hotter and hotter. The national reconstruction cannot be done in an orderly manner if the old borders and designations of the past remain the same. According to national aspects, cultural specifics and economic skills, every nationality [*narodnost’*] has to be merged into an independent political unity that would be able to fulfil their economic and cultural needs.”[[39]](#footnote-39)

The Bukharan communists had the sedentary population in mind. The cotton growers and the townspeople were at the centre of the modernizing economy and their development should not be impeded by “backward” nationalities.

Political support for delimitation and separation was not only based in opportunism, but also in fear of a near collapse. Abdulla Rakhimbaev, head of the Central Committee of the Turkestani Communist Party from 1923 to 1924, shared the evaluation by Isaak Zelenskii and Iosif Varekis – Moscow’s main representatives in Tashkent – that national antagonisms within party and state institutions would make Central Asia soon ungovernable. Rakhimbaev even feared that class conflict could gain a national dimension and thus endanger Bolshevik rule as such. A split of state institutions alongside national criteria would prevent this alleged collapse.[[40]](#footnote-40)

Particularly Iosif Vareikis was Janus-faced on this territorial issue. In principle, he confirmed that a Central Asian federation aside from the RSFSR and the ZSFSR would be the ideal state structure for the region. However, he then turned the argument. In order to build such a federation there must be nation states to form it. Thus, a national delimitation would be a necessary precondition for a later federation. And he added that unless such nation states would be created “we dare not wasting our time on the discussion of such kind of projects.”[[41]](#footnote-41)

The general tide turned against politicians that tried to maintain Turkestan, Bukhara and Khorezm within a reformed federal structure. At the beginning of 1924, Ryskulov lost his key position and was replaced by Sharustam Islamov, a decisive supporter of national delimitation. Simultaneously to this reshuffling of cadres, the party leadership in Moscow formally opted for national delimitation, but it tasked the regional party administration in Tashkent, the Central Asian Bureau or Sredazbiuro,[[42]](#footnote-42) to deal with the details.[[43]](#footnote-43) Thus party cadres of all prospective national republics were to discuss the division of the region.

The internal friction became evident during the meetings of the Territorial Commission for Delimitation of the Central Asian Republics, appointed by the Sredazbiuro in August and September 1924. For instance, Abdurakhim Khodzhibaev, functionary at the Fergana Oblast’ Executive Committee and member of the Uzbek sub-commission, loudly proclaimed his definition: “Who produces cotton? The Uzbeks do that!”[[44]](#footnote-44) And Sultanbek Khodzhanov, since 1921 Turkestani people’s commissar for education and member of the Kazakh sub-commission, opposed this with his unifying definition: “Until 1920, we did not have divisions between Kirgiz, Kara-Kirgiz and Uzbek. At that time, there was only a Muslim population. […] I propose to call all Muslims *Turks*, *Uzbeks* and so on, this means *Central Asian Turk* or *Central Asian Muslim*.”[[45]](#footnote-45) This is a stark indicator that the markers for ethnic distinction were contested within the Central Asian state and party structures. The relative importance of nomadism and, for example, religiosity, was addressed directly and also acted as a vector for other administrative and political disputes – as will be seen in the tussle over Kyrgyz autonomy.

The “Uzbek” supporters of a national delimitation met fierce opposition from representatives of the prospective Kazakh and Kyrgyz entities. As the latter feared that they would be marginalised they referred to the idea of a Central Asian Federation. This Federation should then guarantee the mutual economic development of the whole region.[[46]](#footnote-46) Like the initial plans for delimitation these plans for a federation were never fully developed or thought through. The Soviet state had already two different federal models to offer: the ZSFSR with its distinct nationally defined republics and the RSFSR with its blurry hierarchy of nationally defined entities.[[47]](#footnote-47) Nonetheless, with Moscow’s support, the pro-delimitation faction held the upper hand.[[48]](#footnote-48) Central Asia would be divided into discrete ethno-national republics, not a federation sitting outside and alongside the RSFSR. The Sredazbiuro would oversee and overrule the party branches in these five republics, but the cross-border management of nomads would not be one of its tasks, as this was part of the state administration. This was a choice against a federal approach or a *raionirovanie* based in economic dependencies on a larger scale. Hence, two possible alternatives were taken away.

**Nomadism: Abstraction and Practice**

It is clear from the narrative above that nomadism was among the most important social, economic and cultural realities that informed delimitation in Central Asia. Given that, and even without a federation, another remaining path was surely open which led to borders between republics with special facilities in nomadic areas. But actual nomadic practice had a loose relationship with nomadism as it existed in the negotiations between indigenous cadres, and border-making is not national delimitation. All these terms require deeper examination.

Nomadism had long affected the ethnic realities of Central Asia. It predominated on one side of what Shoshana Keller calls a ‘robust ethno-linguistic frontier’ which followed the environmental logic of the landscape.[[49]](#footnote-49) It had helped to define Central Asians’ linguistic diversity, their tribal affiliations, their reception of Islam, their interactions with each other and external powers. It put distance, literal and cultural, between rural and urban populations, maintaining independence in some cases and compromising it in others.[[50]](#footnote-50) This is why the binary distinction between nomadic and sedentary Central Asians referred to by advocates of an Uzbek nation loomed large in the imaginary of those with decision-making powers over the national delimitation project, mixing in with preoccupations and arguments over ethnic and national identity. Subsequent borders built around certain groups would reflect nomadic practice because nomadism had for a long time played a role in defining those groups. Any indigenous cadre’s attempts to create national republics for Kazakhs, for example, or Kyrgyz, would embody the historical effects of nomadism at a basic level.

Yet that embodiment lost its meaning along the lines by which the nomadic arc was delimited. First of all, many nomadic communities were lineage societies, in which loyalty and solidarity were organised according to kinship. For many within the Communist Party, lineage was a feature of the backwardness with which nomadism was associated. Because it segmented national groups, it spoiled the internal homogeneity, and so it was ‘functionally antinomic’ to the Soviet civilizing mission as expressed through delimitation.[[51]](#footnote-51) The problem of smaller communities was clear during the discussions of the Delimitation Commission. Even though a minority refused the idea of a delimitation altogether, they also reminded the supporters of this conundrum. For instance, there were communities known as “Kurama”, “Kipchak” or “Kashgarlyk” that could not be easily identified as either “Uzbek” or “Kazakh”. Whereas Sharustam Islamov claimed that the Kurama should simply be counted as Uzbek,[[52]](#footnote-52) Sandzhar Asfendiarov was opposed: “The word *kurama* means *rag rug* – a mixture. This group includes the most different of tribes [*plemena*]…”[[53]](#footnote-53)

 Certain identities were folded into larger ones. Could the same be done with pastoral nomadism? National groups were not recognised according to their daily nomadic practice. On the one hand, seasonal migration might clearly mark out a Turkmen from a Sart, but it did not separate a Turkmen from a Kazakh. Both groups felt a sense of pride in their nomadic heritage, for them it meant independence and cultural integrity, but not necessarily as nations, and not in ways that were internally homogenous. How could it, given the variation in practice? On the other hand, one’s association with a nomadic culture could help one identify as Kazakh, for example, but to stop being nomadic – completely or for portions of one’s life – was not to stop being Kazakh.

Furthermore, the relationship between historical nomadism and nomadism in Communist Party discourse was not mechanistic. The nomads of the Bolshevik imagination were often poorly sketched caricatures informed by prejudice. Indigenous cadres fared better, but they had their own agendas, in particular the expansion of their new territorial jurisdictions, and their discourse was nationalized in ways that simplified things.[[54]](#footnote-54) In reality any division was unclear and gradual. Nomadic practice was a spectrum, and not simply a linear one between wholly settled and constantly mobile. It did not neatly overlap with other ethnic or tribal markers. What should delimitation prioritise?

Where tribes competed at the outskirts of a republic the early Soviet administration prioritised the national principle, insisting on borders that impinged upon nomadic practice on both sides of a conflict. Given that conflicts often erupted over access to vital shared resources like land and water, a border which bequeathed privileged access depending on one’s identity could but make things worse. A well or pasturage territorialised in space rather than time made life difficult for one nomadic group or another at one end of their migratory route. But this was justified using the language of national emancipation and self-determination in the post-revolutionary era. New national cadres gained bureaucratic power from this language. Not in spite of, but *because of* their role representing a nationality, they came to see cross-border sharing of jurisdiction to be a threat to their position and hardened the border at the expense of those crossing it.[[55]](#footnote-55)

Along the Kazakh-Turkmen border in the early 1920s where both sides of the line were nomadic, in practice, neither was treated as such, their migratory routes were sundered and their access to pasturage was compromised. Although the border could be crossed freely, Soviet authorities refused to guarantee and facilitate access across the line. Priority was given to nomads or settlers using resources on ‘their’ side of the border at a time when inter-tribal hostility was intense. This bureaucratic inflexibility made respecting nomadic practice on either side impossible. It forced a reconceptualization in which tribal interlocutors of the Adai and Yomut were expected to speak on behalf of their Kazakh or Turkmen nation and its territory, and pledge not to seek access to vital resources. The complexities of nomadic practice and the specificities of lineage societies were flattened out into two national categories: broader, simpler, more legible.[[56]](#footnote-56)

The state’s frequent failure (and in fact its inability) to enforce the border meant that disputes over access manifested in administrative tussles rather than state violence. This only reinforced the sense that what was happening on the eastern shores of the Caspian Sea was frustrating disorderliness rather than peoples’ struggle for subsistence. Asserting the principle that a titular Kazakh republic should exist defined partly by their nomadic lifeway was the easy part. Drawing the boundaries of that republic in space while retaining that commitment to a partly nomadic definition of territory and groupness was vastly different. It became another path not taken.

At this juncture it is prudent to distinguish national delimitation from border-making, and to subdivide border-making yet further, into border attestation and border demarcation. National republics were delimited in Central Asia based partly on the distinction between nomadic and sedentary Central Asians, complicating lineage-based identities. The attestation of a border in the lines of a map in Moscow, or indeed Tashkent, remains an abstract bureaucratic process, proclaiming the existence of national borders and creating new, inflexible judicial regimes on either side of those borders without necessarily considering the messy business of enforcement. Border demarcation, in the early Soviet case, was often the corollary of enforcement: asserting the legal force of these borders necessitated a shared bureaucratic consensus over their specific placement. This throws into relief the profound difference between mapping borders at scale from above and placing them between blades of grass. It seldom meant a physical manifestation of the border, but the process was still deeply contentious before, during and after national delimitation.

**The Case of the Kyrgyz Republic**

Disputes over what became the Kyrgyz-Kazakh border are a good example of how the dynamics of demarcation worked, cutting across the first decade of Soviet power. The first Soviet-era proposal for a Kyrgyz territory was the Kara-Kirghiz Mountain Oblast’ (KKMO), formalised with recommended borders in 1922. As argued by Mirlan Bektursunov, the idea resulted in arguments which were embedded in local oblast’-level politics and were informed by concerns about the nomadic economy. This encompassed a conceptual split between “steppe nomads” (Kirgiz-Kazakh, after 1925 “Kazakh”) and “mountain nomads” (Kara-Kirgiz, after 1925 “Kyrgyz”), a split whose weak explanatory power would become apparent later in the decade. Decision-makers in Tashkent, Pishpek (today’s Bishkek) and Semirech’e were cognisant that the Kyrgyz and Kazakhs had a ‘shared nomadic economy’, but there were fears for the cultural autonomy of the Kyrgyz, who were differentiated by their social hierarchies and language.[[57]](#footnote-57) There were also anxieties over the ‘territorial aspirations’ of the Kazakh Republic and an ever greater distancing of the Kyrgyz region from the centre of power. All this led to broad-based support for the KKMO project, including among Kazakhs based in Tashkent.[[58]](#footnote-58)

We see here how anxieties over autonomy and culture militated against federative solutions in favour of national ones. Documents produced by the first Organisational Congress of the Workers of the Mountain Oblast’ in June 1922 show that its aims were explicitly national and justified by the principle of self-determination for the Kyrgyz people, as elaborated in its third protocol:

“The first preparatory congress of the working masses of the Kara-Kirgiz people for the creation of the Mountain Oblast’ manifests the will of the higher administrative and political powers of Turkestan ASSR in relation to the self-determination of all nations, particularly the native and formerly oppressed.”[[59]](#footnote-59)

The nomadic interests of the Kyrgyz played a significant role in the shaping of the new oblast’. The Congress described a Kazakh-Kyrgyz border which followed a blend of topographical features like mountain ridges and riverbeds, pre-existing *uezd* boundary lines, but also established pasturelands for local pastoralists, a critical resource and infrastructure in the nomadic economy.

This then implied that nomadic interests could be smoothly encapsulated in border attestation around the nomadic arc. The relationship between nomadism and border demarcation, in contrast, cannot be exemplified using the KKMO because famously it was squashed by a telegram from Moscow bearing the name of Joseph Stalin in 1922, on the grounds that the KKMO looked like unsanctioned nationalist secessionism.[[60]](#footnote-60) But demarcation did come later, after the national delimitation and the creation of an Autonomous Oblast’ for the Kyrgyz in 1924 which would eventually become the Kyrgyz ASSR by February 1926.

Notwithstanding the broad acceptance that a distinction between nomadic and sedentary Central Asians should inform the borders of Soviet Central Asia, the victory of the model of nationally defined republics had divided nomads from one another. This was done using a national border which, once attested, had to be demarcated if localised governance was to mean anything at all. Not only did this put a line through regions where nomadic practices intermingled freely, it would demonstrate the need for flexibility when reflecting and defending nomadic interests using national principles.

The notion of Turkestan and the borders of a Central Asian Federation might have accommodated nomadism differently. Ethno-national borders were already affecting nomadic life come 1924, in the way for example that they hemmed in nomadic practice and hid nomadic interests from administrators along the Russo-Kazakh border. The ultimate preferment of separation was not so much a turning point, but it *was* a moment when a suitable alternative was taken away.[[61]](#footnote-61)

**Consequences of National Separation**

*In Kyrgyzstan*

In mid-1925 authorities in Pishpek were busily trying to deescalate tensions between Kazakh and Kyrgyz pastoralists who both claimed ownership of pasturage in the Suusamyr Valley, then as now located within Kyrgyz territory south west from Pishpek. These tensions had been nationalised by the delimitation and bureaucratised by the Soviet state’s administrative practices. Pishpek devised legislation which permitted the Kazakhs to pasture one head of cattle for every 2.5 heads of cattle pastured by Kyrgyz. Influential Kyrgyz pastoralists visiting Suusamyr were given membership of the Communist Party, said to constitute a soviet there, and were granted authority to ensure that this stipulation was observed, but the dispute was far from resolved.[[62]](#footnote-62)

It is significant enough that the national delimitation had plainly failed to accommodate nomadic practice into the border demarcation work north of the Suusamyr Valley. But the case raises the question of how such accommodation could have been achieved given the mixing of Kyrgyz and Kazakh populations juxtaposed against the non-mixing of Kyrgyz and Kazakh jurisdiction. Even when agreements were reached, everyday problems remained because two state administrations had to interact. In Suusamyr, herders from both republics were sharing summer pastures after the delimitation.[[63]](#footnote-63) However, Kazakh and Kyrgyz politicians could not agree, if and how they should collect taxes from the herders. Moreover, the Kazakh representative, named Buraev, complained that Kyrgyz activists started educational campaigns among the Kazakh herdsmen: “It is completely impossible that the cultural educational institutions of Kirgizstan can fulfil the cultural-economic needs of the Kazakh herdsmen.”[[64]](#footnote-64) As was typical, the logic of the national delimitation caused both sides to double down on the sanctity of the border, wherever it sat, as a means of protecting their bureaucratic power.[[65]](#footnote-65)

In April 1925, the *Raionirovanie* Commission for the Kyrgyz AО discussed the unsatisfactory border with Kazakhstan in the North East. Previously two bilateral commissions tried to define an already-attested border between types of nomad, in doing the harder work of demarcation they had fallen back on “natural markers” like riverbeds and mountain ridges, ignoringed the economic dependencies and the will of the people living in the region.[[66]](#footnote-66) Following the projected border, the herdsmen in the Kukrursu Volost’ would lose access to their summer pastures and access to rivers that safeguard the irrigation of the area.[[67]](#footnote-67) Initially, in practice, the herdsmen cared little about the newly demarcated borders. The inhabitants of the village Pokrovka in Kyrgyzstan complained in 1927 that herdsmen migrating from Kazakhstan simply occupied their summer pastures with 2800 sheep and 100 horses and demanded a compensation for the damage caused from the government.[[68]](#footnote-68)

Access to water was crucial for herdsmen in an arid environment. This caused troubles at the riverbeds of the Kara-Kara and the Irisu in the north-east to Issyk-Kul. There were repeated clashes between herdsmen migrating from Kazakhstan and Kyrgyzstan about who can water their animals first.[[69]](#footnote-69) The troubles were even increased as the functionaries in Alma-Ata (today’s Almaty) and Frunze (by that point, the new name of Pishpek) noticed that the bilateral border had an obvious flaw. The line the bilateral Kyrgyz-Kazakh commission demarcated on 23 February 1928 differed decisively (by about 40 km2) from the border on the map the VTsIK in Moscow approved on 23 July 1928.[[70]](#footnote-70) In this case the functionaries from both sides agreed in 1930 that in a designated area on the Kyrgyz side, people from both sides of the border would be allowed to rally and water their livestock.[[71]](#footnote-71) However, such an arrangement could again produce conflicts on the ground when different herds would be watered at the river.

Much more border-demarcation and adjustment would follow. The precise outcome of the 1924 delimitation was self-consciously provisional. By 1927 organs of the Central Executive Committee in Moscow had produced more maps reflecting the changing national borders of Central Asia which were intended to be definitive for all of three years.[[72]](#footnote-72)

Where was nomadism left in this self-reinforcing logic of national border-making? Conceptually it was there at inception but as a practice it had become a trivial irritant next to the primacy of Soviet borders. Nomads could request that borders not cut them off from resources or trading markets in major cities, but where this request was granted it was often because administrators felt nomadic districts needed an urban administrative centre to ensure that district’s proper governance and economic development. The town of Osh in the Fergana Valley that was attached to Kyrgyzstan despite its alleged Uzbek population is but one example. The preservation of nomadic practice was not a priority.[[73]](#footnote-73) Borders moved but their nature did not.

*In Kazakhstan*

Kazakhstan experienced similar trade-offs in, for example, the creation of the Gur’ev and Ural *Okrugs* in the west of the Kazakh republic. Here the second type of new Soviet border, not national but economic, was decisive. The Gur’ev *Uezd* was an administrative area reaching around the north-eastern coast of the Caspian Sea. In 1925 it had its borders extended north-westwards bringing more nomadic Kazakhs into its jurisdiction. Gur’ev itself (Atyrau today) was an administrative centre for oil and fishing enterprises, and the new need to govern nomads was experienced as a burden there. The nomadic population only remained in the *uezd* for three to four months annually, spending the rest of the year over borders in other areas. Investigatory work for the regional *prokuror* (prosecutor) became immeasurably harder because of the mobility of suspects; summoning nomads to court was impossible and court actions reportedly took years. A protocol from the Gur’ev *Uezd* committee on 23rd March 1926 states that the counting of nomadic herds, the collection of taxes from nomads, and the support of nomadic agriculture was all far more troublesome than in Gur’ev’s settled regions.[[74]](#footnote-74)

In 1928, as part of the second stage of *raionirovanie*, Kazakh authorities suggested that the Ural Guberniia, which contained the Gur’ev *Uezd*, be divided into two new and more rational economic zones, the Gur’ev and Ural *Okrugs*. The Gur’ev *Okrug*, including the southern half of the Gur’ev Uezd, would contain local industrial and advanced agricultural enterprises. The nomadic regions to the north-west would join the largely agrarian Ural *Okrug*, consolidating the developmental challenges associated with nomads and including a fund to help those nomads to settle.[[75]](#footnote-75)

Forceful arguments were made against the division of the Ural Guberniia. Sietkali Mendeshev, а Kazakh Bolshevik, petitioned central organs in Moscow over several months, arguing that the proposed border between the Ural and Gur’ev *Okrugs* would cut across local nomads’ regular north-south migrations, disrupting their travels. Settlement was not an option in the region due to the ‘bitter salinity’ of the soil. Mendeshev also protested the idea that the new Gur’ev *Okrug* would govern exclusively sedentary agriculture, suggesting that Kazakhs there had been wrongly identified as sedentary when they were in fact semi-nomadic. Mendeshev proposed an alternative *okrug* with an administrative centre in the village of Slomikhina.[[76]](#footnote-76)

Central Kazakh authorities reasserted the good sense of their proposal, partly by contesting Mendeshev’s depiction of Kazakh life in the region, and partly by appealing to bureaucratic logic, saying Slomikhina was not developed enough to act as a governing centre.[[77]](#footnote-77) On 3rd September 1928 the Central Committee in Moscow concurred with the Kazakh government and sanctioned the proposals[[78]](#footnote-78). In fact, the Gur’ev *Okrug* was again expanded in 1929 to encompass more of the fishing industry along the shores of the Caspian, with little regard for migrating nomads in the area.[[79]](#footnote-79) Even where this part of north-western Kazakhstan met the periphery of the RSFSR the border could not be relied upon to protect the interests of nomads as representatives of the Kazakh nation.[[80]](#footnote-80)

Neither the republican governments in Kyrgyzstan and Kazakhstan nor even regional authorities within the republics seemed able to find suitable settlements to deal with nomadism when faced with cross-border challenges. Access to natural resources and land, taxation or law enforcement were tied ever more tightly to republican or even administrative borders. These borders established after 1924 became soon fixed in the bureaucrats´ heads. By following the practice of their comrades in the South Caucasus, they could have organised particular settlements when dealing with cross-border issues. Such practices were far from unthinkable in the early Soviet state, e.g. in the South Caucasus after the dissolution of the ZSFSR.[[81]](#footnote-81) This insistence on territoriality among the Central Asian bureaucrats took thus another suitable alternative – cross-border settlements – away. One more path of development became inaccessible.

**Conclusion**

At base, the Bolsheviks and the Central Asian political class were overwhelmingly wedded to a bordered state. From that, their journey ended in a small set of national categories with clearly demarcated ethno-national borders. The demarcation remained piecemeal but the logic of administrative national jurisdiction, even within the larger structures of the USSR, meant that where it mattered the border cut across nomadism to respect nationality. As is often the case, it is at the margins where the hard core of governing logic is thrown into relief; the de-prioritisation of nomadic interests at the periphery reminds us that any apparent concern for the nomadic-sedentary divide at each republic’s core became an inadvertent corollary of nationality policy. Nomadism was not expected to last, and it was thought of as backward, so while it had cultural resonance it made little sense to associate it in the political or economic dimensions with formalised national identities. It was a transnational phenomenon that, the Communists believed, should be allowed to die out.

This could have been done with more care and consideration in a federative system, or a system in which borders and jurisdictions were more flexible and less totalizing. The rationalising logic of *raionirovanie* compounded bureaucratic incentives to inconvenience mobile pastoralists. As they ended up, the borders could be moved, but grudgingly, with nomads caught between administrators who jealously guarded the productive capacities of the spaces in their charge. ‘Divide and rule’ may not have been the intention but division was an outcome of the path the Soviet Union took. Four alternative paths of development became inaccessible: first a federal solution, second a more exclusively economic raionirovanie, third administrative-territorial practices that included nomadic interests and were subsequently more propitious for reaching cross-border settlements.

Assessing the relationship between borders and nomads puts Central Asia and the Soviet Union into a larger comparative framework with other modern states in nomadic regions. It also touches on a consistently vexatious issue for Soviet governance throughout the USSR’s existence, which is the management of itinerant communities. It aids us in prising apart the Soviet Union’s different spatial technologies and to distinguish their intent from their effect. It helps us to see in a new way the connection between the productive output of the Soviet experiment in Central Asia, manifested in new syncretic cultures and prestige infrastructure, and the various destructive results of Soviet actions: cultural vandalism, economic exploitation, famine and mass mortality.[[82]](#footnote-82)

Francine Hirsch once argued that the Soviet population, Central Asians included, endured a ‘double assimilation’, first as nationalities, then as Soviet citizens.[[83]](#footnote-83) However vividly present in the imaginary of Central Asian nations, nomadism was in its practice ignored in the first assimilation and assaulted in the second. In the process of their implementation, national borders both bent to and broke nomadic practices.

***Summary***

*The national delimitation of Soviet Central Asia in 1924 embedded a particular interpretation of nationhood into the constitutional structures of the Soviet Union. Pastoral nomadism was still common, and the dichotomy between sedentary and non-sedentary peoples became important in dividing nationalities: Uzbek versus Kyrgyz, Kazakh and Turkmen. But the decision to build national entities intensified the importance of borders, and the internal borders’ bureaucratic logic became insensitive to nomadic interests. Nonetheless, a Central Asian Federation, ideas from raionirovanie, the inclusion of a nomadic perception of space and cross-border settlements could have offered viable alternative paths.*

***Резюме***

*Понятие нации, положенное в основу конституционной структуры Советского Союза, возникло в ходе национального размежевания Средней Азии в 1924 году. Распространенное в регионе кочевничество сыграло ключевую роль при создании новых республик, поскольку именно дихотомия между оседлым и кочевым населением позволила размежевать национальные сообщества узбеков рядом с кыргызами, казахами и туркменами. В ходе строительства национальных республик, однако, проявились практические последствия размежевания: бюрократическая логика внутренних границ оказалась нечуствительной к интересам кочевников. Вместе с тем, идеи Центрально-Азиатской Федереции, районирования, включения кочевнического восприятия пространства и межграничных соглашений исчезли как потенциальные альтернативные способы решения национального вопроса.*

1. The authors would like to extend their utmost gratitude to Victoria Clement, Anton Liavitski, Vitalij Fastovskij, Nick Baron, Niccolò Pianciola, and the reviewers and editors at *Ab imperio* for their insightful comments on earlier drafts of this article. [↑](#footnote-ref-1)
2. For clarity we have used the contemporary English-language spelling of present-day Central Asia’s ethnic categories wherever possible, but it should be noted that the names, their precise meanings and spellings were in flux during the 1920s. Prior to the distinction between Kyrgyz and Kazakh as we understand them today was in the Russian administrative language weak. Party and state institutions had been using the term Kirgiz to designate both the Qazaq (“kirgiz-kaizaks”) and Kyrgyz (“kara-kirgizy” or “dikokamennye kirgizy”). See: Ingeborg Baldauf. Some Thoughts on the Making of the Uzbek Nation // Cahiers du monde russe et soviétique. 1991. Vol. 32. No. 1. Pp. 89–91; Alun Thomas. Nomads and Soviet Rule: Central Asia under Lenin and Stalin. London/New York. 2018, P. 25; Gero Fedtke. Roter Orient: Muslimkommunisten und Bolschewiki in Turkestan, 1917-1924. Köln, 2020. Pp. 30–31; Mirlan Bektursunov. ‘Two parts – one whole?’ Kazakh–Kyrgyz Relations in the Making of Soviet Kyrgyzstan, 1917–24 // Central Asian Survey. 2022. P. 2. [↑](#footnote-ref-2)
3. Isaak Zelenskii and Iosif Vareikis. Natsional’no-gosudarstvennoe razmezhevanie Srednei Azii. Taschkent, 1924. [↑](#footnote-ref-3)
4. Fedtke. Roter Orient. P. 188. [↑](#footnote-ref-4)
5. Arne Haugen. The Establishment of National Republics in Soviet Central Asia. New York, 2003. Esp. Pp. 233-238. [↑](#footnote-ref-5)
6. Terry Martin. The Affirmative Action Empire: Nations and Nationalism in the Soviet Union, 1923-1939. Ithaca/London, 2001. P. 38-41. Kate Brown. A Biography of No Place. From Ethnic Borderland to Soviet Heartland, Cambridge, 2003, P. 18-51. [↑](#footnote-ref-6)
7. Francine Hirsch. Empire of Nations: Ethnographic Knowledge and the Making of the Soviet Union. Ithaca, 2005. P. 14. [↑](#footnote-ref-7)
8. Vladimir Kruglov. Organizatsiia territorii Rossii v 1917-2007 gg: Idei, praktika, rezul’taty. Moskva, 2020. Pp. 57-58. [↑](#footnote-ref-8)
9. Rossiiskii gosudarstvennyi Arkhiv Ekonomiki (Russian State Archive for Economy), f. 4372, op. 15, d. 2, l. 1 (Mikhail Vladimirskii’s speach at the 1st session of the Section for Raionirovanie); Konstantin Egorov. Raionirovanie SSSR: Sbornik materialov po raionirovaniiu s 1917 po 1925 god. Moskva, 1926. Pp. 11–13. [↑](#footnote-ref-9)
10. Stephen J. Blank. The Sorcerer as Apprentice. Stalin as Commissar of Nationalities 1917-1924. Westport, 1994. Pp. 208-209. [↑](#footnote-ref-10)
11. Stephan Rindlisbacher. The Territorial Challenge in the Early Soviet State // Sabine von Löwis and Beate Eschment (Eds.). Post-Soviet Borders: A Kaleidoscope of Shifting Lives and Lands. New York, 2023. Pp. 52-53. [↑](#footnote-ref-11)
12. National borders were not the only borders that mattered. Niccolò Pianciola has argued that Central Asia’s division into macroeconomic zones in the Stalinist period had major consequences during collectivization: Niccolò Pianciola. Stalinist Spatial Hierarchies: Placing the Kazakhs and Kyrgyz in Soviet Economic Regionalization // Central Asian Survey. 2017. Vol. 36 No 1. Pp. 73-92. Nick Baron’s work also emphasizes the importance of economic zoning in the USSR: Nick Baron. Soviet Karelia: Politics, Planning and Terror in Stalin's Russia, 1920-1939. London, 2007. [↑](#footnote-ref-12)
13. Christine Bichsel. Conflict Transformation in Central Asia: Irrigation Disputes in the Ferghana Valley. London, 2009. Pp. 106-112; Muzaffar Olimov and Saodat Olimova. Integration vs Disintegration: State Borders and Border Conflicts in the Isfara Valley // Sabine von Löwis and Beate Eschment (Eds.). Post-Soviet Borders: A Kaleidoscope of Shifting Lives and Lands. New York, 2023. Pp. 205-223. [↑](#footnote-ref-13)
14. Adrienne L. Edgar. Tribal Nation: The Making of Soviet Turkmenistan. Princeton, 2004. Pp. 9, 169. [↑](#footnote-ref-14)
15. James C. Scott. Seeing Like a State: How Certain Schemes to Improve the Human Condition Have Failed. New Haven, 1998. Pp. 45-52. [↑](#footnote-ref-15)
16. Peter Sahlins, Boundaries: The Making of France and Spain in the Pyrenees. Berkeley, 1989. Pp. 267 and 270; Charles S. Maier. Consigning the Twentieth Century to History: Alternative Narratives for the Modern Era // The American Historical Review. 2000. Vol. 105. No 3. Pp. 808-809; Madeleine Reeves. Border Work: Spatial Lives of the State in Rural Central Asia. Ithaca/London, 2014. [↑](#footnote-ref-16)
17. Hirsch. Empire of Nations. P. 10. [↑](#footnote-ref-17)
18. Alexander Morrison, Cloé Drieu and Aminat Chokobaeva (Eds.). The Central Asian Revolt of 1916: A Collapsing Empire in the Age of War and Revolution. Manchester 2019; Ian W. Campbell. Nationalizing Violence in a Collapsing Empire: A View from the Steppe // Ab Imperio. 2020. No. 3. Pp. 98-113. [↑](#footnote-ref-18)
19. ‘Nomadism’ is very broad category of analysis which can be productively divided into a more precise typology, but for the purposes of this article the category is sufficient, indeed its breadth is a strength, because it was similarly broad in some of the macro-administrative thinking that went on in the early Soviet Union. On Russian Imperial and Soviet censuses, see: Juliette Cadiot. Kak uporiadochivali raznoobrazie: Spiski i klassifikatsii natsional’nostei v Rossiiskoi Imperii i v Sovetskom Soiuze, 1897-1939 gg. // Ab Imperio. 2002. No. 4, Pp. 186-195. [↑](#footnote-ref-19)
20. Frederick Cooper and Rogers Brubaker, Beyond 'Identity' // Theory and Society. 2000. Vol. 29. No. 1. P. 20. [↑](#footnote-ref-20)
21. In 1926, only Uzbekistan and Turkmenistan had the status of union republics. Kyrgyzstan and Kazakhstan were autonomous republics of the RSFSR, Tajikistan an autonomous republic within Uzbekistan. Karakalpakistan was at the time an autonomous oblastʼ within the Kazakh ASSR. [↑](#footnote-ref-21)
22. Fedtke. Roter Orient. Pp. 264-271. [↑](#footnote-ref-22)
23. Sarah Cameron. The Hungry Steppe: Famine, Violence, and the Making of Soviet Kazakhstan. Ithaca/London, 2018; Robert Kindler. Stalins Nomaden: Herrschaft und Hunger in Kasachstan. Hamburg, 2014; Adeeb Khalid. Making Uzbekistan: Nation, Empire, and Revolution in the Early USSR. Ithaca/London, 2015. [↑](#footnote-ref-23)
24. The inclusion here of ‘socialist’ connotes the sometimes difficult question of how far the attitudes of the Soviet administration towards nomads differed from that of the tsarist administration that preceded it. To some extent this was a difference of theory but not effect: the tsarist administration wished to provoke settlement among nomads too, for example, but whereas pre-1917 this was principally another means of expropriating lands, after 1917 there was also a preoccupation with the transformation settlement would have within and among the ex-nomads themselves: Tetsu Akiyama. The Qïrghïz Baatïr and the Russian Empire: A Portrait of a Local Intermediary in Russian Central Asia. Boston, 2021. P. 83. Nevertheless it is worth noting that the Soviet state was not the first to concern itself with productivity, rationality and efficiency in use of land and people. [↑](#footnote-ref-24)
25. Cameron. Hungry Steppe. Pp. 60-69. [↑](#footnote-ref-25)
26. Baldauf. Some Thoughts. Pp. 79-96. [↑](#footnote-ref-26)
27. “Sart” was a broad term for the urban or sedentary population in Central Asia, especially merchants, although its precise implications varied according to the user. Due to its alleged derogatory connotation, it was abandoned in the 1920s: Baldauf. Some Thoughts. Pp. 80-81; Hirsch. Empire of Nations. Pp. 183-184. [↑](#footnote-ref-27)
28. Martin. The Affirmative Action Empire. P. 183; Hirsch. Empire of Nations. Pp. 131-134 [↑](#footnote-ref-28)
29. On the ZSFSR, see: Et. Peyrat. Soviet Federalism at Work. Lessons from the History of the Transcaucasian Federation // Jahrbücher für Geschichte Osteuropas. 2017. Vol. 65. No. 4. Pp. 529-559. [↑](#footnote-ref-29)
30. Fedtke. Roter Orient. Pp. 261 and 337; Adeeb Khalid. Nationalizing the Revolution in Central Asia: The Transformation of Jadidism, 1917-1920 // Ronald G. Suny and Terry Martin (Eds.). A State of Nations: Empire and Nation-Making in the Age of Lenin and Stalin. Oxford, 2001. Pp. 145-162. [↑](#footnote-ref-30)
31. On Kyrgyzness see: Jipar Duishembieva. ‘The Kara Kirghiz Must Develop Separately’. Ishenaaly Arabaev (1881–1933) and His Project of the Kyrgyz Nation // Ananda Breed, Eva-Marie Dubuisson and Ali Iğmen (Eds.). Creating Culture in (Post) Socialist Central Asia. Cham, 2020. P. 15. [↑](#footnote-ref-31)
32. Edgar. Tribal Nation. P. 23. [↑](#footnote-ref-32)
33. Fedtke. Roter Orient. P. 390; Haugen. The Establishment. P. 171. [↑](#footnote-ref-33)
34. Alun Thomas. Revisiting the ‘Transcaspian Episode’: British Intervention and Turkmen Statehood, 1918–1919 // Europe-Asia Studies. 2023. Vol. 75. No. 1. Pp. 131-153; Ivan Sablin and Alexander Korobeynikov. Buryat-Mongol and Alash Autonomous Movements before the Soviets, 1905-1917 // AlterNative: An International Journal of Indigenous Peoples. 2016. Vol. 12. No. 3. Pp. 211-223; Svetlana Gorshenina. Asie centrale: L’invention des frontières et l’héritage russo-soviétique. Paris, 2012. Pp. 190-197. [↑](#footnote-ref-34)
35. Between 1920 and 1925 Soviet officials used the denomination *Kirgiz АSSR* or shortened *Kirrespublika*. [↑](#footnote-ref-35)
36. Russian State Archive of Socio-Political History (hereafter RGASPI). F. 62. Op. 3. D. 9. L. 15. (Turar Ryskolov, address to the plenum of TsK KPT, 28 July 1923) [↑](#footnote-ref-36)
37. Ibid. Ll. 16-17. [↑](#footnote-ref-37)
38. Gero Fedtke. Wie aus Bucharern Usbeken und Tadschiken wurden. Sowjetische Nationalitätenpolitik im Lichte einer persönlichen Rivalität // Zeitschrift für Geschichtswissenschaft. 2006. Vol. 54. No. 3. Pp. 214-231. [↑](#footnote-ref-38)
39. RGASPI. F. 62. Op. 2. D. 101. Ll. 2-3. (Four theses of the Bukharan CP, 10 March 1924). [↑](#footnote-ref-39)
40. RGASPI. F. 62. Op. 2. D. 101. Ll. 43-44. (Minutes of the Uzbekistan Commission within the Sredazbiuro, 10 May 1924); Iosif Vareikis. Novyi etap natsional’nogo stroitel’stva v Srednej Azii // Isaak Zelenskii and Iosif Vareikis (eds). Natsional’no-gosudarstvennoe razmezhevanie Srednei Azii. Taschkent, 1924. Pp. 43-46. [↑](#footnote-ref-40)
41. Vareikis. Novyi etap. P. 54. [↑](#footnote-ref-41)
42. The Sredazbiuro was the main liaison organ of the party between the Bolsheviks in Moscow and in Central Asia. It as the place where orders from Moscow were implemented and requests to the center formulated. It was the main decision-making forum for the political practice in the region. See, Shoshana Keller. The Central Asian Bureau: An Essential Tool in Governing Soviet Turkestan // Central Asian Survey. 2003. Vol. 22. No. 2/3. Pp. 281-297. [↑](#footnote-ref-42)
43. RGASPI. F. 17. Op. 3. D. 443. Ll. 17-18. (Minutes of the Politburo TsK RKP(b), 12 June 1924, Item 4). [↑](#footnote-ref-43)
44. RGASPI. F. 62. Op. 2. D. 104. L. 117. (Stenograph of the Territorial Commission for Delimitation of the Central Asian Republics, 17 August 1924) [↑](#footnote-ref-44)
45. RGASPI. F. 62. Op. 2. D. 104. L. 119 [Italics, SR/AT]. (Stenograph of the Territorial Commission for Delimitation of the Central Asian Republics, 17 August 1924). Note that the term “Muslim” referred in this time not only to religious affiliation, but was also used as ethnonym. See: Fedtke. Roter Orient. P. 16; Khalid. Nationalizing the Revolution. P. 156. [↑](#footnote-ref-45)
46. RGASPI. F. 62. Op. 2. D. 101. Ll. 54-55. (Minutes of the Kirgiz-Kazakh and Kara-Kirgiz commission within the Sredazbiuro, 5 May 1924) [↑](#footnote-ref-46)
47. In the end of 1936, pressure from Georgian and Azerbaijani party and state institutions would lead to the dissolution of the first, but this was not yet on the agenda in 1924: Peyrat. Soviet Federalism. Pp. 549-551. [↑](#footnote-ref-47)
48. RGASPI. F. 62. Op. 2. D. 110. L. 18. (Minutes of the Editorial Commission of the Territorial Commission for Delimitation of the Central Asian Republics, 6 September 1924). [↑](#footnote-ref-48)
49. Shoshana Keller. Russia and Central Asia: Coexistence, Conquest, Convergence. Toronto, 2020. P. 6. [↑](#footnote-ref-49)
50. David Gullette. The Genealogical Construction of the Kyrgyz Republic: Kinship, State and ‘Tribalism’. Leiden, 2010. Pp. 11-12 [↑](#footnote-ref-50)
51. Isabelle Ohayon. The Soviet State and Lineage Societies: Doctrine, Local Interactions, and Political Hybridization in Kazakhstan and Kirghizia During the 1920s and 1930s. // Central Asian Affairs. 2016. No. 3. Pp. 164 and 173. [↑](#footnote-ref-51)
52. RGASPI. F. 62. Op. 2. D. 104. Ll. 30-31. (Stenograph of the Territorial Commission for Delimitation of the Central Asian Republics, 16 August 1924) [↑](#footnote-ref-52)
53. Ibid. L. 69. [↑](#footnote-ref-53)
54. Haugen. The Establishment. P. 178. [↑](#footnote-ref-54)
55. Thomas. Nomads. P. 85. [↑](#footnote-ref-55)
56. Thomas. Nomads. Pp. 85-92. [↑](#footnote-ref-56)
57. By the conclusion of the Tsarist era, the role of the distinctive Kyrgyz manap had been ‘reorganized’ by imperial power: Tetsu Akiyama. Why Was Russian Direct Rule over Kyrgyz Nomads Dependent on Tribal Chieftains ‘Manaps’? // Cahiers du monde russe. 2015. Vol. 56. No. 4. P. 8. Systems of patrilineage, too, adapted to changing politics: Nathan Light. Kyrgyz Genealogies and Lineages: Histories, Everyday Life and Patriarchal Institutions in Northwestern Kyrgyzstan // Genealogy. 2018. Vol. 53. No. 2. P. 5. [↑](#footnote-ref-57)
58. Bektursunov. ‘Two Parts’. Pp. 3 and 9; see also Haugen. The Establishment. Pp. 168-169. [↑](#footnote-ref-58)
59. Central State Archive of the Kyrgyz Republic (hereafter TsGA KR). F. 89. Op. 1. D. 255. L. 7. (Third Protocol of the First Organisational Congress of the Workers of the Mountain Oblast). [↑](#footnote-ref-59)
60. Z. Kumarov and E. Sadykov. Abdykerim Sydykov: Lichnost’ i istoriia. Bishkek, 2002. Pp. 69-70. [↑](#footnote-ref-60)
61. Thomas. Nomads. Pp. 80-85. [↑](#footnote-ref-61)
62. TsGA KR. F. 21, Op. 4, D. 43. Ll. 70-73. (Protocol 29 of the Presidium Kyrgyz ASSR Central Executive Committee). [↑](#footnote-ref-62)
63. TsGA KR. F. 21. Op. 2. D. 45. L. 53. (Minutes of the VTsIK, 3 May 1927). [↑](#footnote-ref-63)
64. TsGA KR. F. 21. Op. 2. D. 45. L. 9. (U. Buraev to the SNK of the Kyrgyz ASSR, 7 May 1927). [↑](#footnote-ref-64)
65. TsGA KR. F. 21. Op. 14. D. 12. Ll. 4-4 ob. (Agreement/Protocol of the Parity Commission on the Clarification of the Borders between Kyrgyzstan and Kazakhstan). [↑](#footnote-ref-65)
66. TsGA KR. F. 949. Op. 1. D. 6. L. 3. (Minutes of the Sub-Commission to clarify the borders of the Kara-Kirgiz ASSR, 10 April 1925). [↑](#footnote-ref-66)
67. TsGA KR. F. 949. Op. 1. D. 6. L. 4-5. (Minutes of the Sub-Commission to clarify the borders of the Kara-Kirgiz ASSR, 10 April 1925). [↑](#footnote-ref-67)
68. TsGA KR. F. 21. Op. 2. D. 45. L. 58. (Report of the Talas Kanton Ispolkom, 1 September 1927). [↑](#footnote-ref-68)
69. TsGA KR. F. 21. Op. 14. D. 20, L. 11. (Minutes of the Kazakh-Kyrgyz border commission, 27 August 1930) [↑](#footnote-ref-69)
70. TsGA KR. F. 21. Op. 14. D. 20. L. 1. (Map of the Karakol Kanton, Tiup-Kurmestinsk Volost’, 1928). [↑](#footnote-ref-70)
71. TsGA KR. F. 21. Op. 14. D. 20. L. 2. (Map of the collecting points (urochishche) Taldy-Bulak, Santazh, Kuturchan-Bulak and Kar-Kara with the border between the Kyrgyz and Kazakh ASSR as designated by the 1930 commission). [↑](#footnote-ref-71)
72. Hirsch. Empire of Nations. P. 172. [↑](#footnote-ref-72)
73. Khalid. Making Uzbekistan. P. 276; Edgar. Tribal Nation. Pp. 62-63; Hirsch. Empire of Nations. P. 168. [↑](#footnote-ref-73)
74. RGASPI. F. 17. Op. 25. D. 285. Ll. 104 and 132. See also: Alun Thomas. Kazakh Nomads and the New Soviet State, 1919–1934 / Ph.D. dissertation. University of Sheffield, 2015. Pp. 85–89. [↑](#footnote-ref-74)
75. State Archive of the Russian Federation (hereafter GA RF). F. 1235. Op. 140. D. 1029. Ll. 5-6 and 9-10 ob. (Minutes Extracts from the Presidium of the All-Russian Central Executive Committee on the conduct of *raionirovanie* in the Ural and Semipalatinsk provinces of the Kazakh ASSR, and related materials) [↑](#footnote-ref-75)
76. GA RF. F. 1235. Op. 123. D. 345. Ll. 22-30. (Letter from Sietkali Mendeshev). [↑](#footnote-ref-76)
77. GARF. F. 1235. Op. 123. D. 345. L. 18. (Protocol extracts from a joint meeting of the presidium of the Kazakh Central Executive Committee and the Kazakh Soviet of People’s Commissars). [↑](#footnote-ref-77)
78. GARF. F. 1235. Op. 140. D. 1029. Ll. 9-10ob. (Minutes Extracts from the Presidium of the All-Russian Central Executive Committee on the conduct of *raionirovanie* in the Ural and Semipalatinsk provinces of the Kazakh ASSR, and related materials) [↑](#footnote-ref-78)
79. GARF. F. 1235. Op. 123. D. 345. Ll. 55-57. (Declaration by the Presidium of the All-Russian Central Executive Committee). [↑](#footnote-ref-79)
80. Thomas. Nomads. Pp. 80-85. [↑](#footnote-ref-80)
81. Rindlisbacher. The Territorial Challenge. P. 60. [↑](#footnote-ref-81)
82. Ali F. Igmen. Speaking Soviet with an Accent: Culture and Power in Kyrgyzstan. Pittsburgh, 2012; Kindler. Stalins Nomaden. Pp. 109 and 284; Botakoz Kassymbekova and Aminat Chokobaeva. On Writing Soviet History of Central Asia: Frameworks, Challenges, Prospects’ // Central Asian Survey. 2021. Vol. 40. No. 4. Pp. 483-503; Botakoz Kassymbekova. On Decentering Soviet Studies and Launching New Conversations // Ab Imperio. 2022. No. 1. P. 117. [↑](#footnote-ref-82)
83. Hirsch. Empire of Nations. P. 14. [↑](#footnote-ref-83)