The Rhetoric of Islamic Debate in Kazakhstani Mass Media

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Abstract

There is an ongoing debate in Kazakhstani mass media over what constitutes proper Islamic belief and conduct. This paper examines a running dispute between Zikiriya Zhandarbek, an intellectual based at a university in southern Kazakhstan, and scripturalist Islamic institutions, such as the Kazakhstani Muftiate and the Islamic television channel Asyl Arna. In his tirades against "Salafist" and "untraditional" members of the Muftiate and Asyl Arna, Zhandarbek uses rhetoric inviting identification with domestic traditions and Akhmed Yasawi, a local Sufi saint. Conversely, scripturalists' rhetoric identifies them as scholars working to revive knowledge of the Qur'an and Islam. However, both parties claim to represent the Kazakh nation, showing the over- whelming importance of nationalist rhetoric in Kazakhstan today.

Keywords

Islam – media – nationalism – Kazakhstan – rhetoric

Introduction

Zikiriya Zhandarbek has a problem. That problem is Islam in contemporary Kazakhstan. In particular, he is worried about the threat that scripturalist Muslims pose to the existence of the Kazakh nation. He thinks that Kazakh imams ignore Kazakh traditions, that the major Islamic media company in Kazakhstan is taking money from Saudi Arabia and attempting to Arabize the country, and that Kazakh Sufis are unjustly imprisoned. Zhandarbek has developed

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this theme of danger to the Kazakh nation in several articles and open letters published on *Abai.kz*, one of the most popular and contentious Kazakh-language websites. In this article, I examine the rhetoric in three articles writ- ten by Zhandarbek and in responses to Zhandarbek written by scripturalist Muslims.

In addition to classical works and their emphasis on appeals to ethos, pathos, and logos (roughly, character, emotion, and logic), Kenneth Burke's work on rhetoric provides the theoretical basis for my understanding of rhetoric.[1] Burke defines rhetoric as "the use of words by human agents to form attitudes or induce actions in other human agents."[2] For Burke, one key to understanding how writers and speakers form attitudes in others is how they help readers and listeners identify with other people, ideas, and symbols. For example, a politician might say "I was a farm boy myself" to convince listeners that he is one of them; this rhetorical device also identifies the politician as someone with particular traits—farm boys are hard-working, plain-spoken people— and particular interests, such as lower interest rates on farm loans.[3] Or a Catholic anti-abortion activist might state, "abortion is another child abuse scandal," asking critics of the church's handling of sexual abuse cases to identify with the anti-abortion cause. These examples are not general cultural discourses, but the skilled use of specific words and ideas to bring about specific attitudes and actions. When, as will be seen below, Zhandarbek uses such words as "youth" and "tradition" in his attacks on scripturalist Muslims, he evokes emotions like the parental fear of losing one's children and pride in belonging to a respect- ed, important culture. The rhetoric in this paper tells us something about the types of Islamic authority in Kazakhstan and the different feelings of Muslimsin contemporary Kazakhstan.

Dramatis Personae

Zhandarbek is a nationalist intellectual. His work, like that of many other late Soviet and post-Soviet intellectuals, attempts to define Kazakh culture and civilization.[4] He was trained as a historian, and is a docent and kandidat, an

1 Aristotle, *The Art of Rhetoric*, trans. H. Lawson-Tancred (New York: Penguin, 1991); K. Burke, *A Rhetoric of Motives* (Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 1969).

2 Burke, *A Rhetoric of Motives,* 41.

3 Ibid, xiv.

4 For more on intellectuals' nation-building work, see C. Baker, *Ethnic Words and Soviet Things* (PhD diss., Indiana University, 2018) and D. Kudaibergenova, *Rewriting the Nation in Modern Kazakh Literature: Elites and Narratives* (Lanham, MD: Lexington Books, 2017).

academic rank roughly equivalent to a Ph.D., at Ahmed Yesevi University in Turkistan, Southern Kazakhstan. His early academic work concentrated on the genealogical manuscripts [*nasab-nama*] of sacred lineages [*qozha*] in Central Asia.5 These manuscripts not only detail individual familial genealogies, but also tell the origin stories of Islamic communities in Central Asia and make claims to administrative posts, property, and Islamic authority. A leading American scholar of Central Asia has argued that "the nasab-namas often are virtually our only sources through which to understand the history and development of the [sacred lineages] of southern Kazakhstan, and indeed all of Central Asia."6 Many of these genealogical manuscripts, particularly those in southern Kazakhstan, trace sacred lineages back to Akhmed Yasawi, a 12th- century figure popularly considered the founder of a Sufi order. Yasawi has been the focus of much of Zhandarbek's later academic work.7

Soviet perspectives on Yasawi provide much of the basis of Zhandarbek's understanding of Kazakh Islam. Soviet scholarship on Yasawi, particularly after 1950, examined Yasawi as the author of a collection of poetry, the *Divani Hikmet*, rather than as a religious figure. This allowed intellectuals, particularly Turkologists, to examine the *Divan-i Hikmet* as a founding document of Turkic literature. Anti-religious Soviet writers linked Yasawi to a feudal Turkic past but did not deny the specifically ethnic nature of the Yasawi tradition when they portrayed it as ignorant, backwards, and harmful. Late in the Soviet era, authors such as Tadzhikova began to assert, based on a particularly ethnicized framework of history, that Yasawi's Sufi ideas were tied to Turkic shamanism and could be celebrated as part of national culture.8

Zhandarbek has allies in his quest to promote Yasawi as a defining figure of Kazakh culture. After the dissolution of the Soviet Union, the late Soviet approach to glorifying Yasawi's (supposedly) syncretic blending of Islam with "shamanist" or "pre-Islamic" beliefs became part of the standard school and university curriculum. Yasawi is now a key figure in popular and governmental discourse: he is praised by Nursultan Nazarbayev, the Kazakhstani president,

5 Z. Zhandarbek, *Nasab-nama" Nusqalary zhane Turki Tarikhy* (Almaty: Daik Press, 2002).

6 D. DeWeese, "The Politics of Sacred Lineages in 19th-Century Central Asia: Descent Groups Linked to Khwaja Ahmad Yasavi in Shrine Documents and Genealogical Charters," *International Journal of Middle East Studies*, 31, no. 4 (1999): 507–530.

7 Z. Zhandarbek, *Iasaui Zholy zhane Qazaq Qoghamy* (Almaty: El-Shezhire, 2006).

8 D. DeWeese, "Ahmad Yasavī and the Divan-i Hikmat in Soviet Scholarship," in M. Kemper and S. Conermann (eds.), *The Heritage of Soviet Oriental Studies* (London: Routledge, 2011), 262–290. For an examination of the Soviet re-interpretation of Sufi practices as shamanic rituals, see D. DeWeese, "Shamanization in Central Asia," *Journal of the Economic and Social History of the Orient*, 57, no. 3 (2014): 326–363.

and is the subject of documentaries on television.9 Kazakh students learn that Yasawi argued that "we read the Qur'an and simultaneously believe in the spirits of our ancestors" and that Yasawi taught his students that a nation must not forget its past or its language.10

More generally, Kazakh intellectuals from movie directors to professors to artists are engaged in defining a specifically Kazakh spirituality. A few examples should suffice to show this nation-building in action. In *Shal* (The Old Man), the hero of the film declares that he is not the kind of man who goes to the mosque; rather, his god is the Kazakh steppe itself. For the Old Man, Islam is less important than communing with the land of Kazakhstan.11 Gharifolla Esim, a prominent professor of philosophy and deputy in the Kazakhstani senate, argues that the Turkic peoples have their own specific interpretation of Hanafi jurisprudence.12 Some intellectuals go even further, declaring Kazakhs' true religion to be "Tengrism," a supposedly pre-Islamic Turkic monotheistic religion.13 Zhandarbek is part of this broader nationalist search for a religion or spirituality unique to Kazakhs.

Zhandarbek's rhetorical opponents, whom I identify as members of "scripturalist" Islamic institutions, are the organized heart of what I have elsewhere called the "piety movement" in Kazakhstan.14 The piety movement is a coalition

9 For an example of Yasawi in popular culture, see the episode of the pseudo-historical program "Signs: Legends of the Steppe" on Yasawi from 2013: "Znaki. Stepnye Legendy," YouTube video, 44:45, posted by "The Seven Channel," September 16, 2013, https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=scgetYL5Gfs. This program is discussed in M. Laruelle, "In Search of Kazakhness: The Televisual Landscape and Screening of Nation in Kazakhstan," *Demokratizatsiya: The Journal of Post-Soviet Democratization*, 23, no. 3 (2015): 321–340. For an example of governmental discourse on Yasawi, see "Nazarbaev: Ongtustik Onirding Tarikhy—Tutas Qazaqstannyng Tarikhy," *Inform.kz*, April 27, 2017, http://www.inform.kz/kz/nazarbaev-ontustik-onirdin-tarihy-tutas-kazakstannyn-tarihy_a3021518 (accessed October 13, 2017), in which President Nazarbayev praises Yasawi during a visit to Southern Kazakhstan in April 2017: "Southern Kazakhstan is a region where the cream of Kazakh-ness has not been spoiled. It is a place endowed with the spiritual power (*qasiet*) of saints and sages, where there are traces of Akhmed Yasawi and Al-Farabi, a place rich with sacred monuments to [our] ancient civilization."

10 S. Bainietova, *Qozha Akhmet Iasaui: Tarikh, Tulgha, Uaqyt* (Almaty: Aruna, 2007), 81.

11 E. Tursonov, *Shal* (Kazakhfilm, 2012).

12 G. Esim, "Salafiler Dasturdi Durys Tanymaidy," *Abai.kz*, January 25, 2017, http://abai.kz/post/48680 (accessed February 19, 2018).

13 M. Laruelle, "Religious Revival, Nationalism and the 'Invention of Tradition': Political Tengrism in Central Asia and Tatarstan," *Central Asian Survey*, 26, no. 2 (2007): 203–216.

14 See especially the opening discussion in W. Schwab, "Islam, Fun, and Social Capital in Kazakhstan," *Central Asian Affairs*, 2, no. 1 (2015): 51–70. See also W. Schwab, "Traditions

of Kazakh Muslims who differ from broader Kazakhstani society in several ways: they believe that there is one true interpretation of Islam and that this interpretation must be based solely on the Qur'an and hadiths; they pray on a daily basis; they attend mosque regularly; they advocate for the wearing of the hijab or headscarves; and they dislike Islamic shrines and the veneration of ancestors. There are, of course, different levels of engagement with these ideas. Some women in the piety movement may think wearing a headscarf is a good idea but find it impossible to do so at their job. There are also fissures within the movement. Most members of the piety movement identify as Hanafi Muslims, while others identify as Salafis. However, on an everyday level, there is overlap and influence between different parts of the movement. For example, Islamic presses associated with the piety movement publish works written by Saudi scholars as well as classical Hanafi texts.15 Members of the piety movement are more interested in accessing Islamic scripture and scholarship than in sorting themselves into neat intellectual genealogies.

The Kazakhstani Muftiate and Asyl Arna are the dominant institutions of the piety movement in Kazakhstan. Asyl Arna is an Islamic television station that broadcasts diverse content, from family-oriented dramas to pedagogical talk shows with imams as guests. Its founder, Mukhamedzhan Tazabek, is a former popular singer in Kazakhstan and one of the most popular social media figures in Kazakhstan. His Instagram feed shows him drinking coffee in coffee shops, traveling to the UK, and hanging out with imams and members of parliament. Asyl Arna constructs a vision of Islam as an achievable part of a middle-class lifestyle that provides guidance for a moral and economically successful life.16 The Muftiate is charged by the Kazakhstani government with defining Islamic practice and belief for Muslims in Kazakhstan, educating

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and Texts: How Two Young Women Learned to Interpret the Qur'an and Hadiths in Kazakhstan," *Contemporary Islam*, 6, no. 2 (2012): 173–197; W. Schwab, "Establishing an Islamic Niche in Kazakhstan: Musylman Publishing House and Its Publications," *Central Asian Survey,* 30, no. 2 (2011): 227–242.

15 For example, Musylman Publishing House has published S. al-Qahtani, *Musylman Qorghany*, trans. A. Qasymov and K. Berdali (Almaty: Khalifa Altay Charitable Fund, 2004) and Q. Isa, *Islam Uaghyzy* (Almaty: Shapaghat-Nur, 2002). Al-Qahtani is a Saudi scholar, while Isa's work is a translation of a text that was originally published by the government of Saudi Arabia; the popularity of these types of texts illustrates the importance of transnational Salafist media in the piety movement. Musylman Publishing has also published the classic Hanafi text N. al-Layth al-Samarqandī, *Uiqydaghylardy Oyatu: Tanbihul Ghafillin*, trans. Zhengis Matkarimov (Almaty: Musylman, 2011).

16 W. Schwab, "Visual Culture and Islam in Kazakhstan: The Case of Asyl Arna's Social Media," *Central Asian Affairs*, 3, no. 4 (2016): 301–329.

imams and other bureaucrats, and running mosques throughout the country. It is the successor to the Central Asian Muftiate of the Soviet Union, an organization similarly tasked with administering Islam in Soviet Central Asia, which promoted a scripturalist form of Islam in its schools and mosques.17 The Kazakhstani Muftiate has continued this scripturalist orientation. In sermons, its imams tell Kazakhs to eschew popular practices such as shrine visitation, for- tune-telling, and folk healing. Instead, imams argue that Kazakhs should read scripture and increase their religious literacy.18 It is this emphasis on scripture, books, scholarship, and literacy that sets the Muftiate apart in broader publicculture in Kazakhstan.

Nationalist and Scripturalist Appeals

Zhandarbek has been writing articles on the threats to "Kazakh traditional beliefs" for at least a decade. These threats include everything from a religious studies textbook arguing that Kazakhs have totemistic beliefs rather than Sufi beliefs19 to Russian influence in Kazakhstan.20 Most of Zhandarbek's writing, however, focuses on the creeping threat of "non-traditional," "Salafi" Islam, two terms he uses for what I identify as the piety movement. The exchange analyzed in this section contains ideal types of rhetoric from Zhandarbek and his scripturalist opponents.

On December 28, 2015, Zhandarbek criticized Abdighappar Smanov, a fiery scripturalist preacher from southern Kazakhstan, in an article titled, "Who Are You, Mr. Smanov?,"21 writing:

> In a previously published article, we wrote about A. Quanyshbaev, who preaches under the auspices of the Spiritual Administration of the Muslims of Kazakhstan, and whose sermons are contrary to Kazakh traditional religious belief (*qazaqtyng dasturli dini tanymyna sai kelmeitin*).

17 E. Tasar, "The Official Madrasas of Soviet Uzbekistan," *Journal of the Economic and Social History of the Orient,* 59, no. 1–2 (2016): 265–302.

18 A. Bissenova, "Building a Muslim Nation: The Role of the Central Mosque of Astana," in M. Laruelle (ed.), *Kazakhstan in the Making: Legitimacy, Symbols, and Social Changes* (Lanham, MD: Lexington, 2016), 209–226.

19 Z. Zhandarbek, "'Dintanu Negizderin' Osulai 'Tanu' Kerek Pe Edi?!" *Abai.kz*, April 6, 2010, http://Abai.kz/post/3487 (accessed October 13, 2017).

20 Z. Zhandarbek, "'Kommentshi 'Turkistandyqqa' Zhauap,'" *Abai.kz*, April 6, 2012, http://Abai.kz/post/13038 (accessed October 13, 2017).

21 See Bigozhin's article in this issue for more on Smanov.

> Today, we continue this development and seek to discuss who is who [within the scripturalist movement], analyzing the sermons of Abdighappar Smanov, who influences today's Kazakh youth and is involved in the formation of religious knowledge. In a previous article we warned that if young people's religious beliefs change, if Kazakh traditional religious beliefs are reformed, then it is not necessary to prove—for it is axiomatic—that the Kazakh nation will leave history; the Kazakh nation will be divorced from the Kazakh civilization that has formed over the centuries and will enter the stage of history as a new people.22

This extract, which appears in the first paragraph of the article, contains the text's basic and hyperbolic emotional appeal: you and your children are in danger. Zhandarbek constructs this appeal in two ways. First, he appeals to pride in being a Kazakh, in the accomplishments of the Kazakh nation, and in its ostensibly monolithic and unique culture. Second, he appeals to a sense of parental responsibility for the youth of Kazakhstan. Zhandarbek is inviting the reader to identify with Kazakh parents whose children ignore their advice, exhortations, and traditions.

In his attack on Smanov, Zhandarbek implicitly argues that the Kazakh nation has one set of religious beliefs, following the essentialist rhetoric of national culture in Kazakhstan.23 The basis for this set of religious beliefs, in Zhadarbek's opinion, is the philosophy of Akhmed Yasawi, who constructed a specifically Turkic tradition of Islam. Yasawi prevented the Arabization of the Turkic peoples and catalyzed a renaissance of culture, religion, and freedom in the Islamic world, since it is only by following their nation's particular Islamic path that people can be independent and true to the spirit of Islam.

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22 Z. Zhandarbek, "Siz Kimsiz, Smanov Myrza?" *Abai.kz*, December 28, 2015, http://abai.kz/post/42873 (accessed October 13, 2017).

23 This essentialist rhetoric is not new. For example, in the Kazakh Soviet Encyclopedia, after enumerating the number of Kazakhs in the Kazakh SSR, the Kyrgyz SSR, Iran, Afghani- stan, and other political units, the description of Kazakhs starts with "[Kazakhs] speak the Kazakh language, which is a part of the northeast Kipchak group of Turkic languages. Kazakhs who follow a religious path have accepted the Sunni laws. In their beliefs, there is also a place for pre-Islamic Shamanist beliefs in Tengri and the ancestor spirits." Note the lack of room for any diversity in Kazakh religious belief. Kazakhs can be irreligious, but if they are religious, they are religious in one way: the Kazakh way. M.Q. Qarataev (ed.), "Qazaq," *Qazaq Sovet Entsiklopediyasi*, vol. 6 (Almaty: Qazaq Sovet Entsiklopediyasi, 1975), 219.

> *Qozha Akhmed Yasawi provided a path that completely follows the social relations of sharia law and the Five Pillars of Islam along with the ancient traditions of the Turkic peoples.* The fact is that through centuries-long tests, this path has allowed the originality of Turkic society to be maintained… This gave the opportunity to restore spiritual independence, language, and tradition not only to Turkic peoples, but to all peoples that accepted Islam [emphasis in original].24

The intellectual aspect of the Yasawi path described by Zhandarbek furthers the emotional appeal of his argument by demonstrating the depth of thought in Kazakh and Turkic civilization. He explains that the Yasawi path focuses on ascending layers of ethical behavior. If sharia law provides the necessary guidelines for the society, then the Sufi path provides the guidelines for inner life.25 Zhandarbek argues that Yasawi—and the saints and Sufi masters (*pir*) who followed him—taught the concept of the "perfect man" (*kemel adam*; Arabic: *Al-Insan al-Kamil*) to Kazakhs.26 The theory of the "perfect man" stems from the idea that there is a single true reality, which is God, and that humans were created to bear witness to this reality. Muhammad and the other prophets are the vehicles of the revelation of the true reality to humanity. The "perfect man" provides a link between humanity and God, the true reality, through the instantiation of Muhammad's revelation. The perfect man thus becomes a mirror held up to God, reflecting and knowing the greatness of God.27 Zhandarbek explains that moving toward this state is only possible by moving up the seven levels of inner life by following the "requirements of moral, ethical, and Sufi frameworks." This in turn requires not only using the brain and reason (*aqyl*), but experiencing the love of God and life with the heart, which is only possible by following the customs and traditions taught in a person's true culture.

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24 Z. Zhandarbek, "Siz Kimsiz, Smanov Myrza?"

25 Zhandarbek quotes the Qur'an 26:88–89 to show the importance of this inner life: "On Judgement Day, neither wealth nor children will benefit you in front of me. Only those who come to me with a pure heart will benefit." (Author's translation of Zhandarbek's Kazakh translation).

26 In another article, Zhandarbek writes that Yasawi taught over 100,000 students: Z. Zhandarbek, "Qozha Ahkmet Iasauiding Turki Tarikhyndaghy Roli," *Abai.kz*, June 27, 2011, http://Abai.kz/post/9200 (accessed October 13, 2017).

27 J.T. Little, "Al-Insan al-Kamil: The Perfect Man According to Ibn al-Arabi," *The Muslim World,* 77, no. 1 (1987): 43–54; R. Arnaldez, "al-Insān al-Kāmil," in P. Bearman, T. Bianquis, C.E. Bosworth, E. van Donzel, and W.P. Heinrichs (eds.), *Encyclopaedia of Islam*, Second Edition; S.H. Bashier, *Ibn al-'Arabi's Barzakh: The Concept of the Limit and the Relationship between God and the World* (Albany, NY: SUNY Press, 2012).

If your eyes glazed over when reading about the "perfect man," you are not alone. The majority of 21st-century Kazakhs are not interested in complicated Sufi esotericism. Zhandarbek's explication of Yasawi's intellectual path does not appeal to individual Kazakhs' logical derivation of personal theology. Rather, it invokes Akhmed Yasawi and presents an outline of an impressive-sounding philosophy ostensibly based on Yasawi's thought. Zhandarbek's sketch of the Yasawi path provides just enough substance to show readers the intellectual greatness of the Kazakh tradition with which they identify. Zhandarbek is counting on the fact that while readers might not want to become experts in Yasawi's philosophy, they certainly take pride in it.

In addition to Yasawi's intellectual path, Zhandarbek refers to the ritual aspect of the path that Yasawi made possible for Turkic peoples, and in particular Kazakhs, which emphasizes the role of saints (*aulie*) and ancestor spirits (*aruaq*) in everyday life: "We can be sure that Qozha Akhmet Yasawi's position on ancestor spirits (*rukh-aruaq*) entered the Kazakh nation's traditional religious worldview as [ritual] traditions and forms [the Kazakh nation's] spiritual pillar."28 He specifically alludes to rituals in which the vast majority of Kazakhs have participated, such as funerary feasts on the seventh or fortieth day after death. Ancestor spirits and saints are not only ethical bridges between mankind and God, but also physical bridges, something confirmed by the Qur'an in Bakarah 87, which Zhandarbek translates as "We supported him with pure ancestor spirits, holy ancestor spirits (*biz ony pak aruaqpen, qasietti aruaqpen qoldadyq*)." Zhandarbek also argues that the physicality of the ancestor spirits is confirmed by quantum physics. A person has "seven subtle bodies," including an ethereal body, an astral body, a mental body, and a celestial body, which perhaps correspond to the seven levels of one's inner world. In Zhandarbek's view, Yasawi integrated the belief in ancestor spirits present in ancient Turkic religion with Islam and combined Turkic and Islamic rituals to send each of these bodies to the next level of the universe. For example, the astral body dies after forty days, and thus Kazakhs have a feast and recite the Qur'an on the fortieth day after death to help a soul continue its journey. Other subtle bodies die at other intervals, hence Kazakhs' funerary feasts after seven days or a year. In return, the deceased's essences support the endeavors of the living.

Zhandarbek presumes his readers have their own experience and knowledge of "Kazakh traditions," of which funerary feasts are only one example. By linking Yasawi to Kazakh funerary traditions, Zhandarbek helps his readers to identify as the inheritors of both Yasawi's thought and Kazakh tradition. Readers are thus able to fit their own experience into Zhandarbek's "moral, ethical,

28 Zhandarbek, "Siz Kimsiz, Smanov Myrza?"

and Sufi frameworks," conjuring pride in their own traditions, as well as feelings of nostalgia and belonging.

By imagining their experiences as coterminous with the Kazakh tradition, readers identify as Kazakhs whose traditions are being destroyed by preachers like Arman Quanyshbaev and Abdighappar Smanov. Zhandarbek argues that these imams and preachers are arrogant and act like they know more about Islam than Kazakhs or their ancestors. He rhetorically asks, "Smanov is a teacher (*ustaz*). But what kind of teacher is he?" The answer is that he is someone who thinks that Kazakhs who look to saints and Sufis are, in fact, "infidels" (*kapir*). Not only does Smanov think that he knows more about Islam than "traditional" Kazakhs, he does not even think "traditional" Kazakhs are Muslims! If you think you are a Kazakh, and you want your children to carry on your Kazakh legacy, the argument goes, then you must oppose Smanov and his allies.

The simplest scripturalist response to Zhandarbek's appeal to emotional ties to nation, tradition, and children is to draw on the Islamic scholarly tradition and scripture. Askhat Asqarov, a scripturalist author who writes for *Islam. kz*,29 defended Smanov in a short article entitled, "Who Are You, Mr. Zikiriya Zhandarbek?" This article presents a different style of argument and a different rhetorical appeal than Zhandarbek's article:

> Countless thanks and praise to God the Most High, the Most Powerful, and may God's blessings and peace be upon His most respected messenger, Muhammad. Zikiriya Zhandarbek's article, "Who are you, Mr. Smanov?" on *Abai.kz* is known to all of us. In this article, [Zhandarbek] cites verses from the Qur'an and argues that these verses prove that the ancestor spirits (*aruaq*) cannot be considered separate from God and that the ancestor spirits support people. But if we look critically at this proof, we see that one of the verses he cited was Bakarah 87, "Ua aiad- nahu bi rukhil-qudus," which he translates as "We supported him with pure ancestor spirits, holy ancestor spirits." Or, "rukhil-qudys" is "ancestor spirit" (*aruaq*). However, if we were each to translate the Qur'an according to our own understanding [like Zhandarbek], then we would each have our own religion. It is for this reason that God Almighty commands us to follow the owners of knowledge, and says in the Qur'an (Fatur 28): "In truth, from His servants, it is only those who know that fear Allah." In another verse (Nakhl 43), [it is said]: "If you don't know, ask those who have knowledge!" If we remember these verses, then we can gain the correct understanding of these verses as given by several Sunni scholars:

29 *Islam.kz* is run by Qairat Zholdybaiuly, the assistant Mufti (*naib mufti*) of Kazakhstan.

> Imam Tabari writes that "rukhil-qudys" means Gabriel [the angel]. Imam Baidawi also says [this means] "the angel Gabriel," not ancestor spirits. Ibn Kathir wrote a commentary on this verse that says that ibn Masud, ibn Abbas, and Muhammad ibn Ka'b said that "rukhil-qudys" means Gabriel. If we cite these scholars and Companions of the Prophet, then we know "rukhil-qudys" does not mean ancestor spirit, but Gabriel. 30

Asqarov goes on to disagree with Zhandarbek's interpretation of a second verse from the Qur'an. These two paragraphs form approximately half of the short article and contain the basic appeals of Asqarov's argument. The first appeal uses the format of the text to emphasize Asqarov's character as a scholar within the Islamic scripturalist tradition. He, unlike Zhandarbek, starts with the appropriate and traditional praise for God and the Prophet. He, unlike Zhandarbek, cites the Qur'an in Arabic and can provide an exegesis of the definitions of individual words. He, unlike Zhandarbek, wishes not to have his own national religion, but to follow in the footsteps of scholars and Companions of the Prophet he presumes are universally recognized by Muslims. The second appeal is to the logic of the audience: you are a Muslim and thus you believe in the primacy of the Qur'an; the Qur'an shows that Muslims should listen to scholars; and scholars agree that the passage in question refers to the angel Gabriel, not ancestor spirits.

Asqarov's work also includes an appeal to identify with Muslim scholars. He names famous scholars such as Tabari, Baidawi, Ibn Kathir, Ibn Masud, and Ibn Abbas. This not only calls on their authority, but also allows the reader to pick sides, choosing between famous Muslim scholars who are honored throughout the Islamic world and a Kazakh professor. Whose side do you want to be on?

Asqarov, with his scripturalist appeal to his own scholarly credentials and the logic of the scripturalist tradition, and Zhandarbek, with his appeal to Kazakhs' loyalties to nation and family, essentially talk past each other in their exchange. Zhandarbek cites Bakarah 87 in order to highlight the importance of Kazakh national tradition; Asqarov cites Bakarah 87 in order to showcase the value of the scripturalist tradition. They make different rhetorical arguments and speak to different audiences. Zhandarbek writes for a national audience of Kazakh-language readers of a website with a populist and nationalist political slant. Asqarov's audience is smaller. He writes for a Muftiate-affiliated website for an audience consisting of scripturalist Muslims. Given their different audiences and platforms, it is no surprise that Zhandarbek and Asqarov fail to

30 A. Asqarov, "Siz Kimsiz Zikiriya Zhandarbek Myrza?," *Islam.kz*, http://askhataskarov.islam.kz/kk/post/siz-kimsiz-zikiriya-jandarbek-myrza-3096 (accessed October 13, 2017).

engage with one another. However, as we will see in the next section, the most widely-read arguments over proper Islamic belief and practice in Kazakhstan do speak to each other using different types of the same nationalist rhetoric.

Zhandarbek, Asyl Arna, and the Muftiate: Competing for the Nation-State

In October 2015, Zhandarbek wrote an open letter to President Nursultan Nazarbayev to exhort him to personally examine the court case against Ismatulla Qari, a Sufi leader in Almaty, and to change the religious message of the Mufti- ate and Asyl Arna. Zhandarbek sees these issues as being connected through their mutual link to Saudi Arabian influence.

> Respected Head of the Nation! Respected
>
> Nursultan Abishuly!
>
> I am writing this open letter to you because two events have been covered in the pages of the mass media in the last two weeks. First, the popular Australian internet journalist Julian Assange's site Wikileaks published a data file entitled "The Saudi Cables" on Saudi Arabia's secret letters. This file contains a letter that clearly shows that Saudi Arabia funded the Asyl Arna television channel in Kazakhstan and that our country's religious direction is completely controlled by the Saudis and we are going along with the plans they have drawn out.
>
> [The second event in the media] is Asqar Zhmadildaev's report to the "Press Club" on the court case of Sayat Ibraev, doctor of technical sciences and professor [and a student of the Sufi Ismatulla Qari]… It is clear from the Saudi letters to which kind of problems we must turn our attention. In a [Saudi] letter, it is said, "In addition, [in Kazakhstan], Sufi propaganda is spreading among the Kazakh people, and there is a group of Sufi preachers engaged in mistaken activities. In addition, there is the danger of Shi'ite influence and activities. If there is no [Salafi] propaganda, there is a possibility that those interested in religion will side with the Shi'ites." I have no doubt that Saudi influence is the main fac- tor in [our government's] pressure on Sufism, which is the basis of the Kazakh nation's religious beliefs, and their prosecution and persecution of Sufis like Ismatulla Qari and his students. There is the possibility that

> after the removal of Ismatulla Qari and his students, who are preaching the traditional religion of the Kazakh nation and the basics of religious belief, there will be no obstacle to the proselytization of preachers from the Salafi-Wahhabi movement…
>
> Respected Head of the Nation!
>
> Today, the means to solve these problems are in your hands alone. I do not believe that anyone else can solve these problems. Therefore, I request that you quickly take the following measures to heal our nation's religious-spiritual condition. I request and ask that you take the following matters into your own hands:
>
> 1. Reinvestigate the case against Ismatulla Qari and Sayat Ibraev, who have been prosecuted for preaching the traditional Kazakh religion of Yasawi's path, and make a just decision;
>
> 2. Influence the Spiritual Administration of the Muslims of Kazakhstan to turn toward the Kazakh nation's traditional religious ideology;
>
> 3. Solve the issue of educating our religious cadres in the spiritual-religious cradle of the Kazakh nation;
>
> 4. Work to completely stop the training of religious cadres in foreign countries.31

Zhandarbek's choice of terms by which to describe the addressee of the letter, Nursultan Nazarbayev, begins the text's emotional appeal to the national loyalty of the reader. Nazarbayev is known by many honorifics: "The President," "The First President" (*tunghysh president*), "The King," and "The Tsar" (*patsha*). The form of address Zhandarbek uses, "Head of the People" (*elbasy*), combines "head" (*bas*) with a word (*el*) connoting the people, the nation, the extended family. "The Head of the People" emphasizes the national and familial nature of the state of Kazakhstan. Zhandarbek invites readers to identify with the head of the national family and asks them what they would do if an outsider threatened this family.

31 Z. Zhandarbek, "'Asyl Arna' Ham Zayat Ybyrai Zhyry," *Abai.kz*, October 15, 2015, http://Abai.kz/post/41806 (accessed October 13, 2017).

The first paragraph names the outsiders purportedly threatening this family: the Saudi government and Asyl Arna. In the second paragraph, the Saudi government is again named, but then equated with "Salafi-Wahhabi" preachers. Thus, Zhandarbek frames Asyl Arna as a Saudi government-funded Salafi organization that wants to change the traditional beliefs of Kazakhs. To mark Asyl Arna as dangerous and foreign, he specifically uses the terms "Salafi" and "Wahhabi," which became terms of derision in Central Asia in the late Soviet era thanks to a dispute between Hanafi traditionalists such as Muhammad Hindustoni and reformist students of Hindustoni. During the dispute, Hindustoni labeled his renegade students "Wahhabis."32 Accordingly, the Soviet government shifted its rhetoric on the "general Muslim menace" from Sufism, previously demonized as premodern and dangerous, to Wahhabism.33 Central Asian governments picked up on this rhetoric of fear after the dissolution of the Soviet Union, and its use intensified following 9/11. Alexander Knysh points to the general Soviet and post-Soviet use of "Wahhabi" and "Salafi" as a "rhetorical foil" in an atmosphere of fear. Knysh shows how "Wahhabis" are contrasted with Sufis in the post-9/11 environment; in this discourse, terrorists are Wahhabis, Wahhabis are terrorists, and Sufis are patronizingly seen as the nice, peaceful, traditional Muslims who can be trusted to listen to state authorities. "Wahhabi" has become a catch-all term for bad, unwanted, or dangerous Muslims. This rhetoric is often used by governments in post-Soviet countries, where anyone who opposes the government can be deemed a "Wahhabi" bent on terrorism.34 Taken to a ridiculous extreme, any religious person, even an evangelical Christian, can be labelled a Wahhabi, as Rasanayagam has shown in the case of Uzbekistan.35

In one sense, Zhandarbek's rhetoric follows the exact typology set out by Knysh: "bad" Wahhabis are set up in opposition to "good" Sufis. The "good" readers of the article should therefore fear the evil, violent, foreign Wahhabis and identify with the "traditional" Sufis.

Zhandarbek names the Sufi leader Ismatulla Abdighappar, also known as Ismatulla Qari and Ismatulla Maqsum, as the righteous enemy of the Salafis. Ismatulla is an ethnic Kazakh born in Afghanistan who came to Almaty in the

32 A.J. Frank and J. Mamatov (eds.), *Uzbek Islamic Debates: Texts, Translations, and Commentary* (Springfield, VA: Dunwoody Press, 2006).

33 M. Atkin, "The Rhetoric of Islamophobia," *Central Asia and the Caucasus,* 1 (2000): 123–32.

34 A. Knysh, "'A Clear and Present Danger': 'Wahhabism' as a Rhetorical Foil," *Die Welt des Islams*, 44, no. 1 (2004): 3–26.

35 J. Rasanayagam, "The Politics of Culture and the Space for Islam: Soviet and Post-Soviet Imaginaries in Uzbekistan," *Central Asian Survey,* 33, no. 1 (2014): 1–14.

early 1990s. His preaching concentrated on reviving his interpretation of the Yasawi Sufi path, which he also identified with the 19th- and early 20th-century Kazakh poets Abai Qunanbaev and Shakirim Qudaiberdiuly. Ismatulla's group met with initial success, but he ran afoul of the Muftiate and the Ministry of Justice and was expelled from Kazakhstan in the late 1990s.36 He returned in 2001 and continued his work until 2011, when he and several of his deputies, including Sayat Ibraev, received prison sentences for religious extremism.

However, Zhandarbek's case against the Muftiate does not rely on Ismatulla's exact teaching or religious practices, which he does not discuss. Zhandarbek's main rhetorical appeal is to the same identification with country, family, and tradition discussed above. At points in the article, the Saudis and their allies control what the national family does and seek to change the religious beliefs of the Kazakhs. At other points, the threat of miscegenation is implied. Zhandarbek later states that Kazakhs will "have the name of Kazakh, the essence of something else" [*aty Qazaq, zaty basqa*]. If, in the previous section, Smanov was accused of teaching Kazakh children to turn their backs on their parents, here the Saudis are accused of brainwashing your children and making you take care of their bastard sons. This stirs powerful emotions of parental love and sexual jealousy. The facts of the case against Ismatulla are unimportant in Zhandarbek's argument, which is centered on the idea that at least Ismatulla is one of "your" people.

In this article, Zhandarbek connects love of country to the nation-state, the political unit of Kazakhs, rather than to Kazakh tradition. Anyone who takes money from a foreign government is not a real Kazakh. Other countries' influence must be guarded against and the homeland must be purely Kazakh. Other countries do not promote Kazakh traditional beliefs—and indeed could not promote Kazakh beliefs because non-natives cannot grasp the totality of Kzakh culture. By this logic, Kazakhs must not be trained in foreign countries, as this corrupts them and turns them away from Kazakh culture and Kazakhstan. Even in schools in Kazakhstan, Kazakh imams must not be trained using materials prepared for Arabic countries. Kazakhstan must have its own national curriculum for imams, and the Kazakhstani government must provide for this. Here, the proper Islamic comportment of Kazakhs is seen as the responsibility of the Kazakhstani state and its leader, the Head of the Nation.

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36 P. Jessa, "Religious Renewal in Kazakhstan: Redefining 'Unofficial Islam,'" in C. Hann and Civil Religious Group (eds.), *The Postsocialist Religious Question: Faith and Power in Central Asia and East-Central Europe* (Berlin: lit Verlag, 2006): 169–190. See also H. Fathi, "Les Réseaux Mystiques au Kazakhstan: Entre Dhikr et Militantisme?" *Cahiers d'Asie Centrale*, 15/16 (2007): 223–261.

Zhandarbek's appeal to the nation-state opens a rhetorical door for Erzhan Qazhy Malghazyuly Mayamerov, then Head Mufti of Kazakhstan, who explained his own responsibility to the nation-state for Kazakhs' Islamic beliefs and practices in his response to Zhandarbek on *Abai.kz*:

> The Spiritual Administration of the Muslims of Kazakhstan is the spiritual center and traditional home (*qarashangyraghy*) of Muslim society in our country. The Muftiate not only directs all mosques and calls society to faith, but also invites all peoples and ethnic groups to unity.
>
> Thank God, compared to neighboring nations, our achievements in the religious field have not been few. If I were to name one of them, it would be that every mosque has a Friday sermon on the same topic [in any given week]. In 2,500 mosques, only sermons on Muftiate-approved topics are read. In some countries, there is a religious system which is divided into regions, where people do not respect each other and there is no harmony. On this issue, our nation is far ahead. We are intensifying all sorts of work to bring our houses of worship into one unit.
>
> In 2013, we raised the idea of "Religion and Tradition" (*Din men Dastur*).37 This excellent initiative had the support of the majority [of people]. We developed a culture of celebrating religious holidays, together with national values. The holidays of Eid al-Adha, Eid al-Fitr, and the Prophet's Birthday were celebrated with a national character. Imams do not simply give sermons from a sharia point of view, but have adapted sermons to our entire history, our important civilization, and our customs that bring us to proper etiquette. In the space of a few years, the initiative on the relationship between "religion and tradition" has already turned into a viable idea.
>
> The "Religion and Tradition" book is not simply a religious [text], but arouses interest about spirituality, culture, literature, and history in readers and the general public. This initiative will continue to the Presidium of the [Muftiate] Congress in 2018.38

37 This is the title of a book produced by the Muftiate: Qazaqstan Musylmandary Dini Basqarmasy, *Din men Dastur* (Almaty: Ghibrat Publishing House, 2013).

38 E.Q.M. Mayamerov, "'Asyl Arna' Hem Sayat Ybyrai Zhyryna' Muftiding Zhauaby," *Abai.kz*,October 16, 2015, http://Abai.kz/post/41780 (accessed October 13, 2017).

This article sounds like a Soviet bureaucrat reporting on his successes to his superiors, and in many ways that is exactly what it is. The Mufti has two audiences, which correspond well to Burke's two functions of rhetoric: first, members of the Kazakh public, whose attitudes he hopes to shape; and second, members of the Kazakhstani government, whom he hopes to induce to take actions such as funding the Muftiate and jailing its opponents.

One emotional appeal in the Mufti's writing is to the audience's pride in re-building Islam in Kazakhstan. In the past, there were only a handful of mosques in Kazakhstan; now, there are more than 2,500. The Muftiate develops initiatives which are discussed in Presidiums and executive committees; later in the article, the Head Mufti discusses the first-ever forum of imams, held in Astana, the "center of the nation." There, the imams gathered discussed a platform of topics, including "Basic Religious Beliefs," "The Basics of Islam," "The Basics of Sharia," "The Ethics of Islam," "Islam and the Family," and more. All of the Muftiate's preaching, publishing, conferencing, and initiative-planning is done in the service of "promoting the blending of religion and tradition," "increasing the role of the religious school formed by Kazakh Muslimness," and "raising the capabilities of imams."[39]

This pride in reclaiming and rebuilding Islam in Kazakhstan is part of the same emotional appeal to national loyalty that Zhandarbek makes. The Mufti uses some of the same language as Zhandarbek, asserting his love for and respect of the "forefathers" [*ata-babalar*]: "Our forefathers' ancient path, which strongly upheld the Hanafi school of jurisprudence and respected Imam Maturidi's path [of theology], is always authoritative to us. Now, the importance of bringing to light the masterpieces left by our forefathers is being proven by time itself."[40] However, it is not the traditions of common Kazakhs that will show the ancient customs of the forefathers, but rather the Muftiate's work and the writings of past Kazakh scholars:

> We consider it the duty of today's generation to protect our forefathers' legacy by bringing to light the dusty manuscripts found in the rare book collections of the libraries of the world and the old books yellowing in wise old men's treasure chests. It is clear that through these works we can deeply examine how the Islamic religion spread to the Kazakh Steppe and we can confirm our traditional path. It is our belief that the book "The Masterpieces of Traditional Islam," born from these good intentions, will contribute to Kazakh spirituality.

39 Ibid.
40 Ibid.

The Head Mufti cleverly takes Zhandarbek's appeal and turns it on its head. Zhandarbek identifies readers' traditions and homes as the center of Kazakh spirituality. What readers do in their homes and what they hope their children will do must be reflected in state policies. The Mufti, meanwhile, identifies his workplace as the spiritual home of Kazakhs; what he and his colleagues do must be reflected in the homes of ordinary Kazakhs.

The Muftiate's rhetoric stems from its understanding that the Soviet era largely curtailed Islamic practice and knowledge in Kazakhstan. This is a wide- spread belief among scripturalist Muslims in Kazakhstan, who assert that "the Kazakh nation's ancient traditions and beliefs and way of life collapsed completely during the 70–80 year period of atheism."41 In his article, the Mufti argues—more mildly than some others—that "the nation had to move away from religion in yesterday's [Soviet] atheist society."42 The Mufti's response emphasizing the importance of "dusty manuscripts" and "yellowing books" rather than rituals or common Kazakh traditions is characteristic of scripturalist Muslims' understanding of moving back to Islam. He invites the reader to identify with scholars and imams. Scripturalist Islamic media companies post different images of the Qur'an on their social media feeds on a daily basis and publish listicles on how best to memorize the Qur'an.43 Scripturalist Muslims place study groups and personal reading of the Qur'an, hadiths, and new Islamic literature at the center of their Islamic practice:44 if you want to be smart, if you want to know more about Islam than others, then follow the Mufti. For the Muftiate, Asyl Arna, and other scripturalist Muslims, rhetorical appeals to the nation invoke what they imagine to be their forefathers' admirable and glorious scripturalist tradition rather than preserving the practicesof ordinary Kazakhs.

41 M. Tazabek, quoted in Schwab, "Visual Culture and Islam in Kazakhstan," 304. I have also discussed scripturalist Muslims' devotion to the idea that the Soviet experience destroyed Islam in Kazakhstan in Schwab, "Establishing an Islamic Niche in Kazakhstan"; and Schwab, "Traditions and Texts."

42 Mayamerov, "'Asyl Arna' Hem Sayat Ybyrai Zhyryna' Muftiding Zhauaby."

43 Schwab, "Visual Culture and Islam in Kazakhstan." For an example of a listicle on how to memorize sections of the Qur'an, see "Belgili Qari Mishari Rashidten Qurangha Bailanysty 16 Kenges," *Asyl Arna*, n.d., http://asylarna.kz/maqala/maqalainfo/161 (accessed October 13,2017).

44 Schwab, "Traditions and Texts."

The Limits of Rhetoric

On April 12, 2017, President Nazarbayev set an agenda for the "spiritual revival" of Kazakhstan as part of his drive to modernize Kazakhstan and have it become part of the 30 most developed countries in the world. The push requires preserving Kazakh culture while "changing habits" to make the country more competitive. For example, the Kazakh language should be preserved and pro- moted by translating the world's "best 100 textbooks" in the humanities into Kazakh, but written Kazakh should also be shifted to a Latin script in order to help students learn English and other languages. Regarding religion, Nazarbayev calls for expanding governmental attention to the sacred geography of Kazakhstan, arguing that "we should strengthen protection for our nationalholy sites":

> This can be achieved through a "Spiritual Holy Sites of Kazakhstan" or "Sacred Geography of Kazakhstan" project, as scholars call it.
>
> Every nation, every civilization has its national holy sites that are familiar to every representative of this nation.
>
> This is the basis of spiritual tradition and is particularly important for Kazakhstan. We represent a country with huge territory and rich spiritual history… This is not about the restoration of monuments, buildings, and constructions. The point is to unite, in the national [consciousness], the monuments surrounding the Ulytau region and the Mausoleum of Khoja Akhmed Yasawi, the ancient monuments of Taraz and the Beket Ata burial sites, the ancient compounds of East Kazakhstan and the sacred sites of the Zhetysu (Semirechye), and many other places. All of them help shape our national identity.
>
> Nowadays, when one talks about the impact of foreign ideological influences, we should keep in mind that these cover certain values, cultural symbols of other nations. Only our own national symbols can oppose them.45

45 This quote is taken from the Kazakhstani government's English translation of the press re- lease: N. Nazarbayev, "Course Towards the Future: Modernization of Kazakhstan's Identity," *Aqorda.kz*, April 12, 2017, http://www.akorda.kz/en/events/akorda_news/press_confer- ences/course-towards-the-future-modernization-of-kazakhstans-identity (accessed October 13, 2017). The Kazakh version can be found here: N. Nazarbayev, "Memleket Basshysynyng 'Bolashaqqa Baghdar: Rukhani Zhanghyru," *Aqorda.kz*, April 12, 2017,

President Nazarbayev's rhetoric echoes the nation-focused rhetoric of Zhandarbek: Kazakhstan has a unique culture that is the result of the co-evolution of land, culture, and people throughout history. The appeal to Kazakhs is that they will continue and strengthen their traditions.

However, despite the similarities in rhetoric and appeal between President Nazarbayev's plans and his own, Zhandarbek wrote another open letter to President Nazarbayev on April 23, 2017, in which he derided the Muftiate'swork:

> Respected Head of the Nation!
>
> Your article titled "Oriented to the Future: Spiritual Revival" raised issues critical to the future of the Kazakh people and had significant meaning for clarifying the horizons of our nation's spiritual development. In this era of globalization, where global processes turn the grindstone of his- tory, your article details the meaning of a program that unquestionably lights the fire of hope in every Kazakh's chest in a time when we ask our- selves, "Will we be divorced from our existing spiritual and cultural life, will we disappear from the stage of history as a people?"
>
> We can say with confidence that if each item discussed in your article is implemented, then the Kazakh nation will not be lost and will remain on the stage of history. However, the legal questions must be asked: how will the programs in your article be implemented, and who will implement them? I cannot hide that I have doubts about this issue. You have made it clear that the bulk of [responsibility for] implementing this program falls on the Muftiate, and you have specifically accepted their ownership of this project. But I believe that this organization, which is responsible for the complex religious situation in our country and for standing against the spread of Wahhabi-Salafism, actually provides grist for the Wahhabi-Salafi mill and uses its strength to change our nation's religious beliefs, and that this organization is not suitable to implement this kind of nationally important work; on the contrary, it works against spiritualrevival.46

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http://www.akorda.kz/kz/events/akorda_news/press_conferences/memleket-basshy- synyn-bolashakka-bagdar-ruhani-zhangyru-atty-makalasy?q=%D0%98%D1%81%D0%BB%D0%B0%D0%BC (accessed October 13, 2017).

46 Z. Zhandarbek, "Elbasygha Khat. qmdb Imamdary Qazaq Rukhaniyatyna Shabuyl Zhasap Zhatyr," *Abai.kz*, April 24, 2017. Taken down by April 25, 2017.

Here we see the same appeal to the fear of losing one's traditions and one's identity as a Kazakh. The phrasing is even similar to Zhandarbek's earlier letters: the question of whether the Kazakh nation will exit the stage of history (*tarikh zakhnasy*) echoes his concern in 2015 that the Kazakh nation would enter the historical stage as a new people after losing their traditional beliefs.47 We also see the same identification of the Muftiate as a Salafi-Wahhabi group and the same dichotomy between Salafi-Wahhabis and "traditional" Muslims. What is different in this case is that the exchange between Zhandarbek and President Nazarbayev was quickly stopped. Zhandarbek's open letter was posted on *Abai.kz* on April 24, 2017, and had been removed by April 26. Simply put, while debate over Islamic practice and belief is permitted in Kazakhstan, criticism of the President's religious and spiritual initiatives is not. In his previous open letter to Nazarbayev, Zhandarbek asks for Nazarbayev's attention and states that only Nazarbayev can solve these issues. In the open letter detailed above, Zhandarbek directly attacks one of Nazarbayev's decisions. One can debate how to be a good Muslim, how to be a good Kazakh, and how to be a good Kazakh Muslim, but presidential initiatives are not up for discussion.

Conclusion

So what can Zhandarbek's debates with scripturalist Muslims tell us about Islam in Kazakhstan more broadly? The first thing we can learn is that effective public rhetoric in Kazakhstan centers on the nation. Nationalist rhetoric is more effective than scripturalist rhetoric for two reasons. First, the Kazakhstani government uses nationalist rhetoric to justify many of its policies. The government also maintains strict control of the national media, and nationalist rhetoric is simply more likely to be printed, televised, or transmitted than any other type of rhetoric.48 Second, most Kazakhs are less interested in scripturalist theology than in Kazakh identity, the economy, loving marriages, and well-behaved children. They identify with other Kazakhs rather than with

47 This phrase also appears elsewhere in Zhandarbek's writing: Z. Zhandarbek, "Salafittik Zholdy Qorghaityn Siz Kimsiz, Izbairov Myrza?" *Abai.kz*, May 21, 2016, http://Abai.kz/post/44658 (accessed October 13, 2017).

48 For more on mass media in Kazakhstan, see B. Junisbai, A. Junisbai, and N.Y. Fry, "Mass Media Consumption in Post-Soviet Kyrgyzstan and Kazakhstan: The View from Below," *Demokratizatsiya: The Journal of Post-Soviet Democratization*, 23, no. 3 (2015): 233–256; and E. Schatz, "The Soft Authoritarian Tool Kit: Agenda-Setting Power in Kazakhstan and Kyrgyzstan," *Comparative Politics*, 41, no. 2 (2009): 203–222.

Islamic scholars. Scripturalist Muslims understand this: Mukhammadzhan Tazabek, the head of the Asyl Arna television channel and a leading scripturalist voice in Kazakhstan, has stated that his viewers and followers on social media are not interested in "deep theological issues" (*tereng teologiyalyq maseleler*); rather, they are interested in "national and family values, professional training, true love, and feelings of kinship" (*ulttyq, otbasylyq qundyly- qtar, kasipke baulu, taza makhabbat, tuystyq sezim*).49 Scripturalist Muslims are therefore interested in providing scripturalist answers to the questions of how to get ahead economically and how to have a loving marriage. The uniting interests of Kazakhs are nationalism and economic success, and different groups of Kazakhstani Muslims use rhetorical appeals to these interests in their discussions of Islamic practice and belief.50

The second thing that these debates tell us is what it feels like to be a Muslim in Kazakhstan, at least for different types of socially conservative Muslims.51 Public culture creates private emotions. Zhandarbek's appeals to readers' identification with the Kazakh nation and its traditions call forth a sense of pride in Kazakhs' past and point to the genius of Yasawi to prove the righteousness of a specifically national tradition of Islam. Readers feel a sense of belonging to a community that they were born into, a community that has always lived on the same national land, a community that will not survive without their hard work to pass on their traditions. Zhandarbek stokes anger and resentment toward Arabs, Islamic missionaries, and know-it-all imams who are perceived as denigrating readers' traditions and the Kazakh nation and its culture. They fear losing their children to these "Salafis" or to "terrorists." Their beliefs, their habits, and their lives are being lost, and someone should do something about it. Zhandarbek's readers feel Islam as kinship with their family, as pride in their nation's culture from pre-Islamic times to the 21st century, as resentment to- ward imams and Arabs, and as fear of terrorism and change.

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49 "Mukhamedzhan Tazabek: Musylmannyng Amaly Sozinen Aldyn Zhurui Kerek," *Mazhab.kz*, March 9, 2017, http://mazhab.kz/kk/maqalalar/sheshendik-sozder/muhamedjan-taz- abek-musylmannyn-amaly-sozinen-aldyn-jurui-kerek-3318/ (accessed October 13, 2017).

50 For more on the importance of nationalism and economic success in Islamic culture in Kazakhstan, see my paper on the visual culture of Asyl Arna: Schwab, "Visual Culture and Islam in Kazakhstan." For more on the importance of Islam as a part of national culture in Central Asia, see A. Khalid, *Islam after Communism: Religion and Politics in Central Asia* (Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 2014); and J. Rasanayagam, "The Politics of Culture and the Space for Islam: Soviet and Post-Soviet Imaginaries in Uzbekistan," *Central Asian Survey,* 33, no. 1 (2014): 1–14.

51 See Kudaibergnova in this issue on avant-garde artists' interpretations and representations of Islam.

Scripturalist Muslims reading responses to Zhandarbek feel Islam differently; they have a different Islamic emotional repertoire. Asqarov's readers, for example, identify with Islamic scholars: they feel Islam as the satisfaction of following the dictates of God and experience revulsion, anger, and frustration with those Kazakhs who fail to recognize the truth of the message of Smanov and the Muftiate. The Mufti's readers feel pride in their nation's reclamation of the most advanced religious and intellectual tradition on Earth. In their minds, the Soviet era was a rupture in scripturalist tradition, and they see themselves—scripturalist Muslims—as reclaiming past glory in order to move the nation forward. They believe that everyone else should follow them into a glorious Kazakh and Islamic future, and therefore feel frustration with the ignorance of what they see as common, old-fashioned Kazakhs who were brainwashed during the Soviet experience.

The final thing we can learn from the rhetoric in Zhandarbek's war of words is the limits of debate in Kazakhstan. Scholars and intellectuals can debate whether household rituals, Turkicized interpretations of Sufi history, or the Muftiate's intellectual efforts are authentic; it is permissible to challenge preachers such as Smanov and Quanyshbaev and urge future action by the government. Yet the space for Islamic debate is limited by an overriding concern for governmental stability: the authenticity and benevolence of the Kazakhstani nation and the highest levels of its government are not up for discussion.