

Evolving notions of childhood: an example of Kazakhstan

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Abstract

This research is aimed at understanding versatile and evolving perceptions of childhood in Kazakhstan after the independence of the country. It draws on a variety of primary data including in-depth interviews and surveys with young people and representatives of non-governmental organisations working with young people. This research employs two concepts of sociology of childhood, which address the socio-historical condition of childhood as a social experience.

It explores the role children played in traditional Kazakh families in the mid-19th-beginning of the 20th century. It also addresses state policy concerning children in Kazakhstan after independence. This research presents an analysis of how young participants perceive categories of 'child' and 'adult.' The question is raised whether traditional thresholds of childhood like education, marriage, and financial independence still play a role in understanding the transition from childhood to adulthood. Further, it presents a dialogue between young participants of this research with their older contemporaries on the characteristics of the young generation born after the independence. Finally, it sheds more light on discrimination of young females in the family and society.

Declaration

I declare that this thesis is substantially my own work and no part of the dissertation has been previously submitted to any university for any degree, diploma or other qualification. Previously published work by the author in the form of conference proceedings is drawn on for parts of this thesis. When reference is made to the work of others the extent to which that work has been used is indicated in the text and the reference.

This document contains 60,423 words, 13 tables and 10 figures, and therefore adheres to the limits of 80,000 words, tables and figures put forth by the Degree Committee of the Centre of Development Studies.

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Table of contents:

Chapter 1. Introduction. Defining “childhood”: some theoretical approaches	3
Chapter 2. Place of a child in a traditional Kazakh family in the 19 th -beginning of the 20 th centuries	11
Chapter 3. ‘Oh, that is so good to live in a Soviet country’: Soviet ‘happy childhood’	29
Chapter 4. Childhood in ‘transition’: children and child policies in the 1990s-2000s in Kazakhstan	41
Chapter 5. Research design	56
Chapter 6. Childhood versus adulthood: being young in Kazakhstan	67
Chapter 7: “We are the future”: young people and society	94
Chapter 8. Raising a girl in Kazakhstan: role of a young woman in society	114
Chapter 9. Discussion of the results	130
Appendix 1. Form of informed consent	138
Appendix 2. Interview questions for young participants	140
Appendix 3. Interview questions for experts	141
Appendix 4. Questionnaire on perception of childhood	142
Bibliography	154

Note on transliteration

In transliterating Russian and other Cyrillic names and places, I have applied the Library of Congress system of transliteration, except when another spelling has become commonly accepted in English, for example Mayakovsky instead of Maiakovskii. For Kazakh names and words, I have applied transliteration table developed by UNESCO.

Chapter 1. Introduction. Defining ‘childhood’: some theoretical approaches

In the first pages of ‘Before and after’ Vladimir Sharov ponders how his perception of Bolsheviks was shaped by the proximity of the chocolate factory Bolshevichka: ‘When I was around three-year-old, I learned that the candies were produced at the factory called ‘Bolshevichka,’ and this finally shaped my idea of the Bolsheviks... Whenever I had to write about the Bolsheviks, I would present them as soft and tender... (My) characters were written with such genuine love and affection that our old newspaper wolves said they envied my sincerity.’ Like Sharov’s character I was born in the Soviet Union but in the family of the Party bureaucrat, and my childhood was a privileged experience. I lived in a beautiful spacious apartment in the centre of the green city, the capital of one of the republics of a vast country called the Soviet Union. I went to a kindergarten close to my house. Both of my parents were employed and were receiving high salaries, and during their summer vacations, they were taking me to the Black, Baltic and Caspian seas. At the age of three, I travelled abroad for the very first time.

From my childhood, I believed in a just, free and prosperous society, a peaceful world in which equality reigns because I inhabited it. I was brought up on poems of Agniya Barto and Samuil Marshak, and novels of Arkady Gaidar (Timur and his squad), Anatoly Rybakov (Dirk) and Alexander Fadeyev (Young Guard) that allowed me to follow adventure stories of young people during the Civil War and the Second World War. As part of my primary school assignment in the Russian Language, I was writing letters to Grandfather Lenin to tell him how amazing my childhood experience was. I was a member of the Young Pioneer organisation, and I received my red kerchief during a beautiful ceremony in 1989. I remember that I was filled with a genuine sense of pride and honour. My perception of life was characterised by naivety but also by discussions my parents and grandparents had in the kitchen, by their views of the changes taking place in my country at the end of the 1980s. My journey through the communist system of children and youth organisations halted with the collapse of the Soviet Union in December 1991. My cousin, who was six years younger, did not have my experiences and did not have the same memories, and in time I felt that I have more in common with generation of my grandmother, or my mother.

The post-perestroika and post-Soviet Union events were followed by disclosure of many tragic aspects and defects of my perfect world, by rehabilitation or stigmatisation of revolutionary heroes I learned to adore, and by revision history I used to study at school. These events coincided with my coming of age and the development of my identity, and they made

me interested in history of my own country and the post-Soviet space. This research at the University of Cambridge finally brought me back, full circle to my childhood under communism, as I started to look at the evolution of notions of childhood in Kazakhstan.

Childhood is an integral part in the lifestyle and culture of any society. It is a particular period of human life in terms of the physical, psychological and social maturity. Despite the high importance of childhood in the course of life of any person, interest to this subject has developed rather late. And even today, both humanities and social sciences lack a uniform interpretation of the concepts of 'childhood' and 'children, and therefore, the term 'childhood' has multiple meanings.

In psychology, childhood is regarded as an initial period of ontogenesis (from birth to adolescence). Biomedical sciences consider childhood as a period of growth and children are defined as human beings, who did not yet complete their physical development. In law, childhood is interpreted as a period of life that leads to acquiring full responsibility for actions. In population studies, children and youth are often defined as a category, which is not involved in the reproduction of the population. In the field of education, children are mainly understood as learners and citizens in the making. In sociology, childhood as a separate area of study appeared relatively recently at the end of the 1980s-1990s.

'What is a child, or to be a child?' Asked Thomas Becon in 1550 (Cunningham 2006, 12). When does childhood begins? When does it end? Are children naturally 'pure,' 'innocent' and 'untarnished,' or are they innately 'corrupt,' 'sinful,' and 'morally blemished' (Goldson, 2001)? Is there a 'proper childhood'? There are no universal answers to these questions. Perceptions of children were evolving over centuries: children were seen as 'innocent' and deserving protection from adult exploitation, and at times the same children were considered as 'dangerous,' and childhood was a dangerous place that had to be controlled and regulated by adults (Stearns, 2011). One possible way to explain this contradiction is to recognize that societal attitudes towards children are constructed, which implies that the reality taken for granted is constructed by human meaning-making (Rogers, 2001).

This approach allows to explain why there is no universal 'truth' that states what children are: the idea of socially constructed childhood accepts that there are different categories of 'truths.' For example, children from the elite families in the Soviet Union lived in a world with predictable future. These children had books to read, and toys to play with, they had a path laid for them which included school, university and career. And for these children 'childhood' implied schooling and happiness. While in the rural areas of the same country or in the families

of the 'enemies of the state' in the 1930s-1950s childhood might have meant something very different, or it might have been entirely meaningless.

As Chris Jenks (2005, 7) mentioned: 'Childhood is to be understood as a social construct, it makes reference to a social status delineated by boundaries that vary through time and from society to society... Childhood then always relates to a particular cultural setting.' According to Jenks (2005), research of children and childhood, is actually a process of exploring various social contexts or 'truths,' along with various sociological structures that limits in which a variety of childhoods are 'created' and the normative system of expectation is generated.

In this research, I am going to use two concepts of sociology of childhood, which both address the socio-historical condition of childhood as a social experience. The idea of socially constructed and temporally, culturally determined and spatial childhood belongs to French historian Philippe Ariès. With his book 'Centuries of Childhood,' Ariès opened the subject to historical inquiry (Stearns, 2011). According to Ariès (1996), only from the eighteenth century onwards can we talk of childhood in the modern sense. From this point, we can follow the separation and division of the children's world from the adult's and the establishment of specific ideas, modes and cultural codes concerning children; this Ariès and his disciples named 'the discovery of childhood.' The other concept is related to modern approaches in the sociology of childhood, which identifies childhood as a 'social consequence.' According to this concept, there are different socio-cultural modes of nurture and child upbringing in different times and space, which are also 'sociologically subtle, or rather socially distinguished' (Mihajlovic-Tomanovic 1996, 440).

In this research I am going to use Qvortrup's (1994, 3) definition: 'Childhood is the life-span which our culture limits it to be, i.e. its definitions through the courts, the school, the family, the economy, and also through philosophy and psychology.' Therefore, the term childhood will consider not only the age of life itself but also certain forms of social practice (principles, institutions, activities) determining this age and making it differ from other intervals of life producing a specific social experience.

Young people who contributed to this research were mostly eighteen-years-olds (however, the age of participants varied from 18 to 23). In accordance to the national legislation and international instruments, including the Convention on the Rights of the Child, most of the participants cannot be considered as children. Article 1 of the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child states: 'A child means every human being below the age of 18 years unless, under the law applicable to the child, majority is reached earlier' (UN General Assembly, 1989).

However, cultural constructs and social patterns also play an important role in definition of childhood. The authors of a book 'Youth in the former Soviet South' discuss childhood and youth as a life stage that can both contract and expand. For example, Sophie Roche (2012) describes young people living in a conflict zone during a period of civil war in Tajikistan as a generation that was forced to grow up faster. At the same time, in a relatively safe Kyrgyzstan, period of 'childhood' or 'youth' has been lengthened. Roberts (2010) and DeYoung (2010) address the expansion and prolongation of education in Kyrgyzstan and Kazakhstan, where 'being a student' has become a common life phase. Other reasons for the slowing down of this stage, as both Lepisto (2010) and Roberts (2010) suggest, include their increasing dependence on their families and the tightening of parental control. These and other authors address fluidity of age borders defining childhood, adolescence or adulthood. Fluidity of the concept allowed me to expand the group of respondents.

Participants of this research were young people at the threshold of adulthood or 'someone in between' child and adult as defined by several of the respondents. In the academic literature, this period of life is often addressed as 'youth transitions', since the researchers often perceive this time as the movement of young people through education and into work. The term 'youth transitions' implies a linear, progressive movement towards adulthood, where the notion of adulthood is considered as 'destination' (Wyn and White, 1997). Traditionally, the research of 'youth transition' has tended to focus on the economic sphere and, especially, on young people from disadvantaged backgrounds (MacDonald and Marsh, 2001; MacDonald *et al.*, 2005; Shildrick and MacDonald, 2007). Most of the studies addressing this issue are located in Africa (Masquelier, 2002, 2005, 2013), with some in Asia (Furlong, 2008) and Latin America (Bendit and Miranda, 2015). This research is about Kazakhstan, once part of the Soviet Union, and currently an independent country.

The place of the child in the modern society cannot be taken out of the historical context. In this work, I would like to demonstrate that perception of children and childhood in Kazakhstan is influenced by two set of factors: traditions and history of a Kazakh people before the Soviet Union, and the Soviet model of childhood.

The 19th century Kazakh historiography of childhood is severely constrained by relative lack of ethnographic and historical literature that covers this period. There are records available thanks to Russian historians and ethnographers like Nikolay Rychkov (1772), Petr Andreyev (1785), Yakov Gaverdovskyi (2007) and Aleksey Levshin (1832b; 1832a) who studied territory

of Russian Central Asia. However, there is scarce information devoted to children in these records, and naturally, further research is required.

There are much more literature devoted to the Soviet project of childhood. Lisa Kirschenbaum (2001) provides in-depth analysis of intricate and diverse changes in the early Soviet project of child upbringing at the level of preschools. Her work covers the period right after the Revolution of 1917 to the early 1930s. Encyclopaedic 'Children's World: Growing Up in Russia, 1890-1991' by Catriona Kelly (2007) provides a detailed overview of the Soviet childhood project based on official information, children's literature, theatre, and film, as well as personal interviews.

Children and young people in the Soviet Union represented a meaningful category because this category of population was institutionalised and promoted by the Soviet system on various levels (Kirmse, 2012). The introduction of obligatory schooling increased the time that young people spent outside the home, particularly this applies to children in urban areas. Large numbers of children, school and university-age boys and girls joined Communist youth organisations (the Octobrists, the Pioneers and the Komsomol). Through compulsory education and youth organisations, the Soviet system created a special category that remained even after the collapse of the Soviet Union. The ideological component played an essential role in educating children. Even at the level of kindergartens teachers received a task to provide 'international, antireligious, collective upbringing' to overturn the lessons learned at home (Kirschenbaum 2001, 157).

Perestroika followed by the collapse of the Soviet Union could be considered as a watershed that changed the experience of childhood. However, even after the independence Kazakhstan inherited elements of the Soviet project: the idea of 'happiness,' institutions responsible for childhood, and constant state intervention in the provision of childhood.

This research is mainly focused on the 1990s and beyond the turn of the century. This time focus is not random since the 1990s and 2000s were years of rapid changes and advance of economic globalisation and, linked to it, of social and cultural transformation. These large-scale processes arrived with far-reaching effects on the social conditions of the general population, thereby also on children's conditions and their lived childhoods. The period of time after the collapse of the Soviet Union is also known as 'transition' both in academic and non-academic literature.

As Jane Falkingham (2000) points out, 'transition' in the post-Soviet space is well researched. Economists use this term to show the shift from a centrally planned economy to a

more liberal economic approach. In political terms, the ‘transition’ may imply a move from dictatorship to relative democracy and openness. From a welfare perspective, the current transition in Central Asia is from a universal welfare state to a residual one and from an equitable distribution of income to rising inequality. However, from a child’s perspective the recent transition may just be from a position of security to one of uncertainty.

The economic transformations that took place in the 1990s, especially the recession of the year 1991-1997, were particularly dramatic in Kazakhstan and had made a significant impact on many areas of social life. The shifts in the economic and social structure and community life and their effect on children and their living conditions were not a focus of the government agenda, and this was reflected in the closure of kindergartens, privatisation of hospitals and schools, transformation of playgrounds into parking spaces, and change in the general structure of welfare arrangements for families with children. The scantiness of knowledge about how children have fared in these decades provides for the investigation how these factors influenced children’s lives. Unfortunately, sociology of childhood does not exist in Kazakhstan as a separate field, and researchers interested in children and worlds of childhood in Central Asia, are rare (Умбеталиева, Ракишева and Тешендорф, 2016). However, the current condition of the Kazakhstan society, its changing structure and unstable economic situation, influence the state of children and young people, and all these changes require understanding of perception of childhood and its evolution.

The shift from the Soviet past with its articulated ideology to ‘transition’ was extraordinarily abrupt, and it was followed by a sharp rejection of some norms and values of Soviet society and its view of history and the political world. Some authors (Tazmini, 2001; Omelicheva, 2011, 2016a; Yemelianova, 2014) believe that eradication of the Soviet value system coincided with an ideological vacuum that has been partly filled by religion, including Islam. ‘Traditional’ Sunni Islam prevalent among Kazakh nomads in the 19th century was officially embraced by the government and political elites in independent Kazakhstan. At the same time, there was a significant growth of interest to ‘foreign’ Salafi Islam, especially among young people. Kazakhstan modern political scientists and historians are deeply divided on the role of Islam in the history of the Kazakh people during pre-Soviet times, as well as the future course for the development of this religion in the region and for building of national or state identity.

Unlike any other field of research, sociology of childhood and youth examines childhood as a structural component of a society, while children and young people are considered as

participants of these social processes with their own perception of the world. The research of childhood and children allowed for development of different ideas and methods making it possible to explain how children think, act and experience the environment (Allison, Jenks and Prout, 1998). The perception of children as 'different' from adults influenced methodology of educational research, developmental psychology and paediatrics, and these fields were developing methods to understand the 'otherness' of children to acquire deeper understanding about the learning mechanisms and 'normal' development of children as if the childhood and development of children could be put under control (Lange and Mierendorff, 2009). However, in the 1980s researchers started to question if the existing framework was adequate for explaining the variety of childhood experiences, and histories of children. And already in the 1990s, the researchers were able to accumulate some interesting studies in child development and socialisation. As a result, by the beginning of the 1990s several paradigms were emerging in the new field of childhood studies:

- Childhood, a biological immaturity, should be understood as a social construction and experiences of childhood do vary across time and space (Allison et al. 1998). As West & Hyder (2008, 268) state, 'the idea, definition and expectations of childhood vary between cultures.'

- Childhood should be considered as a variable of social analysis, like class, gender or ethnicity, and therefore children cannot be analysed as a homogenous unit (Allison et al. 1998, 3). The variables like class, gender, disability, and wealth influence individual experiences of childhood.

- Childhood and children's social relationships and cultures are worthy of study not only because being constructed by adults.

- Children are social actors. They affect the world around them from birth. As they grow, they develop different relationships with other children and adults, and take action in their social world.

I hope that my research is taking into consideration all of these paradigms. Variation of childhood across cultures means that there is no objective, natural state of childhood or path along which children's development should occur: the ideas of what children should do and be capable of doing at different ages depend on local customs and perceptions of childhood. It means there is no 'standard' child that can be used as a measure for childhood globally or even within societies. The idea of a child and childhood is constructed within a culture, and generally defined and upheld by particular powerful groups (West & Hyder 2008, 267).

This research is aimed at understanding versatile and evolving perceptions of childhood in Kazakhstan after the independence of the country. Within this context, the objectives of this research are:

- To understand how childhood and children are perceived and defined in the modern Kazakhstan society;
- To identify factors that influence and define representatives of this young generation of Kazakhstan, that formed their common beliefs and behaviours distinguishing them from the rest;
- To analyse the role the girl plays in the modern Kazakhstan family, and to understand different factors that influence the position of the girl in the society.

This study draws on a variety of primary data including in-depth interviews and surveys with young people and representatives of the non-governmental organisation working with young people in Kazakhstan. Chapter 2 explores the role children played in traditional Kazakh families in the mid-19th- beginning of the 20th century. In this context, it is of particular interest to discuss the value assigned to male and female children by their families. Chapter 3 briefly discusses Soviet project of childhood, while Chapter 4 focuses on government policy in regard to children in Kazakhstan after independence. In Chapter 5, I introduce the research methods applied in this study. Chapter 6 presents an analysis of how young participants of this research perceive categories of ‘child’ and ‘adult’ and how they see themselves. The question is raised whether traditional thresholds of childhood like education, marriage, financial independence still play a certain role in understanding the transition from childhood to adulthood. Chapter 7 presents a dialogue between young participants of this research with their older contemporaries on the common traits of the young generation born after the independence. Young people and experts discuss what features can characterise the new generation. Chapter 8 analyses the meaning of being a young female in the Kazakhstan society. It sheds more light on discrimination young women face in their family and community and coping mechanisms they develop to address them.

Chapter 2. Place of a child in a traditional Kazakh family in the 19th- beginning of the 20th centuries.

In every society, approaches to childhood, child rearing, and caregiving are influenced by culture and traditions. In this chapter, I will look at the characteristics and development of traditional childhood in Kazakhstan. This chapter starts with an overview of challenges presented by the history of Kazakh people. Further, I will discuss different stages of child development within the traditional setting of the Kazakh family along with the change in the role of the child in the family. I will also address the issue of gender equality, and in particular, I will look at the value of female and male children in Kazakh society. At the end of this chapter, I will briefly consider the role of Islam in the upbringing of the child in the 19th century, as well as the influence of schooling on the perception of childhood and children.

Historiography of Kazakh children is seriously constrained by two factors. First of all, as Stearns (2011) mentions, children themselves leave relatively few direct records. People quite often reflect about their childhood experiences when they become adults, while adults write about children and write for children and adults create material artefacts, like cradles, toys, children's clothes, and rooms. Stearns (2011, 4) stresses that childhood 'is an easier subject to deal with historically than children are, because childhood is in part defined by adults and adult institutions', while histories of real children are intangible even today.

Analysis of historical resources on childhood can present an additional challenge. According to Stearns (2011), the researcher should be cautious when comparing traditional and modern since many traditional concepts about children are different from modern ones. Moreover, there is a contrast between the West and the rest of the world (Stearns, 2011). Kazakh historiography is especially challenging, since nomadic tribes that lived on the territory of Kazakhstan before Russian colonisation lacked means of transfer of historical information. The literary tradition of the Kazakh people relied upon oral histories memorised and recited by *aqyn*, a singer responsible for remembering legends and tales, and by *žyrau*, a lyric poet who travelled with the representatives of Kazakh aristocracy. Most of the myths that were preserved concern the activities of *batyrs* (heroes or warriors), including *Qoblandy-batyr* (15th or 16th century), *Yer Sain* (16th century), and *Yer Targhyn* (16th century), epics about the struggle of warriors with other tribes, and *Qozy Korpesh and Bajan Sulu*, *Qyz-Žibek*, love stories (Curtis, 1996).¹ None of them mentions children.

¹ Some of these epic stories address childhood of protagonists, however, the period of childhood is treated as a time to prepare the young hero for future adventures. For example, epic stories mention that Sora-batyr matured

Second, through the 16-19th centuries all historiographical references about the Kazakh steppe were based on written sources, including military intelligence, notes, memoirs, topographic or ethnographic observations of Central Asian land, developed by ‘outsiders’, who did not belong to Kazakh population (with very few exceptions) (Akiner, 1997). European and American civil servants and diplomats, and Muslim court historians from the neighbouring Central Asian territories represent the majority of researchers of the Kazakh history and culture of this period. Compared to other foreigners, Russian researchers had unprecedented access to Central Asia since Russian Turkestan has laid in the sphere of imperial political and security interests. Vera Tolz (2008) provides a curious example demonstrating protective nature of Russian imperial government in Central Asia. According to Tolz (2008), the Russian Imperial Archaeological Commission was reluctant to allow foreign archaeologists to work in the Caucasus and Russian Central Asia because potential findings in the region were Russia’s ‘national heritage.’

Majority of foreign observers looked at events in the Kazakh steppe through the prism of their own geopolitical interests stressing details that were important from military or political point of view (Масанов, Абылхожин, & Ерофеева, 2007). Moreover, Western social norms, ideologies and stereotypes were shaping perceptions of the 18-19th century European, Russian and even Kazakh researchers. In many records of Russian or European observers representatives of Kazakh tribes are painted as backward, illiterate, and missing essential knowledge (Campbell, 2011).

As Nurbulat Masanov et al. (2007) stated most of records about everyday life of Kazakh people existed by chance, because of the personal interest of the researchers, including Petr Rychkov, Ivan Andreyev, Yakov Gaverdovskyi or Aleksey Levshin. Only starting from the mid-19th century, a written analysis of the history and ethnography of Kazakh people is provided by representatives of Kazakh intelligentsia, including Chokan Valikhanov, Khosža Babadžanov, Galikhan Žanturin, Alikhan Bukeikhanov, Mukhamedžan Tynyshpayev and Sanžar Asfendiyarov (Масанов, Абылхожин, & Ерофеева, 2007).

This chapter will focus on the period of the 19th –beginning of the 20th century due to the available ethnographic and historical literature on the Kazakh tribes. This period corresponds to the expansion of the Russian Empire and establishment of the Russian rule on the territory of modern Kazakhstan. However, as researchers note, the Russian colonisation did not have a

very fast, so he started his education at the age of four and finished it by the age of five. Yedyge distinguished himself in childhood by superior intelligence and strength, etc. (Winner, 1958).

significant impact on the traditional way of life and family relationship of the Kazakhs because based on the Russian decrees of the 18th and 19th centuries, all the ‘local affairs of the native population which were on non-political nature’ were left in the hands of elected representatives of the native population, and were administered in accordance with local customs (Pierce, 1960; Lane, 1975; Olcott, 1981).

Around the 15th century several tribes in the steppe formed new groupings and came to be known as ‘Kazakhs’, from a Turkic term meaning ‘fugitives’ or ‘brigands.’ These tribes occupied the steppe region from Siberia to Syr-Darya River (Winner, 1958; Pierce, 1960). It is believed that early Kazakh society consisted of patriarchal families, while several families formed an *aul*, a basic economic unit of the Kazakhs (Pierce, 1960). Thomas G. Winner (1958) compared *aul* with a subclan whose members carried out labour together. These subclans formed a clan (*ru*), a complex organisation that included all individuals who were able to trace their affiliation with the clan for seven generations (*žety ata* or *šežyre*) (Winner, 1958).

A brilliant contemporary historians of the Kazakh history Nurbulat Masanov (2007) mentions that Kazakh family was a nuclear family usually consisting of five people, including parents and several children. According to Aldashev and Guirkinger (2012), over the lifetime, women gave birth on average to four children, but due to high infant mortality only two or three children survived into adulthood. Possibly, high infant mortality rate explains the fact that for the Kazakhs the birth of the child was a significant and happy event. There is still a saying “*Balaly uy bazar, balasyz uy mazar*”, which implies that the home with a child is full of joy and happiness, while childless home is similar to the tomb (Стасевич, 2008).

From my point of view, a rich culture of childrearing in the Kazakh traditional family also reflects a vital role of children in the society. Ethnographers mention various rituals that mark different stages in the life of a child: *šildehana* (a celebration associated with childbirth), *bessike salu*, or *besik toi* (a ceremony, organised several days after the birth, when a new born was placed in a cradle), *esim koyu*, or *at koyu* (naming ritual), *qyrqynan šygaru* (a ritual performed in approximately forty days after the birth of a child), *tusau kesu* (a ceremony performed when a child made his first steps) (Абжан & Абылханова, 2014).

Inga Stasevich (2008) mentions that most ceremonies for young children were virtually identical for both sexes, however, the birth of a male heir was considered more significant. According to Kazakh oral tradition, families with a male successor were immortal. Multiple Kazakh proverbs address importance of this event, including the following one *Artynda*

qyzyqalgannyn – izi qalgany, artynda uly qalgannyn – özi qalgany (Someone who left a daughter has left his mark, someone who gave birth to a son has stayed himself).

Despite the ceremonial similarity in celebrating the birth of a child, differing gender roles could have been observed in small details during the rituals: parents placed a whip in a boy's cradle to make him a good horseman; or a knife to scare away evil spirits. There was a comb in a girl's cradle so she would grow up as a beautiful young lady, or scissors, so she would be a good sewer. Also, there were small differences in the timing of the celebration: for example, in case of *qyrqynan şygaru*, the celebration for boys was organised on the 39th day for a boy to grow strong and brave, while for girls it was performed on the 41st day, so she would be diligent, quiet and obedient (Стасевич, 2008).

The status of a girl in her own family was equal to the status of a boy. This is illustrated by the fact that a daughter in her parents' household sat next to her father and the honoured guests (*tör*). But as Yakov Gaverdovskyi (2007), a Russian diplomat, who lived with one of the Kazakh tribes in the beginning of the 19th century, mentioned male and female members of the household played different societal roles and therefore, they were trained for their functions differently. A boy was considered a successor to the head of the family, and therefore, he inherited property of his father. A girl was raised to leave her parents after marriage. Her purpose of life was to become a good woman and to honour the name of her parents and the family of her husband (Стасевич, 2008).

Both Yakov Gaverdovskyi (2007) and another 19th century Russian traveller and researcher Nikolay Teslenko (2012) wrote that traditional nomadic societies in Central Asia did not create 'impenetrable walls' between adults and youth, allowing the last to try on different social roles, encouraging their participation in the community life through work along with the grownups. It can be possibly inferred that the difference between childhood and adulthood was not as distinct as in the Western societies of the 19th-20th centuries.

Differentiation between sexes was further enhanced in children of 7-11 years of age. From this age boys and girls were brought up separately. Inga Stasevich (2008) mentions that at 12-13 years of age (or *muşel žas* in Kazakh) children experienced a transition: from freedom to responsibility of a grown-up life. After reaching her first *muşel*, a girl evolved from *qyz bala* (girl child) into a different category (*qyz* or young woman). From this point, elder women in the family would make sure the girl observed all the necessary etiquette rules: for example, she was no longer allowed to participate in games with boys. After reaching her first *muşel*, young women were more involved in domestic chores and received training from elder women in the

household. By 13-14 years of age, a young woman was supposed to acquire all the skills required for housekeeping and childcare to perform all her duties of a wife in the family of her future husband (Стасевич, 2008).

In Islamic tradition, young men were considered adults when they reached 12-15 years when they started to observe religious rituals, including *namaz* (prayers), *oraza* (fasting), etc. (Мустафина 1992). According to customary law (*adat*)², young men reaching fifteen years of age were considered adults, and they had a right to marry, 'to be absent, to be hired and to go on their own business without asking permission' from the older members of the household (Стасевич, 2008, 323). A Kazakh proverb *Onbeš žyl otau iese* (when a man turns fifteen, he becomes the owner of his own house) can illustrate this particular threshold. Teslenko (2012) mentions another Kazakh proverb related to upbringing of male children: *Balany žetige kelgenše tyima, žetiden on törtke kelgenše qulyňša qyina, on törtten keiyn qurdasynday syila* (The child should not be prohibited anything until reaching seven, from seven to fourteen he should be exploited as a slave, and after fourteen treated as equal). This proverb clearly defines a stage, when boys can be initiated into the adult world.

At 15-16 years of age, young women were considered as marriageable women (*žetken qyz*). According to Stasevich (2008), at the end of the 19th - beginning of the 20th century, this particular age was the most common age for marriage. However, depending on the wealth of the women's family, young Kazakh females could have been married earlier or later (Мустафина 1992; Стасевич 2008). Young women from wealthy families were married at a later age (around 20), while need potentially could have forced heads of the more deprived households to marry their daughters as soon as they reached *mušel žas* (Aldashev and Guirkingner, 2012). Early marriage rarely happened to young boys though (Mustafina 1992).

The life of a young woman changed after her marriage. In 1910, a Kazakh writer Miržaqip Dulatov described this transformation in 'the first novel of Kazakh life' *Baqitsiz Jamal* (Happless Jamal):

But the unfortunate girls spend their lives in cage like nightingales. People marry them to whoever will give the highest bride price, and the unlucky ones with tears in their eyes leave their fathers' homes. And the parents are not kind to them in this instance, no matter how much they might love them (Quoted by Allworth, 1967, 467).

² *Adat* or customary law of the Kazakhs was a fusion of social norms (legal and ethical) that existed in some other nomadic people (Drobyshev 2005)

According to *adat* rules, the head of the family was the only administrator of all family property. After marriage (which coincided with gaining independence from parents) all male children received full rights to own property (*enši*)³, while female children were never free or independent. Before marriage, young women depended on their fathers, while after marriage they belonged to their husband's household.

A birth of a child was vital for prestige and social standing of a woman. Motherhood brought new responsibilities and new status in the husband's family, another sign of woman's full adulthood. The social standing of a married woman who had several children was much higher compared to single or childless women. Women with children were considered wise and experienced, and their advice was sought not only by younger females but males as well (Стасевич, 2008). When assigning seats to guests in a *yurt* (a Kazakh dwelling), unmarried or childless women, as well as the impoverished members of the household, received the less prestigious places further from *tör* (Стасевич, 2008). During matchmaking and wedding ceremonies, only married women and women who had children (and who presumably led a happy family life) were allowed to socialise with a couple. This selective approach was applied to ensure that a couple would be equally successful in their marriage. Childless women were especially feared and were not allowed to provide any services to the young couple (Стасевич, 2008).

A birth of a child brought additional prestige to a mother in a traditional Kazakh family, but the significance of this event also indicates a value of a child per se. Childlessness was considered as a curse since it meant the complete disappearance of the family in the future. On the contrary, numerous children (especially, male children) were believed to be vital for future security and prosperity of the household (Akiner 1997). According to the tradition, shamanistic rituals directed at helping a woman to conceive were performed right after the marriage ceremony. In the childless marriage, women were encouraged to approach *baqsy* (a healer or a shaman), and if as the result of all these rituals a boy was born, he was usually called Tanirberdi (given by *Tengri*, the chief deity worshiped on the territory of Central Asia) or Aldabergen (God-given). Importance of male heirs for the family was reflected in names given to girls, including Ulbolsyn, Ulžan, and Ulžagas. These names given to girls demonstrate the wish of

³ Every male child had a right to own property that included *enši*, a necessary minimum to start his own household, and *kalym*, payment for a future bride. The minimal size of *enši* and *kalym* were defined by traditions and customary law, the maximum size was decided by the head of the household (father), but not at the expense of other children (Масанов, 1995).

their parents to have a boy (all three names can be translated as ‘the next child should be a boy’).

Children were treasured because they were perceived as an investment, which would quickly pay returns since children can contribute to the household economy when young and support elderly parents later on. The idea of children as an investment is reflected in the notion of *kun* (blood price) and *kalym* (payment for a bride). Franz von Schwarz (2006), a German doctor and astronomer who spent several decades in Central Asia in the 19th century, described two compelling cases involving children. In one example a child died due to the negligence of cattle owner when a cow ran into the *yurt* and knocked over a pot with boiling water on a child. Cow owner was forced to pay a full blood price (*kun*) to a father of the child, which shows the value of merely an infant for a family. In the second case, von Schwarz discussed a disappearance of a young man who went to a neighbouring *aul*. The circumstances of the youth’s disappearance were unclear. However, the *aul* paid a blood price to the family (фон Шварц, 2006).

The blood price (*kun*) for a man’s life included one hundred sheep and six *žaqsy* (a slave, a camel, a chain armour, a gun, a horse and a carpet). The blood price for a woman's life was only a half of a man's *kun*: fifty horses and three *žaksy*: a camel, a horse, and a carpet (Кисляков 1969). However, a value of *kun* was probably a negotiable concept and varied in every individual case.

Kalym, or payment for a bride, depended on wealth and social status of the future in-laws, personal qualities of a bride and some other conditions (фон Шварц 2006). The usual size of *kalym* included forty-seven heads of cattle, and for this reason another term describing *kalym* was *qyryq žety*, or forty-seven. However, rich people provided up to fifty-seven heads of cattle, while more impoverished families – from seventeen to forty-seven. Due to its size, *kalym* could have been paid in small instalments, and every payment had a meaning. For example, when the groom’s family paid the biggest instalment, the groom received a right to visit the bride. Before the wedding, the groom’s family delivered so-called *toi maly*, the property required for organization of the celebration, as well as *sutaqy*, a present to the mother of a bride ‘for milk’ (Кисляков 1969). Mustafina (1992) mentioned that *kalym* remains even in contemporary Kazakhstan society in the form of presents for the family of the bride, *toi* expenditures, or *keširim* (so-called forgiveness price for stealing of a bride).

Fannina Halle (1938), a German art historian and sociologist, who wrote about Central Asian women in the Soviet Union, provided another insight into the life of a young woman in

a Kazakh family. In her book, Fannina Halle described a Kazakh woman Alma, who recalls her 'engagement' with future husband:

I was the only daughter in my family. My parents had three sons. My three elder brothers. And so, I was a favourite little playing in the family. My father ... would place his hand on my head and say gaily: "I have a beautiful daughter growing up; she will bring in a large kalym." He had been haggling with Mullanur bey [the future father in law] over the kalym, and when the price was finally agreed upon after long debate (forty sheep, ten horses, five cows, and fifty roubles in money), and when they settled the date for the final payment of the kalym and the wedding... In the course of several years, the kalym was paid, and I was barely fourteen, according to my mother's calculations, when the wedding was celebrated (Halle, 1938, 87-90).

Count Konstantin Pahlen (1964), a Russian statesman who travelled to Central Asia at the beginning of the 20th century, condemned the idea of *kalym* in his memoirs. According to Pahlen (1964, 224), 'a bevy of girls is a source of guaranteed income to the head of the family... A man must buy his wife; that is the rule, and he must stick to it. Should the suitor be unable to pay the full sum outright he is allowed to pay by instalments spread over a number of years; but he gets his wife only when he has completed payment of the contracted sum... The girl's consent is never sought. It often happens that the father promises the girl to a second bridegroom and takes a down-payment from him on account, a procedure generally leading to hard-fought litigation and often developing into vendetta and bloodshed. I was told by an expert on Kirgiz affairs that disputes over *kalym* lead to more murders, robberies, and raids than any other cause.'

These two descriptions provided by Fannina Halle and Konstantin Pahlen show that the high status of a young woman in her own family coexisted with the treatment of her as a commodity and a potential source of income. Mustafina (1992) plainly explained *kalym* as compensation to the family of a bride for the loss of labour force, that was paid to the head of the household (the owner of this labour force). According to Pahlen (1964), for the groom's family, a young woman (a bride to be) also represented an economic asset since women had a lot of responsibilities, including assembling and taking down *yurts*, tending and watching the cattle, cleaning, cooking, making felt rugs, carrying out menial tasks, and rearing the children. As it was mentioned earlier, child-bearing was probably the essential function of a woman.

Kazakh proverbs reflect the complexity of a position of a girl in a family hierarchy. For example, proverbs like *qyz – qonaq* (a girl is a guest), *törkidegi qyz – tore* (a daughter in her father's home is a hostess) demonstrate that young woman had a prominent place in her family.

But at the same time, the Kazakhs said that *qyz – žat žurttyq* (daughter belongs to the other family), *šyqkan qyz – šiden tysqary* (married daughter is on the other side of the house), implying that young woman is supposed to marry and leave her parents' household.

Kazakh women were not veiled, and before marriage young women enjoyed relative freedom: they were allowed to talk to young men, participate in horse races, singing contests, etc. (Bacon, 1980). According to the memoirs of Konstantin Pahlen, even after marriage, women in Kazakh society enjoyed certain degree of freedom, compared to sedentary households. 'She (a Kazakh woman – AK) does not veil her face, and she is free to talk to strangers; her spiritual independence is shown by the temerity with which she frequently refuses to follow an unloved husband to whom she has been sold by father or brother, by the dignity of her bearing, and by her forthrightness in a court of law' (Pahlen, 1964, 61). As Weiner (1951, 289) pointed out, in the traditional heroic epics of the Kazakhs the heroine was 'usually endowed with qualities similar ... to those of the *batyr* (hero),' and was 'depicted as the equal of her husband or lover in moral worth and intelligence.' However, as Weiner states, the descriptions of the heroines in the epical poetry could be highly idealized.

Inga Stasevich (2008) acknowledges necessity of differentiation between social status of a young woman in her family group (which was as high as a status of a male heir of the family) and her low economic standing. As it was mentioned earlier, young woman did not own any property and therefore was not independent in financial terms. The economic status of a young girl depended on the social and economic standing of her father, which determined her position in the 'hierarchy' of brides, influenced the size of *kalym* and therefore, a choice of potential husband.

According to Thomas Winner (1958, 14), 'a woman was always subject to the will of a superior. As a young girl, she was ruled by her father, but after marriage, she became subject to the will of her husband and his older wives.' The Kazakh proverbs refer to future hardships in the lives of young women (*qyzdyn žoly žiniške*, or girl's road is narrow), and dependency on 'success' of possible marriage. *Imandy qyz – syikti žar – ayaulы ana – aqžaulыqty aže* (well-mannered daughter, beloved wife, dear mother, pious grandmother): these are possible incarnations for a woman or the roles a woman is allowed to adopt in the traditional Kazakh family. However, ethnographers discuss some rare cases when women were allowed to run their households after the death of the head of the family while the older male child was still young (Масанов, Абылхожин and Ерофеева, 2007). Most often after marriage, the status of a young woman changed. Men were allowed complete authority over their wives, including

killing, punishing or divorcing them. As Mustafina (1992) commented marriage was a turning point when a relatively well-established young female was transformed into a 'slave,' whose life was devoted to household chores and whose responsibilities included being 'a wife, a mother, and a mentor.' Mustafina (1992a) explained this contradiction by co-existence of two different beliefs in the society: an archaic pagan notion of a woman that influenced the perception of a young girl in her father's family, and Islamic tradition presuming unequal standing of a woman within her husband's family. In writings of Chokan Valikhanov, a talented Kazakh historian, geographer, ethnographer, and linguist of the late 19th century, was blaming Islam for changing position of a woman in the society at large. Valikhanov mentioned that 'freedom of women and their participation in public events is gradually disappearing' because of 'enormous progress' of Islam in the Kazakh steppe (Валиханов 1984, 303).

Influence of Islam on the traditional Kazakh upbringing

In this research, I would like to avoid drawing parallels between nomadic people and sedentary societies that lived along the Silk Road. Comparisons will be inappropriate since nomads who lived on the territory of Kazakhstan had a very different lifestyle and moreover, they have never been considered as devote Muslims despite their belonging to the Islamic world from the late ninth century.

In the beginning, the penetration of Islam among the Kazakhs was very slow. According to Thomas G. Winner (1958), the Arab invasion of southern Central Asia did not influence the religious life of the tribes in the northern part of Central Asia. And later Arab geographers still described the tribes of the north as being indifferent to Islam (Winner, 1958). The first large-scale conversion of the Kazakhs to Islam began in the seventeenth century under the influence of sedentary Uzbeks. But even during this period due to a nomadic way of life and relative isolation religious practices among Kazakhs retained elements of earlier shamanism, animism, and ancestor worship (Hiro, 1994; Olcott, 1995). It was not until the late nineteenth century that Islam became a predominant religion on the vast territory of nomadic tribes.

Christopher Bardanes, a Greek traveller who served as a doctor in one of the Russian ethnographic expeditions to the Central and Eastern part of Kazakhstan in the 1770s, mentioned in his notes 'sketchy knowledge of Islam' among Kazakh tribes. Bardanes described a low number of clerics among Kazakhs, and moreover, quite often this role was taken by representatives of other ethnic groups, like Bashkirs or Tatars. According to his diaries, only some of Kazakhs prayed and performed religious rituals, while majority did not know the words

of prayers except for ‘There is no god worthy of worship except God and Muhammad is His messenger’ (Барданес 2007, 179, 185).

Thomas G. Winner (1958, 13) quoted memoirs of the 19th-century American scholar and diplomat Eugene Schuyler of his trip to Russian Turkistan. Schuyler discussed members of Kazakh tribes: ‘It is only externally that they are Moslems. On being asked what religion they have they will say they do not know, but at the same time they would repel with vigour any insinuations that they were not good Moslems.’

Winner (1958) continued explaining all the differences between nomadic tribes of Central Asia and sedentary Uzbeks, including distinct dietary laws (with the exception of pork meat), lack of circumcision rites among nomadic tribes, and lack of veiling and seclusion of women since the latter would interfere with women’s work in nomadic society (Winner, 1958, 13). Islam developed deeper historical roots in the non-nomadic Tajik and Uzbek populations than among the nomadic Kyrgyz, Turkmen, and Kazakh tribes. And since the Kazakhs maintained their nomadic way of life significantly longer than any other people of the region, Islam did not spread among Kazakh tribes in a mosque-centred, institutional manner (Андреев, 1785; фон Шварц, 2006).

The majority of the Kazakhs embraced Islam in the early nineteenth century under the dual pressure of wandering Tatar missionaries from Kazan, and Russians, who perceived Islam as a cementing force for the nomadic tribes, thus making them easy to control (Allworth, 1967a; Hiro, 1994; Winner, 1958). As Winner (1958) mentions, Russian colonisation fostered a considerable growth in Islamic conversions among the Kazakh groups.

According to the notes of Chokan Valikhanov (Валиханов, 1984), despite its late start, Islam made ‘enormous progress’ on the territory of Kazakhstan in the mid-19th century. Valikhanov attacked Russian administration for fostering Islam, which he considered harmful to the cultural traditions of the Kazakhs. He believed that influence of Islam was pernicious to Kazakh culture, and instead, he urged Russian Imperial government to stimulate conversion of the Kazakh people to Christianity (Валиханов, 1984). Chokan Valikhanov even names the period of Islamisation of the steppes as the “Tatar period” (Quoted in Winner, 1958, 107). The Kazakh ethnographer lamented that every *aul* had a *mullah* as well as mobile *medrese* (religious school), and he mentioned that those Kazakhs who did not observe *oraza* (fasting) and five-time *namaz* (prayer) were not respected by the relatives. Valikhanov also expressed his concerns that some ‘songs, ancient poems, wrestling as well as freedom for women... were gradually disappearing’ (Валиханов, 1984, 303).

However, even with aggressive Islamisation of the nomadic population, the Kazakhs were not considered as good Muslims. One of the Kazakh intellectuals of the early 20th century, Alikhan Bukeikhanov, reflected that “Kazakhs are non-Muslims or at very most half-Muslims” (quoted in Hiro, 1994, 109). Valikhanov also talked about prevailing paganistic rituals and traditions that intervene with Islam. For example, he described worship practices in the steppes: “All unusual natural phenomena are considered as sacred places, blessed by *auliya* (saint)... A lonely tree in a desert or an ugly plant with crooked branches serves as an object of worship and overnight stays. Anyone passing by puts pieces of dress, threads, throws cups, sacrifices animals...” (quoted in Мустафина, 1992, 95). Islam in the Kazakh steppe was superstitious, stressing magic more than learning and ecstasy more than observance of rules (Radford, 2015).

The perception of Islam among the Kazakh tribes could be illustrated by an example of bride kidnapping. In the research devoted to this subject, Larina et al. (2010) mentioned that according to *adat* (customary law), bride kidnapping was in violation of parents’ will and therefore, it was a serious crime. Consequences for the kidnapper were grave. The authors also commented that ‘*Shariah* (Islamic law) forbade bride kidnapping, however, it made provisions for a forced marriage. Nevertheless, the Kazakhs followed *adat* when it came to the punishment, and in this regard, *adat* rules played a more important role compared to *Shariah* laws” (Ларина & Хаимова, 2010, 14). The supremacy of customary laws over Islamic law shows that rules and traditions developed in the steppes sometimes were considered as more important compared to Islam. Therefore, it can be assumed that Islam did not control certain aspects of nomadic life.

Franz von Schwarz mentioned that all religious beliefs among the Kazakh people were limited to the circumcision, head shaving and some other ceremonies. Von Schwarz provided a description of a situation when a Kazakh person was supposed to take an oath on the Quran, and who instead tore it down and had beaten a *mullah* (фон Шварц, 2006, 184). Von Schwarz also wrote that it was customary among wealthy Kazakhs to invite a *mullah* to the wedding ceremony. However, ‘a mullah does not play any role, since it is a mere formality and (his presence - АК) provides more elegance to it (the celebration - АК)’ (фон Шварц, 2006, 183).

At the same time, both Konstantin Pahlen and Chingiz Valikhanov expressed their concerns about the changing status of women due to the Islamic influence. For example, in Turkestan memoirs, Pahlen mentioned that with a spread of Islam wealthier Kazakhs were adopting customs of the sedentary population and ‘preaching the desirability of relegating the women to the harem’ (Pahlen, 1964, 61). It can be concluded that penetration and spread of

Islam in the Kazakh steppes were unequal: Islamic customs were embraced by the wealthier Kazakh families, but at the same time it had more a symbolic than real value in everyday life of the commoners and even wealthy merchants and aristocracy. Still, it seems that treatment of women (especially after marriage) was gradually changing under the influence of Islamic tradition.

In the following section, I will briefly discuss the idea of a social contract that existed between children and parents in the traditional Kazakh family as well as some peculiarities in the relations between the generations.

Obligations between parents and children

According to the Kazakh tradition, the respect to the older generation is an essential quality of a human being. The veneration of old age was part of an unwritten code in the Steppe.⁴ The respect for elders is reflected in the spoken language: for example, a respectful form of 'you' (*siz*) is used when addressing the parents or anyone elder.

Teslenko (2012) mentioned that Islamic tradition also had played a role since it stressed the importance of elders and males in the family, who were role models for younger generations. The elder members of the extended family provided younger children with the learning experience of traditions of ancestors and the past. However, among all members of the family, parents were considered as the most important. Children of any age were expected to express their gratitude and obedience towards parents during their whole life. Even after becoming independent (after marriage) the older male children were supposed to follow their father's orders or wishes.

Strict hierarchy⁵ in the family was reflected in the social contract that existed between the senior and junior members of the family who were taught to show obedience, as well as in inferior status of women in comparison to men. Father was the head of the family. The father was in control of all family property, but not at the expense of family interests. According to the customary law *adat*, the head of the family could not bequeath his property to the representatives of other families (Кисляков, 1969). A father could punish his son, but at the

⁴ According to Thomas Weiner (1951), in the Kazakh epic tale *Yer-Targhyn*, the hero Targhyn greets his opponent in the duel Qart-Qozaq, an old man, very politely, and praises him:

You yourself are a great and wise man,
You burn like lighted dry grass,

Your manly bravery is without blemish. See (Weiner, 1951, 286)

⁵ Masanov (1995) stressed that except for family hierarchy with husband present at the top of it, there was another hierarchy among female family members: *baybiše* (the first wife was the most influential member of the family), followed by *toqal* (the second or the third wife), then concubines and slaves. The same status was assigned to the children of the wives. According to *adat*, the children of the first wife enjoyed more advantages compared to the children of the second wife, etc.

same time he could not deprive him of *enši*, he had to provide a dowry to the daughter and to pay a *kun* (blood price) in cases when his family members committed a crime.

Even father did not directly participate in the upbringing, he was supposed to provide an example, while mother played crucial role in child rearing. At the same time in the conversation with her children, a mother would always refer to father's decisions and his orders: she would say *ækennin aitqanin iste* (do what you father told you), or *ækenmen aqyldas* (discuss this with your father). Father had almost absolute power over children and had the right to manage property both of young and adult children (Кисляков, 1969). Wife (or wives), female children and even mothers were always limited in their rights.

Daughter in law had very vulnerable position in the family of her husband. When addressing the relatives of her husband, daughter in law was supposed to use certain expressions, like *ata* (grandfather) or *köke* (father), when she talked to her father in law, *agay* (uncle), when addressing elder brother of her husband, *myrza* (master), when talking to the younger brother of her husband.⁶ She used expressions like *apeke* (mother), *ageke* (older brother), *ateke* (grandfather), or *šešey* (mother, godmother) addressing everyone who was elder, even strangers (Чатырбеков & Давлетова 2013, 22; Мустафина 1992, 23).

As it was mentioned earlier children in the Kazakh traditional family were considered as an investment with an anticipated return: children were expected to help and support their parents at the old age for the trouble of bearing and raising. Even today 'Will you take care of me?' is a usual question asked by the representatives of the older generation when they address young children. In the families with several children (especially boys), this obligation is left to the youngest son (*kenže*), who in the past was regarded as the principle heir of the family wealth, since he received all the remaining assets of his father after separation of the older sons. And according to UNFPA 2005 report (2005), devoted to the older generation, even at the end of the 20th century the structure of the Kazakh families was different from non-Kazakh groups because in many cases parents lived together with their children.

Historically, raising children in the Kazakh families has not been dependent on parenting them. The oldest son in the family was often given to the grandparents. This tradition was called *bauryrna salu*, and it exists even today, which explains why in Kazakh families, the eldest

⁶ To protect her family members against the 'evil eye' the daughter in law was not allowed to use real names of her husband and his relatives. This tradition was called *at terge*. According to this tradition, the daughter in law was supposed to come up with their aliases (such as *erketay* (tenderling), *kishkene bala* (little boy), *ayayym* (my moon), *kunim* (my sun), etc. *Bay-atam* (wealthy father in law), *bi atam* (father in law who is a judge), *myrza qaynaga* (brother-in-law, master), *törežan* (high-born).

children sometimes have different last names. *Bauyryna salu* is not an adoption because a child is free to choose where he wants to remain or leave. However, it could be considered as a form of temporary foster care (Масанов, 1995). The children raised by grandparents were known as *atanyn balalary* (children of grandparents) and they were seen by other family members and community as keepers of traditions, people who would maintain relationships with distant relatives. The Kazakh proverb *Eki šaldyn ortasyndagy bir bala – dana bolady* (a child between two elders will be wise) applies to this particular tradition.

Young people who were interviewed for this research discuss this obligation towards their families and talk about their duty to support their parents and grandparents financially. However, this expectation of reciprocity is often ambiguous and not formalised in any way. Therefore, both elders and children assume certain mutual indebtedness and obligation, but it can be manipulated or misunderstood to the extent that neither side is clear about exactly what they must do.

With the opening of military schools in Omsk (1813) and Orenburg (1825), and a seven-year school for the preparation of interpreters in Orenburg (1850) the education for Kazakh children began to get on a firm footing (Pierce 1960). The Kazakh aristocracy also demonstrated their interest in educating younger generation: Khan Zhangir, the ruler of the Bukeyev Orda in the western part of modern Kazakhstan, issued a decree that mosques and schools be built and a *mekteb* (school) course instituted, with classes held during summer in *yurts*.

From these schools, the best students were sent to Russian gymnasia until a Kazakh gymnasium was opened in 1841 under the direction of Kazan Tatars. By 1914, there were 2,011 schools of all kinds within the borders of contemporary Kazakhstan, attended by a total of 105,200 students. However, Kazakh children constituted only 7.5 percent of the total enrolment of 7,890 children (Pierce 1960).

While both Russian administration and Kazakh aristocracy were working on establishing formal schooling to strengthen the empire, or to promote the loyalty of their kin, the parents of Kazakh children (and children themselves) considered the education as an opportunity for future material gain. According to Ibragim (Abay) Kunanbayev, one of the renowned Kazakh intellectuals of the 19th century, some parents (who traditionally saw their children as a commodity, or a potential investment) tried to make their newly educated children help them in the never-ending lawsuits over pastures (Winner, 1958). In the poem ‘The boarding school’ (1886), Abay complained that majority of children admitted into schools were interested ‘to

obtain honour,' to become a lawyer or an interpreter. Abay found this disgraceful and the poet described these children as not 'knowing good from evil.'

He only waits, and the time of national misery
Will present him with fat presents.

Encouraging the youth to take education seriously and to maintain their self-respect, Abay advised them:

For great learning, you must strive

...

Read and do not be lazy
Do not flatter your way into a uniform
With golden epaulettes.
Cease the empty bragging
And the raising of the eyebrows.

Do not lower yourself before the Russian administrator.

...

Walk the road that has no evil

However hard this road may be (Abay Kunanbayev, quoted by Winner 1958, 115).

Abay demonstrated his despise of the behaviour of Kazakh families who tried to gain advantage through educating their younger generation. However, I think this poem also shows that the Kazakhs considered school as an opportunity for male children to bring material wealth and prestige to their families.

Abay believed in the necessity of liberal education for all, including women, and he expressed his views in his works, particularly in philosophical conversations with his readers *Ghaqlija* (Edification):

'The desire to learn and understand everything; to see and to study – that is a high passion of the soul. If this desire is lost, if you no longer wish to know everything perfectly, or to find out about it at least in part, then you are no longer a human being. If we do not strive for knowledge, then our soul is no longer a human soul, but an animal soul (Abay Kunanbayev quoted by Winner 1958, 114).

The pioneer Kazakh pedagogue and the first author of prose in the Kazakh language Ibray Altynsaryn strongly supported ideas of educating Kazakh children in their native language. For Altynsaryn, schooling for talented youth was an economic and political necessity and even a moral problem (Allworth 1967a). It is worth mentioning that if Abay supported ideas of

education for women, Altynsaryn was involved in creation of the first *internats* (boarding schools) for girls. However, even for this philosopher and pedagogue, the whole idea of educating women was limited to learning the Russian language and acquiring skills in sewing and housekeeping (Pierce 1960).

With the establishment of the Soviet rule on the territory of Kazakhstan, universal schooling would revolutionise lives of several generations of children. Secondary education for girls would be considered normal only in a couple of decades. However, the value of education and its role for the Soviet children t will be discussed in the next chapter. At this point, I would like to conclude that the studies of the Kazakhstan Steppe in the 19th-beginning of the 20th century and the information about local population are sparse and fragmented. A pre-Soviet period was described by different travellers, who were official ambassadors and entrepreneurs, military specialists as well as scientists, including historians and ethnographers. But many of those diaries and memoirs could be compared to the notes of the modern tourists, whose observations in many cases are superficial.

Based on the available information I tried to describe the role children played in the traditional Kazakh family as well as to discuss the value assigned to both male and female children by their parents and society. In the first section of this chapter, I discussed the transformation of a child into a full member of the community. It is evident that children were valuable members of a traditional family in Kazakh tribes. Their birth and upbringing were celebrated through rich and complicated rituals. Differential treatment of male and female children in the family became more and more visible when children reached puberty, and from this point, their education and training was conducted separately. Both male and female children were considered as a form of investment by their parents, and this was reflected in the notions of *kun* and *kalym* that were discussed in this chapter.

The rituals for male and female children could be described as rites of passage and a step on the path from immaturity to maturity. However, if adulthood for young man arrived with at certain age, when he was prepared for marriage and social responsibilities, it could be argued that young woman never became a full adult. She was always under protection and control of her father or her husband.

I concluded this chapter with some observations about the relationships between younger and older generation as well as the role of the religion in the traditional upbringing of children.

Chapter 3. ‘Oh, that is so good to live in a Soviet country’: Soviet ‘happy childhood’

With the establishment of the Soviet rule on the territory of Kazakhstan, population experienced a deep transformation ‘which was of considerably more far-reaching proportions than any changes which the area had undergone as a result of the Russian penetration in the 19th century’ (Winner 1958, 135). Almost immediately after the Bolsheviks came into power, age-old traditions that were still prevalent among Kazakh families, including polygamy, compulsory marriage, levirate and *kalym* (bride buying) were abandoned (Halle 1938). Aleksandra Kollontai, one of the leading Soviet feminists of the early 1920s, promised that the Soviet state would ‘lift the burdens of motherhood from women’s shoulders and transfer them to the state’ (quoted by Hoffmann 2000, 35). Soviet theorists differed on how large a role parents would play in children’s upbringing, but they all agreed that the state would render substantial help and the family would wither out eventually (Goldman 1994). It was believed that transformation (and gradual disappearance) of the family would contribute to raising a new Soviet individual.

With this preface, I begin the discussion of the perception of children in the early 1920s in the Soviet Union. In this chapter, I will look at the development of an image of a revolutionary child that was replaced by the idea of a docile and obedient creature in the 1930s. I will demonstrate how this change was reflected in the children’s literature and movies. This chapter will explore the notion of ‘happy childhood’ to illustrate the relationship between the state and its children. Finally, I will discuss the evolution of the construct of childhood in the 1960s-1980s.

Soviet political leaders saw a child as a blank slate, therefore, the value of a child for the state was connected to a young person being the perfect material that could be forged into a new citizen (Kirschenbaum, 2001). The Soviet educational leadership believed that childish behaviour should be discouraged while responsibility and adulthood were acclaimed (Kelly 2007). According to the new thinking, the world of children should not much differ from the world of adults: children were expected to grow up faster to join adults and help them in a creation of a just society. Vladimir Mayakovsky, the ‘Poet of the Revolution,’ expresses this attitude towards children in his lyrics: ‘*We are moving ahead in building the communist society... Teenager, stop being a child, become a fighter and an activist*’ (quoted by Димке 2012, 313). The lyrics meant that growing up was an opportunity to become a ‘new person’ and to contribute to the development of a new society. Even poet’s interest in children could be

explained by eventual transformation of a child into an adult. His lyrics ‘*We should be able to take aims, to be able to shoot... We will be providing help in every battle...*’ (quoted by Димке 2012, 314), where ‘we’ implied representatives of the younger generation, demonstrated a very different idea of a child as a younger partner, who would be helping in changing the world.

This early Soviet concept of childhood had certain similarities with ideas of other utopic projects, including Protestant communities or *kibbutz* (Furnham, 1984; Aviezer *et al.*, 1994; Aviezer, Sagi and van Ijzendoorn, 2002). Like some of the Soviet educators, *kibbutzniks* believed that the role of the family was almost irrelevant since institutions were able to provide necessary upbringing for children (Clawson 1973). However, despite certain similarities with utopic projects elsewhere, there were at least three components specific to the Soviet model of childhood, including universal education, the involvement of state institutions, and strong ideological component (Stearns, 2011).

Receiving education became a new obligation of the child. By acquiring literacy and relevant skills in school, children helped the state (in contrast to supporting family economy in the past). At the same time according to Knight (2009) and Безпоров (2006), kindergartens and schools served as *ideological* bastions that attacked religion and the church. The Soviet state considered faith particularly dangerous because it was associated with the *ancien régime*, oppression of workers and peasants, and therefore, obstructive to the making of the ‘new’ person. In order to develop a ‘uniform identity’ of the Soviet child and to make children different or better versions of their parents, schools provided children with different ideals and values, relevant to communist goals.

The Soviet state created an extensive *youth-group apparatus* (Octobrists-Pioneers-Komsomol) as a supplement to schooling and as a means of furthering Communist Party influence over children while limiting independent parental controls (Stearns, 2011). Children were embraced as members of the Communist youth organisations: ‘Little Octobrists’ for 7-10-year olds, ‘Young Pioneers’ for 10-15-year olds and ‘Komsomol’ for 15-27-year olds. The ceremonies of accession to every stage reminded of religious ceremonies: they were conducted in front of all members of the school, attended by parents. At the end of the ceremony, children received symbols (pins or kerchiefs) indicating their belonging to the group. Billie K. Press (1989, 21) mentions that majority of Soviet adults remembered the ceremony of induction into Young Pioneers as ‘one of the happiest, proudest days of their lives.’ In the perception of young people who were the members of the early Pioneer movement, adults did not have authority

over them, since the acceptance to the pioneer organisation did not require permission of the family.

The ideological component played an essential role in child education. As in Nazi Germany, the Soviet state propaganda machine was targeting children from the early age (Pinfold, 2001). For example, Soviet kindergartens teachers were tasked with providing ‘international, antireligious, collective upbringing’ to children who were not ‘polluted’ by socialisation with the old regime, not susceptible to the ‘backwardness’ of ignorant, drunk, superstitious, and religious adults (Kirschenbaum 2001, 157).

In the era of rapid industrialisation, children were compared to the energy resources. For example, in the collection of critical essays on the role of Soviet literature for children (1931), the editors stated the following: ‘*We are currently experiencing radical alteration of all the branches of the industry, including human resources... And during this period the task of preparing builders of socialism has a huge significance*’ (quoted by Димке 2012, 313). Alteration of the existing material (i.e., adults) was believed to be a long and labour-intensive process compared to the education of the young. This view of children as a resource influenced the high social status of a child during the discussed period.

Soviet literature curriculum was especially significant in child education. Soviet literature for children accompanied by proper illustrations had to communicate to young readers ideological aspects, shape and influence a mass audience according to aesthetic and social standards set by Bolshevik propaganda (Leving 2011). Therefore, the use of pre-revolutionary literature, including ‘reactionary and bourgeois’ fairy tales, was dangerous (Katsnelson 2011). However, even contemporary authors were not safe from critique. One of a leading authorities on education in the Soviet Union, deputy Minister of Education and wife of Vladimir Lenin Nadezhda Krupskaya launched a condemnation campaign against popular children’s poet Korney Chukovsky and his works, labelling these poems as *burzhuaznaia mut*’ (bourgeois nonsense) (Balina, 2010; Маслинская, 2017). According to one of the Chukovsky’s critics, Chukovsky completely ignored a new Soviet child reader, who would be dissatisfied with missing Soviet content in the poems: ‘... *here comes a new child. He... will ask: “Is it about the USSR?” And learning that it is not... he will annoyingly shrug his shoulder*’ (quote by Маслинская 2017, p.178).

In contrast to Nazi ideologists of the 1930s-1940s who were borrowing ideas from the German pantheon, the Soviet propaganda faced a challenging task of creating new heroes and new examples for the younger generation: heroes who would be children, who would stand as

icons of the revolutionary future, and who would provide communist ideals through stories and novels about new reality (Kirschenbaum 2001; Димке 2012а).

Yury Olesha's *Tri tolstiaka* (The Three Fat Men, 1924) is one of the first child books written and published after the 1917 Revolution. Olesha addressed a struggle with evil forces defeated by courage and friendship, and at the centre of the conflict, the reader finds two children capable of independent decision making (Nikolajeva 1995, 106). Even the book was heavily criticised, the idea of introducing new child heroes lived.

Pavlik Morozov, a devote Pioneer who in 1932 denounced his father only to be murdered by his grandfather, represents an example of a successful construction of a young Soviet martyr (Kirschenbaum, 2001; Kelly, 2007). Pavlik Morozov became the first 'hero-pioneer of the Soviet Union.' In the 1930s, his image was immortalised in various poems, movies, and even opera. The ideological component in the Soviet education was strong to the extent that there were real life replicas of Pavlik Morozov in the Soviet Union. For example, in 1939, a 13-year-old girl became suspicious of her father's involvement with a conspiratorial organization. Like Tom Parson's daughter in Orwell's dystopia *1984*, this young girl was considering reporting her father to the secret police *NKVD*. In her diary, she wrote: '*I would have to do this because this was a sacrifice for the Soviet state. Because this was the greatest thing I could do for my ideas*' (quoted in Thurston 1991, 564). This example illustrates the level of indoctrination when an abstract Soviet state was perceived a closer kin compared to the own family.

This image of self-assertive, politically aware, intellectually autonomous child could also be found in the works of Arkady Gaidar. In contrast to Olesha's fictional revolution, Gaidar's 1933 *Skazka o voennoi taine* (Tale about Military Secret, Mal'chish Kibalchish, and His Firm Word) is a story about 1919 Civil War. The older brother of the protagonist is leaving to protect the Revolution: '*Farewell, Mal'chish... You are all by yourself... You have your head on the shoulders... Live by yourself and do not wait for me.*' A grown man bids his farewell to a young boy telling him to carry on with his life. Later in the story, when the older generation dies in the fight against the evil *burzhuiny* (a derogatory word invented by Gaidar based on 'bourgeois'), young children are the only surviving members of the community. Mal'chish pleads to them to help the Red Army: '*Hey, little kids! Should we only play with sticks and jump ropes? Our fathers are gone, and our brothers are gone. Should we wait for burzhuiny to come and take us to their cursed burzhuinstvo?*' (another word invented by Gaidar, meaning the land where *burzhuiny* lived). The story of Mal'chish is a story of betrayal and loss of young lives. In the end, the protagonist dies for the country and the Revolution, but even the enemy admires

sacrifice of young generation willing to protect the ideas of the new society. In this story, Arkady Gaidar stresses the idea of child's autonomy. In the story, a closed group of children learns collectivist norms and values to shape the world of adults, the Soviet Utopia (Димке 2012).

The idea of a child passionately interested in politics, this active 'new' individual, experienced an abrupt transformation during the Stalin's years. A vivid example of this transformation was provided by Catriona Kelly (2009) in her book on evolution of the legend of Pavlik Morozov. Earlier versions of the legend demonstrated an image of a capable young man. However, according to Kelly (2009), in the later versions of the story, the hero becomes less independent, and more reliant on adults (like a school teacher or a representative of an organization for investigating and combating counterrevolutionary activities, etc.). And according to Kelly (2009), this particular transformation from a revolutionary young person to a child happened due to the conflict of the idea of an independent child with the personality cult of Josef Stalin. The conflict required a shift in the Soviet perception of a child and childhood.

Over the next decade, Stalin brought a halt to virtually all programmes aimed at revolutionising the family, especially in the area of child-rearing (Michaels, 2000). The government introduced new legal and political changes directed at strengthening family institutions, including abortion ban, divorce restrictions, an introduction of a new tax for single persons and childless couples, payments to women with large families, etc. (Clawson 1973). Moreover, parental authority re-acquired prominence, and the state revived the image of an obedient child. In 1935, *Komsomol'skaya Pravda*, an official newspaper for the youth division of the Communist Party, published several messages about importance of family loyalty as '*a component of communist morality.*' According to the newspaper, parents deserved respect as '*elders who helped us be happy, as people who raised us,*' while rudeness towards parents was denounced as '*noncommunist and foreign to our society*' (quoted by Thurston 1991, 559).

Writing in *Vozhatyi*, a magazine for Pioneer leaders, Nadezhda Krupskaya stated that parents and other family members should be considered as 'natural educators' for children. In contrast to her earlier works, she barely mentioned the role of political organisations, including schools and the Young Pioneers. Institutional upbringing acquired a less prominent position, while the idea of obedience to the parents and Stalin, the Father of People, took on greater meaning (Thurston 1991, 561).

Literature for children also experienced a transformation: iconoclastic behaviour against adults was no longer part of the agenda. At the conference on children's literature in 1936, one

of the founding fathers of the Soviet children's stories Samuil Marshak talked about the importance of 'children's stories for children': '*...the time has come for a new and different book. The heroes should not be those who ... experienced so many drastic changes in their everyday lives, in their families, and in their schools, but rather today's children, who are much happier and have the right and the opportunity to live according to the righteous interests of their age* (quoted by Dobrenko 2005, 229).

The Marshak's address calling for proper stories for children built on the 1935 Stalin's famous declaration '*Life has become better, comrades. Life has become happier.*' Stalin's 1935 speech introduced a newly rehabilitated ideal of the family to help in raising ideologically reliable, happy and enthusiastic children, future citizens of 'great motherland' (Knight 2009, 795). The myth of the 'Soviet happy childhood' was born.

Naturally, the idea of 'happy childhood' did not appear overnight during the Stalin era. The Soviet 'happiness' was inspired by classic Russian literature, including Tolstoy's *Childhood (Detstvo)*. In a famous passage (that was read and remembered by many generations of Soviet school children), the narrator ponders about his good fortune: '*Happy, happy time of childhood, never to return? How could one to love it, cherish one's memories of it? These memories refresh and elevate my soul and are a source of the greatest delights for me.*'

After the Revolution, the authors who wrote for children used the slogan 'happy childhood' to provide an optimistic flavour in their stories. But according to Kelly (2009), the real heyday of 'happy childhood' comes in the mid-1930s. The years of 1934 and 1935 witnessed an upsurge of 'joy and happiness' articles in the press. Readers of *Pionerskaya Pravda*, a weekly newspaper for Pioneers, read articles with titles like 'The Happy Life of Children in the Land of Bolsheviks', 'We are the Children of a Happy Country', 'There is no End to the Joy', etc.

This legend of 'happy childhood' culminated in 1936 Aleksandrov's film *The Circus*. Fabulous Lyubov Orlova played an American performer ostracized by her countrymen for raising a mixed-race son. In contrast to the foreigners, the Soviet people in the film demonstrated their acceptance and tolerance. The film served as a statement for two main ideas. First, any child despite the country of origin, or the colour of the skin would be accepted and embraced by the Soviet state and society (in contrast to the racist Western society. Second, an introduction of a vulnerable and fragile image of a child demonstrated a need for the goodwill of adults who were happy to sacrifice everything to provide for his happy childhood.

Writers portrayed Stalin as the most important adult in the Soviet country. In August 1937, *Chizh* (Siskin), a magazine for little children, published a poem by Samuil Marshak *Steamboat from Spain* about a trip of four children fleeing the horrors of the Civil war in Spain. In this poem, the Soviet Union was depicted as a big friendly family (*Children will find in this faraway place Motherland, friendship, family*) with Stalin portrayed as its ‘father.’ Marshak (1937) wrote about ‘*this strange land*’, where ‘*Stalin in Kremlin thinks about him.*’ ‘Him’ implied all children affected by war or any other tragedy.

Agnia Barto, another Soviet children’s poet, in the poem *Mamita Mia* writes about a little girl and a boy traveling on a train from Barcelona to Leningrad: - *Hush! Don't cry! - Whispers a boy from Malaga. – We are going to visit children in Leningrad. There are banners, songs, and flags! We will live with friends.* Here the Soviet land is a display of happiness, and childhood in this country is painted in bright colours of red banners. The image of children in trouble as exceptionally fragile and requiring help emphasizes the importance of their final destination, a place where assistance will be provided by a big Soviet family and Stalin himself.

In the 1930s, the Central Committee of the Communist party denounced ‘the overloading of pupils and pioneers with social-political tasks’ (Thurston, 1991). Preschool and early school education no longer involved studying current party decisions and Marxist political theory, while the teachers at the secondary schools were requested to stop ‘overloading’ children. In May 1935, *Vozhatyi*, the magazine for Pioneer leaders, informed its readers that summer camps served to ‘create an attractive, engaging life’ for children: the leaders of pioneer brigades were supposed to get children into nature, while boring reports were partially banned (Thurston 1991, 560). Although the political education of children hardly ended, it indeed decreased in relative importance for younger children.

The idea of a happy child with age-appropriate toys and holidays was becoming more prominent among Soviet policymakers. To bring more joy into children’s life, the Communist party reinstated some old pre-revolutionary holidays, including the New Year (Thurston 1991). Previously banished toys, dolls reappeared in children’s lives, while fairy tales received a political blessing during the First Soviet Writers’ Congress in 1934, when Maxim Gor’kii and Samuil Marshak re-established this genre as ideologically desirable and corresponding to the requirements of socialist realism (Katsnelson 2011).

The idea of children as beneficiaries of the state was strengthened during the remaining years of the Stalin’s rule, while Stalin was celebrated as a paternal figure (Kelly 2007). Soviet art, literature, and official speeches captured children expressing gratefulness to Stalin, a wise

leader offering advice on any aspect of children's life from education to sports. A phrase 'Thank you, Dear Comrade Stalin, for Our Happy Childhood!' appeared in public spaces, pinned on walls, printed in books and magazines, and chanted by children during public events. In the words of Vyacheslav Molotov, Stalin was a 'teacher, leader, and favourite friend' to children of the world (Peacock 2015, 20). Aleksei Surkov's 'Song about Stalin,' written for the leader's 60th birthday in 1939 demonstrated a direct correlation between children's happiness and Stalin's rule (*Warmed by Stalin's smile Our children play joyfully... Singing, fighting and winning, Our nation follows Stalin* (quoted by Kelly 2009, 6).

Presence of the Great Leader in everyday life was so intense that it evoked confused feelings among younger children: a girl remembering her childhood recalled '*even though I did not love Stalin more than Mama and Papa, I loved him very much*' (quoted by Furst 2002, 357). Another young girl inquired from her mother, '*Whom should we love more – Stalin or the parents?*' (quoted by Thurston 1991, 563).

The image of a grateful and happy child reflected the Soviet Union's reassuring future (Peacock 2015). Therefore, it was challenging for the Soviet government to address an idea of a child in a difficult situation (Kelly 2009). According to the official press, unhappy children lived abroad or existed in the pre-Revolutionary past. Therefore, Soviet newspapers exploited this approach to compare these unfortunate experiences with the happy well-being of Soviet children. Rudolf Dekker names this approach a 'white legend' (i.e., joyous life of Soviet children) in contrast with a 'black legend' (i.e., dreadful conditions for children prevalent during pre-Soviet times or in the Western countries) (R. Dekker as cited in Dekker & Groenendijk 2012, 139; Kelly 2007; Stearns 2010).

The early communist ideology that constructed children as a blank slate was influenced by the ideas of the Enlightenment proclaiming the innocence of the child. Therefore, this thinking was useful in the interpretation of imperfect social arrangements, poverty, and inequality that 'polluted' childhood experiences. Thus, in the 1920s, the new Soviet government did not see any obstacles in explaining the existence of the *besprizorniki* (homeless children) as a gruesome legacy of imperial Russia which would disappear once the socialist society was fully formed (Stolee 1988). The Party even demonstrated sympathy to the children of 'class enemies.' For example, in the 1930s during the deportation of *kulaks* (wealthy peasants) Nadezhda Krupskaya emotionally wrote about children of deported peasants not being responsible for the deeds of their parents: '*A young child's parents are arrested... But we are not waging war with children but with adults. A child cannot choose his parents, he has*

exploited nobody, has oppressed nobody, made nobody's life unbearable, conducted no intrigues. He is guilty of nothing. A child is a child... It is an unforgivable act to punish children for their parents..." (quoted by Fitzpatrick 1979, 164). As a result, the Politburo allowed for young *kulaks* to reject their families to be considered for re-education (Alexopoulos 2008). Both Krupskaya's letter and Politburo decree reflect an initial perception of children as a resource for building a new Soviet person.

However, in the 1930s, the official attitude towards children from the families of the 'enemies of the people' becomes more ambivalent. In 1937, during the reception in Kremlin, Stalin made a speech about the extermination of this category as well as their family members, including children: *'And we will eliminate every such enemy... we will eliminate his entire lineage (rod), his family! ... Here's to the final extermination of all enemies, both themselves and their clan (rod)* (quoted by Alexopoulos 2008, 91).

During the Great Purge, even young children were sent to labour camps or placed in special institutional settings. Frierson and Vilensky (2010) provide gruesome statistics that children constituted around 40 percent of all persons affected by repressions, famine, epidemics and forced migrations.

In some cases, the Soviet secret police NKVD tried to destroy children's attachment to their family and their parents. For example, Sylviya Korytnaya, placed in a children's home after her parents' arrest in 1937, was taught to despise and reject them (Thurston 1991).

Thurston (1991) assumes that the practice of renouncing members of the families was reserved mostly for the landmark cases and 'big party people.' And this is a very plausible assumption. Taking into account the idea of hierarchy within a family re-established during Stalin's years, male heads of the households were the most dangerous category while their dependents (women and children) had the advantage of an ambiguous identity. Women and children often represented victims of 'bourgeois exploitation'. In certain cases, the Party thought that children could be truly 'redeemed' after death of their parents (Alexopoulos 2008). Frierson and Vilensky (2010) wrote about 10 million children who lost their parents during repressions. Obviously, this information about deported children, or children of the 'enemies of the state' was not public (Kelly 2009).

After Stalin's death and Khrushchev's anti-Stalin speech images of the Father of Nations gradually disappeared from the public space. The Soviet family was also de-Stalinised: parents were no longer required to pass on 'Stalin's cult' information to the children (Clawson 1973). Images of Lenin, war heroes and cosmonauts started playing an increasingly important role in

the lives of young members of the Soviet society. Children learned about young Volodya Ulyanov and read a diary of Tanya Savicheva, a young girl who lost all members of her family during the Leningrad Blockade. The post-Stalin stories focused on sacrifice, discipline, and devotion to the common cause (Kelly 2007).

In those years, the Soviet perception of childhood revolved around the idea that children were the privileged class in the new socialist reality. Children received support in the form of access to free education, free extracurricular activities including physical education and music education, as well as various specialised schools that focused on arts, and sciences. This approach could be summed up in a phrase attributed to Lenin: ‘All the best belongs to the children’ and therefore, all the best was provided to them.

Obviously, abundance was a luxury in the Soviet society. Historically, Soviet state offered material wealth only to the most committed members of the society, but at the same time according to the Soviet rhetoric, the child could be denied nothing. Pioneer meetings promoted the happy abundance for children at summer camps with the promise of free meals and wholesome fun. The promise of abundance for children labelled as ‘future generation’ legitimised the hardship experienced by the rest (Peacock, 2015).

In the 1950s, the Soviet population defined themselves more than ever before by their children. Families had more kids than they had in the previous three decades. At the same time Khrushchev’s years in power corresponded with material well-being: the 1950s and 1960s was the time of the first refrigerator, or TV, and the beginning of the apartment boom in the Soviet Union (Stearns, 2011). In interviews, mothers and children spoke proudly of the toys and the new washers and dryers now housed in the individual flats, provided by courtesy of the state (Peacock 2015). For the first time, child’s image was generated to sell something, whether it was a product or an idea.

By the end of the 1960s, the image of the child had undergone another transformation. During the Cold War, the child remained a symbol of innocence and victimisation, at times demanding the protection of the state, but at the same time child was used as an advocate for justice, peace or some other cause. For example, Soviet propaganda condemned the US military by focusing on the fate of children in Korea and Vietnam (Peacock 2015).

The 1960s, and more particularly the 1970s and 1980s was a celebration of the Soviet family as the ideal place for raising useful and well-balanced citizens. However, the hierarchical structure remained in place: the Soviet child was supposed to demonstrated complete obedience to authority to be accepted by those closest to him (Clawson 1973). What persisted was the

conviction that happiness was children's essential condition, a dogma that remained undisputed throughout the Soviet period, and that continued to be widely accepted after 1991.

Fifty years ago, Philippe Ariès showed how meanings of childhood disclose the beliefs and fears of the society around it. Perhaps more than ever before, representations of children function as mirrors for the populations that generated them. Soviet childhood was the prototype of the Soviet Utopia. The image of the child reflected the transformative capacity of the country (Peacock 2015).

In the Soviet Union, the child was 'the object of state upbringing' (Stearns 2010). Even the state assumed responsibility for the childhood right after the Revolution of 1917, the perception of childhood transferred over time. Originally driven by the revolutionary ideas of raising a new human being, a builder of the New Society, the image of the child as an equal partner and a small adult in the 1920s transferred into an image of fragile and vulnerable being in the 1930s. Due to the collision between the personality cult of Josef Stalin and a pure revolutionary child who is better than an adult, Soviet propaganda changed the way children were perceived by grownups. The image of a fragile child required a reinstatement of the family. Svetlana Boym described the cultural transformation of Soviet society in the 1930s: '*...in the 1930s the family metaphor is back, with Stalin in the roles of lover, father, husband, and grandfather of the people*' (quoted by Alexopoulos 2008, 97).

During Stalin's years the Soviet state created a rigid hierarchy within a family with children as docile and obedient beings at the bottom of the pyramid, while Stalin evolved into a fatherly figure, taking care of all children in the Soviet country. Jean Bodin had argued in the 16th century that '*children who stand in little awe of their parents, and have even less fear of the wrath of God, readily set at defiance the authority of magistrates*' (quoted by Thurston 1991, 561). Soviet history demonstrates the validity of this concept for the 1930s.

During this period, the state invented an idea of 'Soviet happy childhood.' The concept of '*schast'e*' (happiness) and '*schatlivoye detstvo*' (happy childhood) will be further discussed in the empirical chapters of this dissertation. However, it is worth noting now that the central idea of an emphasis on childhood 'happiness' (as opposed to health, security, adequate education) was more about the Soviet state's presentation of itself than its actual commitment to improving children's lives (Kelly 2009).

The emphasis on happiness as the essential state of Soviet children did not vanish with Stalin. This representation of the child existed for almost forty years and according to Kelly (2007), this myth became a fixture in official propaganda even into the post-1991 world, at least

in the official language and state programmes. Whenever leaders of different post-Soviet countries talk about young generation, they revitalize the theme and mention that the state wants young people to be educated and happy.

Chapter 4: Childhood in ‘transition’: children and child policies in the 1990s-2000s in Kazakhstan

From the mid-1980s Kazakhstan experienced several dramatic changes as a result of the *perestroika* reforms, followed by the Soviet Union's collapse in 1991, the country's independence, and its transition from a centrally planned to a market economy (Agadjanian, Dommaraju, & Glick, 2008), but also economic downturn, political instability, and increased insecurities for the majority of the country's population (Pomfret 1999; Olcott 2002).

This chapter will explore the collapse of the Soviet welfare model in Kazakhstan and its consequences for children. In the second part of the chapter, I will discuss the situation of children in modern Kazakhstan, including various language and ethnic groups. In one of the sections, I will look at the religious revival and expansion of Islam among Kazakh population. Finally, I will discuss the introduction of child agenda in the state policy that happened after the ratification of the Convention on the Rights of the Child.

Most of the data for this chapter is based on the national statistics (Shokamanov 2009; Committee on Statistics 2015). However, significant gaps in data availability and disaggregation (by sex, age, level of income, rural and urban location or by region) remain. According to UNICEF Kazakhstan (McAsey, 2016), the Ministry of Economics can produce about half of 87 indicators reflecting on Sustainability development goals for children. This gap is being more or less filled by household surveys, including multiple indicator cluster survey (MICS), conducted by UNICEF every five years. There are also reports providing an overall analysis of economic changes in Central Asia and Kazakhstan with a discussion of changes in education, healthcare and other sectors (Andjelkovic *et al.*, 2011; International Crisis Group, 2011).

Starting from 1994, UNICEF publishes regular reviews on the situation of children in Central Asia and Kazakhstan (Falkingham, 2000; Menchini, Marnie and Tiberti, 2009; UNICEF Innocenti Research Centre, 2009; Gassmann, 2011). Babu and Reidhead (2000), Menchini and Redmond (2009) provided analysis of a situation with child poverty in Central Asian countries. Several authors (Asanova, 2006; Kalyuzhnova and Kambhampati, 2007; Abdiraiymova, Duisenova and Shayakhmetov, 2013; Habibov, 2014; Diagnostic Report, 2015) studied reforms in the education sector and their impact on children. Healthcare reforms were examined in the framework of the research of Danilovich (2010), Agrawal (2008) and McKee *et al.* (2002). Taking this analysis into account I will try to explain how has the situation of children been affected by large-scale economic and social changes.

Transformation of 'welfare state' in Kazakhstan after the independence

A 'welfare state' established during the Soviet times was committed to universal employment and the provision of education, healthcare, housing, pensions, and childcare. The collapse of the Soviet Union in 1991 led to the steady erosion and privatisation of social services, while the radical 'shock therapy' reforms of the early 1990s failed to establish new structures and mechanisms that would adequately replace them (Cook, 2010).

Communist welfare model was unique, and therefore, it left a unique legacy for post-communist governments since the population who lived during the Soviet times had certain expectations about the state's role in social provision (Orenstein, 2008). First of all, full employment provided for development of the economic system. Thus, the Soviet Union had a wide payroll-tax base as well as less demand for state social assistance compared to Western models. Second, the extent of social provision and the variety of mechanism for achieving social aims were broader. The welfare extended to social service, social transfers, insurance systems (universal medical care, old-age and disability pensions, and maternity and family benefits), but also provided housing as well as cultural activities and entertainment (Danilovich, 2010). Third, the state-owned enterprises played a leading role in social provision, including distribution of housing, subsidized food, health care, day care, entertainment and other social goods for their employees and their families. These benefits were stratified with better services reserved for specific groups working in defence and industrial sectors. Fourth, the whole system was driven by the ideology of equality and values of working class. However, the state had a full control of the distribution of social benefits using them as instruments of punishment and reward (Orenstein, 2008).

This broad, state-controlled, budget-financed system of welfare emerged in its rudimentary form during the 1930s Stalinist industrialization, expanded rapidly from the 1950s, reaching its peak in the 1970s. The Soviet welfare system provided healthcare and education, pensions and social insurance, family benefits, housing, and food subsidies to large populations (Cook, 2010). It was constructed to meet the needs for human capital and labour force planning, and the whole system was the outcome of a process that prioritised heavy industry and defence sectors. The Soviet welfare state was a central mechanism for state construction and societal stratification with provision differentiated for elite, industrial, and rural sectors; privileges attaching to the party, state, military, security forces, and workers in key industries; and rural populations included last and least (Cook, 2007, 2010; Inglot, 2008).

Characterised as authoritarian-paternalist communist welfare model does not fit standard Western typologies (Cook, 2010). The significant difference of the Soviet welfare state was its treatment of women, featuring ‘dual breadwinner, double burden’ systems. The Soviet Union accommodated women’s employment, including extended maternity leaves and subsidised childcare. At the same time, women’s household activities were neglected, as well as unequal domestic division of labour (Pascall and Lewis 2004; Inglot 2008).

After 1991 the Soviet welfare state experienced a radical transformation. The collapse of the Soviet welfare model involved liberalisation and privatisation of the pension and healthcare systems, and deep cuts in social assistance (Cook, 2010). Three significant changes in the welfare system took place: the elimination of most price subsidies (for basic foodstuffs, consumer goods, electricity, and other utilities) which had a negative impact on poverty level during the transition; the end of full employment which led to development of unofficial ‘grey’ economy and put additional fiscal pressure on the state; and the transformation of state-owned enterprises into profit-making entities which led to the unemployment (Orenstein, 2008).

In the early 1990s, social expenditures were cut, both in real terms and as a percent of GDP. A ‘thinning’ of the social welfare paralleled the economic decline. Public spending on social protection declined from 11.2 percent of GDP in 1992 to 6.6 percent in 1996 (Cook, 2007) (Table 1). Structural changes led to the reduction of the number of households eligible to receive child benefits (by half in 1994) (Cook, 2007). In 1996, the government attempted to introduce insurance financing in the healthcare, however, that produced a crisis so severe that the state retreated from the reform and re-established budget financing to develop a more gradual reform strategy. Kazakhstan substantially reduced its healthcare infrastructure, cutting the number of hospitals by nearly half between 1990 and 1997 and decreasing the number of doctors, which left many rural areas without medical facilities (Cook, 2007). This combination of the failed insurance reform and closure of hospitals left an estimated 20 per cent of the population without access to healthcare.

Table 1: Social expenditures on health, education, and pensions in Kazakhstan selected years 1990-2001 (percent of GDP)

	1990-92	1993	1995	1997	1999	2001
Health	4.4	2.5	2.0	3.2	2.2	1.9
Education	4.0	4.0	4.5	3.9	3.9	3.3
Pensions	8.2	4.1	4.3	7.1*	-	3.8

*An increase due to the one-time payment. Source: Cook, 2007, 50

With the beginning of the administrative reform at the end of the 1990s - beginning of 2000s, social sector ministries experienced multiple reorganisations (and gradual deprofessionalisation), with some functions transferred to nongovernmental agencies (Cummings, 2005). The welfare in Kazakhstan recovered very slow and unevenly (Akiner 1997). Today poorly regulated social insurance markets and weak state administrative capacities contribute to frequent welfare policy failures, as well as to continuing large-scale corruption in social sectors. The transformation to a liberal welfare model restricted availability of social benefits. Public welfare provision has been deeply retrenched and residualised with almost 36 percent of healthcare expenditure being provided by private organisations (Table 2). And it was mentioned earlier welfare has returned to traditional forms with a greater reliance on family provision: this trend was especially visible among the Kazakh population (Cook, 2010; Roberts, 2010; Shedenova and Beimisheva, 2013).

Table 2. Selected welfare indicators (2005)

	Social benefits, general and central government (% GDP)	Labour force participation rate (%)	Poverty rate (% below PPP US \$4.00/day)	Ratio of public vs private healthcare expenditure
Russian Federation	9.37	70.3	45.3	62.0
Kazakhstan	3.93	73.3	56.7	64.2
Belarus	13.04	67.1	15.9	75.8

Source: Cook, 2010, 677

Country and its children

With a population of approximately 17 million people, Kazakhstan is a small country. In an international comparison, this population lives in a relatively large area, which is the ninth largest in the world; the population density is as low as 6.3 persons per square kilometre. Since the collapse of the Soviet Union there was a wave from the rural to urban areas and beyond Kazakhstan borders (primarily to Russia): more than a half of the population (53 percent) now are urban dwellers, while the rest live in rural areas.⁷ The child population follows this pattern

⁷ It is necessary to underscore that territory of Kazakhstan was urbanized during the Soviet time. Before the collapse of the Soviet Union proportion of urban population was 57.1 percent, which is only five per cent increase compared to the numbers of 2015. This drastic change could be explained by out-migration of Russian and German ethnic groups after 1991 since a proportion of the Kazakhs living in the city was still relatively low (in 1989, Kazakh ethnic group was only 27.1 percent of the urban population).

(in 2015, 52.14 per cent of child population lived in urban areas) (Committee on Statistics 2015). However, certain exceptions remain. The child population in the southern parts of the country is larger in the rural areas compared to urban areas (Committee on the Rights of the Child, 2015). According to the official data, in 2012 there were larger size families in rural areas (about 26 percent of families with children, had three or more children; meanwhile, only every tenth urban family had three or more children). Still prevailing majority of urban and rural households had one or two children (Shedenova and Beimisheva, 2013).

During the 1990s, internal migration was increasingly moving people from southern and northern parts of the country towards cities in the north (Astana) and the south (Almaty). The result is that the metropolitan regions of Almaty (the most populated city in Kazakhstan and the former capital) and Astana (the current capital from 1996) have grown quickly and are homes to roughly 14.3 percent of Kazakhstan population and 11.8 percent of total child population respectively. However, South Kazakhstan region surpassed both capitals being home to 16 percent of total population and 21 percent of total child population (Комитет по статистике Министерства национальной экономики Республики Казахстан, 2015).

In Kazakhstan, every third person is younger than nineteen. The total number of population in this age group is over 5.7 million. During the Soviet times, fertility rates were traditionally lower in Kazakhstan compared to other countries of Central Asia, with a total fertility rate of 2.9 in 1980 (Agadjanian, Dommaraju and Glick, 2008). However, after the independence, according to the results of research by the Kazakhstan Institute of Strategic Studies (Ashimbayev et al. 2004) due to low standards of living, economic uncertainty, and unemployment, many families in Kazakhstan were postponing children. Shirin Akiner (1997) in her review on the transformation of gender models in Central Asian societies in the 1990s, mentioned the change in attitudes among young couples to family planning: young parents had to bear in mind costs of health care and education, that used to be free in the Soviet Union.

In the 2000s, growing economy provided financial security to the families. As a result, many couples, who were postponing children in the 1990s were having children in 2000s. This led to the improvement of total fertility rate to 2.03 (2003) and then to 2.64 (2013), which explains widening bottom of the population pyramid (Figure 1). However, it is unclear if this trend will continue in the future since there is an apparent growth of the median age of the population, which increased from 27,7 years in 1979 to 31,7 years in 2009. This can be interpreted as the first sign of population aging.

According to national demographic forecasts (Committee of Statistics 2014), Kazakhstan will experience another ‘baby boom’ in the coming years, and the proportion of children will reach about 28.2 percent in 2030, while the number of working-age population will decrease (from 63.3 percent in 2012 to 57.9 percent in 2030) (Figure 2). Rising proportions of children and of older people would require adjustments in the social policy and additional social spending (Committee of Statistics 2014).

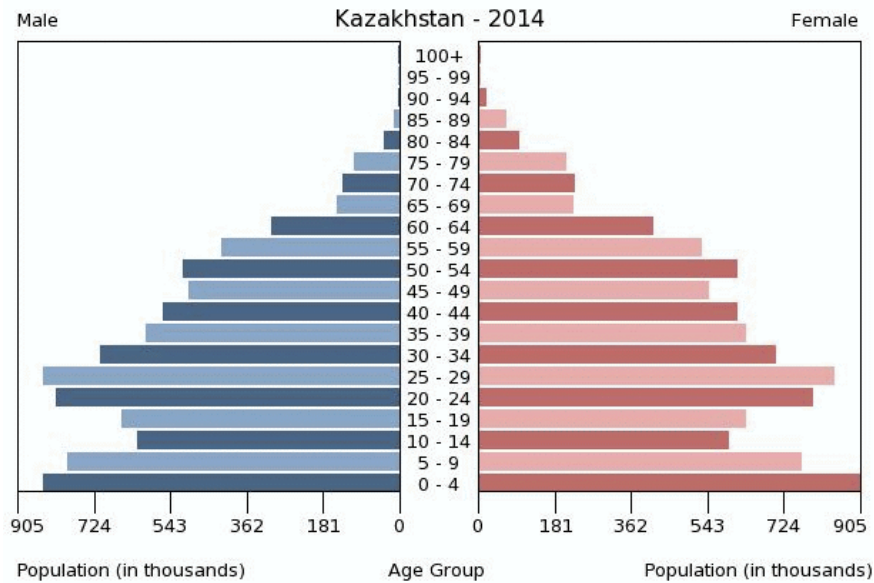
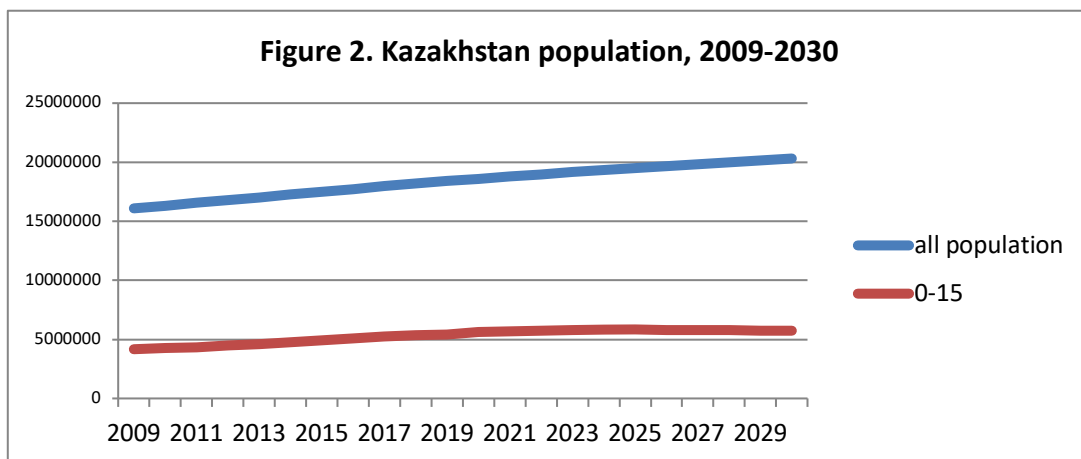


Figure 1. Population pyramid, 2014

Source: CIA Factbook 2014

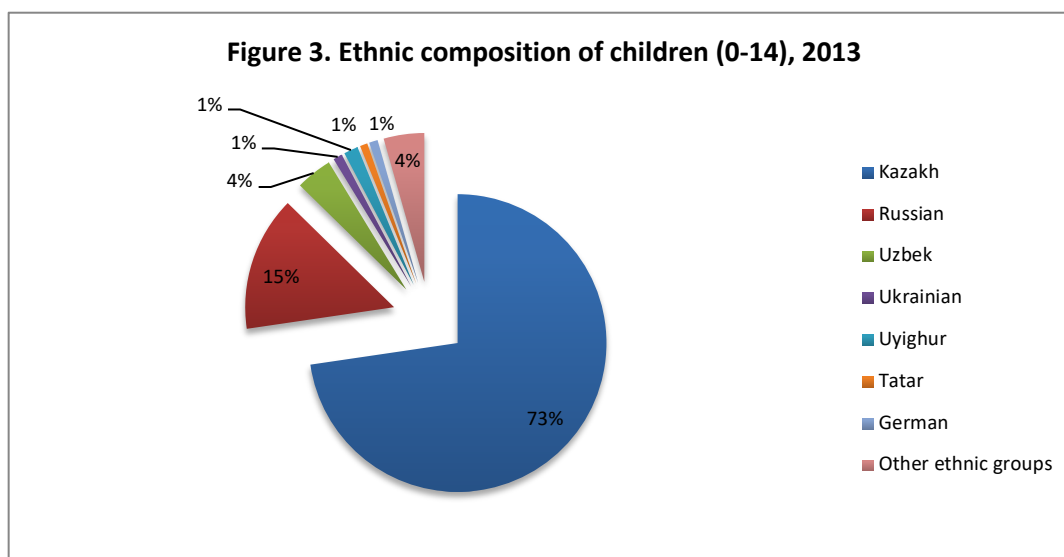


Source: Demographic trends in the Republic of Kazakhstan (2014, 56)

Being one of the territories of Imperial Russia and then becoming one of the Soviet republics, the area of modern Kazakhstan was receiving migrants for centuries. Thus, Kazakhstan population is culturally, ethnically and linguistically diverse. Starting from the

1970s, the country experienced out-migration: In 1970-1990, more than a million migrated to Russia, Ukraine, Belorussia and the Baltic republics. After the independence, the government made an open call for diasporic Kazakhs and starting from 1989, roughly 500,000 people living outside the territory of Kazakhstan in Karakalpakstan, Uzbekistan, Turkmenistan, China, and Mongolia migrated to Kazakhstan (Diener 2005).

Kazakhstan government positions the country as a multicultural and multi-ethnic society with more than 100 ethnic groups living on its territory. Nevertheless, Kazakh ethnic group comprises the overall majority (65 percent of the general population) and the majority of the child population (73 percent of the population in the age group 0-14) (Figure 3). Based on the national statistics, rural areas of Kazakhstan tend to be less diverse compared to the cities (Committee of Statistics 2014).



Source: Ethnographic and Demographic Digest of Kazakhstan (2013, 14-16)

The Slavic population groups (Russians, Belorussians and Ukrainians) remained more prevalent in the northern part of the country, while the Uzbeks prevailed in the southern regions. Some ethnic groups (for example, Uyghurs and Dungans) tend to live within the particular area, and children from these ethnic groups grow up within their own small cultural and linguistic communities.

Kazakh is an official language in the country, but the statistics do not provide numbers regarding speakers of the Kazakh language among child population. According to the 2009 Census, approximately 74 percent of the population older than 15 years of age,⁸ had some knowledge of the Kazakh language (Agency of Statistics 2011). The results of the research by

⁸ Including representatives of Russian, Uzbek, Ukrainian, Uyghur, Tatar and other ethnic groups

the Friedrich Ebert Stiftung on young people 14 to 29 years old in Kazakhstan (Умбеталиева et al. 2016) are much more modest. According to them, every third participant of the study used Kazakh in their everyday life, 15.9 percent stated that they used both Russian and Kazakh, while 49.7% preferred Russian (taking into consideration that 63.7 percent from the total number of respondents were Kazakhs).

The Friedrich Ebert Stiftung research demonstrates that Russian is still a vernacular language in Kazakhstan with 94 percent of the population able to understand it and 85 percent able to read and write it (Lillis, 2010). The 2050 Kazakhstan Strategy states that, by 2025 the Kazakh language will be spoken by 95 percent of Kazakhstan's citizens. Moreover, it is expected that Kazakh will play a leading role in 'all spheres of life.' The government proposed to learn 'Russian and English equally well as Kazakh to all citizens of the country, including the younger generation' (Diagnostic Report 2015). However, continually changing language landscape creates a very difficult environment for every new generation of children.

The collapse of the Soviet Union allowed to revive religious traditions in independent Kazakhstan. As it was discussed in Chapter 2, in the 19th century, the territory of Kazakhstan was on a periphery of great regional centers for Islamic studies (Jessa, 2006). For very long time Kazakhs were not even considered true Muslims because of so-called 'folk' version of Islam, a combination of pagan beliefs and shamanistic rituals with superficial knowledge of Islam. During the Soviet times, religion and spirituality were allowed but discouraged by the authorities. For these reasons, post-independence changes in the religious domain were so dramatic.

In the post-Soviet period, Islam has been used by the political elites to create a sense of unity and harmony among ethnically diverse populations (Omelicheva, 2016b). As a result, Islam has received a new place in society as an element of 'national heritage' along with traditions, history, and language of the Kazakh people. With theoretical justification of the role of Islam in the Kazakhstan society provided by the government, the number of registered Islamic communities dramatically rose from 46 in 1989 to 1652 in 2000, and the number of mosques, from 63 to 1711. During the 1990s, a number of new Islamic educational institutions were founded to accommodate 400 graduates of Islamic institutes from Egypt and Pakistan after their return to Kazakhstan (Jessa, 2006). Apparently, the expansion of Islamic community in Kazakhstan run in parallel with the development of other religious communities and confessions. For example, Pawel Jessa (2006) mentions 5,000 religious communities representing 62 different confessions in Kazakhstan in 2003. Many of the missionary groups in

Kazakhstan were imported. For instance, the Muslim groups came from the Middle East, Turkey, and Pakistan, while the Christian groups arrived from Western Europe, the USA and South Korea.

It is difficult to provide an accurate estimate regarding the number of believers in Kazakhstan due to the lack of available sources of information. According to 1996 sociological research about 35-40 percent of Kazakhstan population considered themselves believers, about 15-20 percent claimed to be deeply religious (Podoprigora, 1999). Iakov Trofimov (2001, 2003) mentions that at least 70 percent of the total population can be considered Muslims, while the number of practicing Muslims is two times smaller. For this reason, Mariya Omelicheva (2011) suggests to differentiate between Kazakh Muslims observing all laws and traditions, and rather 'light' observers.

It is also difficult to estimate the number of young people among two categories of Muslims. However, Yemelianova (2014) studying this subject stresses that younger generation was much more exposed to 'foreign' more conservative versions of Islam compared to the older generation that in the past lived under the strict Soviet control.

During the Soviet Union time Kazakhstan started a slow transformation from a mainly agrarian country into industrial. However, as Martha Brill Olcott (1994) pointed out the industrial sector was mostly underdeveloped relative to the resource-extraction and agricultural sectors since the Soviet government was interested in using Kazakhstan as a supplier of raw materials. Almost 25-30 percent of population was involved in agriculture and forestry, and after the collapse of the Soviet Union, representatives of these sectors received the lowest salaries (Алиев 2015). Due to the restructuring of the economy in the 1990s and 2000s, large sections of population, especially in the rural areas, experienced high unemployment (up to 35 percent of population) and poverty (33 percent of population), that remained a severe problem, even in a relatively wealthy Almaty region (Roberts, 2010; Ролѐн and Гасман, 2012). To survive members of families often left poorly paid jobs and moved to the petty trade sector or small business sector.

In their research on disparities between population income in rural and urban areas, Shedenova & Beimisheva (2013) showed that rural and urban residents had different sources of income. In the structure of incomes in rural areas social transfers, financial help from relatives and child support benefits played a significant role (they constituted up to 20 percent of the family income), compared to the families living in the city. Their research also

demonstrates that even in the beginning of the 2010s, the income provided exclusively for the basic needs of the families, with 20 percent of rural households admitting that they experienced significant financial difficulties in covering their basic needs (Shedenova and Beimisheva, 2013).

Studies (Edwards and Alldred, 1999; Kamerman and Gabel, 2006; Gabel, 2011) show that children usually are among the most vulnerable groups in any population because of their physical and emotional dependence on adults and social status. In the countries with higher incidence of poverty and weak social protection mechanisms, children are even more vulnerable. There is a few studies on child poverty in Kazakhstan. A study conducted by UNICEF (Ролен and Гасман, 2012) showed that 45 percent of children in Kazakhstan were poor, and the highest levels of poverty were registered in the west and south regions of the country.

However, even despite absence of direct data, it can be concluded that Kazakhstan children were severely affected by economic destabilisation in the 1990s and 2000s, because majority of children in the country lived in rural areas. When parents of children were losing their jobs due to restructuring of agricultural or industrial sectors, children would usually be the first one to experience hardships. Moreover, Kazakhstan children and young people became victims of crumbling welfare state because majority of budget cuts involved education, healthcare, and social services that had a significant impact on families and children.

According to Standard Rules concerning school (Government Decree no 499, 2014b), every child is entitled to a place in a local school. The homeschooling is possible only for children with disabilities. However, some of the parents initiated a public debate on social network platforms about an expansion of forms of alternative education to provide a 'real choice' for children who do not want to follow the standard education program or prefer homeschooling.

The Standards developed by the Ministry of Education and Science prescribe what to teach children and at what point. It guides on everything including syllabi, the subjects, and the number of hours or assessment criteria, which demonstrates that the sphere of education is heavily regulated by the government. It may also be noted that while the educational equality remains a high priority in Kazakhstan, there are several areas with a significant divide:

- Urban versus rural: children attending rural schools remain at a disadvantage compared with those attending urban schools. Remote rural communities tend to be serviced by smaller schools with lower capacity and resources available, which affects all aspects including

infrastructure and teacher development. The existing situation puts children attending schools in more deprived areas, at a disadvantage (Diagnostic Report, 2015).

- Different language groups: The child and youth population in Kazakhstan is diverse, and ideally the existing education system should respond to various ethnic and cultural backgrounds of children. The school system allows children of some ethnic groups to receive education in their native languages, including Uzbek, Uyghur, and Tajik. However, schools with Russian and Kazakh language remain prevalent in the country, and the United National Test (UNT) could be taken only in these two languages. Moreover, the results of the UNT show that urban and rural students taking it in Russian perform better compared to those taking it in Kazakh. Children, educated in any language other than Kazakh or Russian, are disadvantaged, and as some reports suggest (UNICEF, 2014; Diagnostic Report, 2015), children from minority ethnic groups are increasingly unlikely to go on to university in Kazakhstan as opportunities to study in their languages diminish.

- Vulnerable groups of children: Children growing up in the state-run residential institutions are facing high risks of stigmatisation, unemployment, and poverty, but at the same time restricted access to quality education (Diagnostic Report, 2015). Even today the education system fails to integrate children with disabilities, and homeschooling is the only available option for them, leaving them trapped in severe social isolation (UNICEF, 2014)

- Moreover, Kazakhstan still did not develop a uniform database providing up-to-date and disaggregated information about the quality of education and enrolment levels around the country.

Kazakhstan has the highest rates of youth suicide among women 15-19 years old of any country in the CIS, Eastern and Central Europe (Багаева, 2012). In 2010, 14.8 per 100,000 young women committed suicide (UNICEF, 2014). This problem is not openly discussed or even ignored in the society, while causes of suicide among minors are not investigated. One other issue also often overlooked by the government agencies is a child marriage. In Kazakhstan, this practice predominantly affects girls, mainly in rural communities, and particularly among some minority ethnic groups, such as Turks, Uyghurs and Dungans, and it appears more often in Almaty region. Child marriage significantly impacts on the capacity of adolescent girls to enjoy good health, complete their education, participate in the civic, economic and political spheres, and to enjoy the benefits of development. It also exposes them to increased risks of gender-based violence, early pregnancy, and sexually transmitted infections, including HIV (Багаева, 2012; UNICEF, 2014).

Kazakhstan's state policies prioritise high living standards, development of human capital and a happy and safe childhood. Strategic government documents of emphasise the importance of social and legal policies for the protection of child rights, the prevention of family ill-being, social orphanhood, homelessness and the negligence of children. 'Child policy' is a relatively recent terminological invention within national welfare discourse and in political terminology more generally. It usually implies social issues related to children. In public discussion, this term is being used interchangeably with other terms, such as family policy, educational policy, child protection policy, or health policy. However, the emergence of 'child policy' in public discourse and state-level policy-making may be taken to signal a new kind of awareness of children's place in modern society – an awareness of children as a social group or category which, while consisting of unique individuals, also shares among them a set of specific relations with its material, social and cultural environment, and therefore has a place in welfare policy in its own right. A very similar statement could be made regarding youth. In June 2012, the Government established the Committee for Youth Affairs and Policy Management – the first-ever such body in the country. The committee, which reports to the Ministry of Education and Science, will develop a youth policy and monitor it. The creation of youth affairs departments in all regions of Kazakhstan also demonstrates the importance of this matter for the state.

As such the government pronounces its commitment to the improvement of the system of protection and support of children by developing and implementing regulatory and legal frameworks and by providing government spending on education, health, social welfare and child support. There is a number of laws governing social protection for children, including Law on the Rights of the Child (2005), Law on Special Social Services (2008); Law on State Benefits for Families with Children (2005); Law on Social Protection of Persons with Disabilities in the Republic of Kazakhstan (2005); Law on Social, Medical and Educational Support of Children with Disabilities (2002); Law on State Targeted Social Assistance (2001); Law on Special State Benefit (1999), etc.

The Law on the Rights of the Child was one of the most important documents in the 'child legislation' package. However, the 2002 Law on the Rights of the Child was still using obsolete and derogatory language regarding children with disabilities. The notion of inclusive education was introduced into the Law on Education only in 2010. In this sense, even the most important legislation regarding children required more time to mature and to help the development of a national-level child policy.

The development of national legislation ran parallel to the international discussions on children's rights. Therefore, Kazakhstan's 'child policy' was influenced by international (but mostly, UN) discourse on children. From the moment of Kazakhstan's independence, international organisations like UN Children's Fund played a prominent role in promoting the rights of children in the country. The ratification of the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child in 1994 could be considered as a defining moment that helped to bring child agency into the policy-making in Kazakhstan.

Traditionally, all the rights of the Convention can be divided into three groups: protection (the right of protection from exploitation, or abuse, or war), provision (rights providing access to food and healthcare, to education and social security), and participation (the right to be involved in the decision-making) (Hammarberg, 1990; Roose and Bouverne-de Bie, 2007). This division plays a significant role in country context. From my point of view the state and society in Kazakhstan are more focused on protection rights. The protectionist approach sees the role of adults as guardians and defenders of children. It reflects the position of adults that children should be protected from themselves for their own good because children are incompetent (Lowden, 2002). Roose and Bouverne-de Bie (2007) mention that this perception of children is typical for developing countries where children cannot be considered as equal to adults in the situations that endanger children's lives and well-being. However, from my point of view, this paternalistic approach is typical to the vision of the role of children in the patriarchal Kazakh family and during the Soviet times (especially during the Stalin years and afterward). This approach is rooted in the traditional view of the child as discussed in the previous chapter.

Existence of legislation concerning children demonstrates that Kazakhstan appreciates childhood as a valuable life stage. Nevertheless, the discussion of childhood in the society is often reduced to the fact that children are in the process of growing up to become adults, to contribute to the economic or political development of the country in the future. 'Children (or youth) are the future' is one of the favourite slogans of the Soviet times that continues to exist even today. It is often mentioned in the President's speeches and state programs concerning education, healthcare, or social care. Moreover, children and young people are not aware of their participation rights since they are often regarded by the state agencies as dependent and not yet mature enough to exercise them (Gadda, 2008).

International agencies, including UN Children's Fund, emphasise the importance of participation rights for children. As Lowden (2002) stresses, the supporters of so called

libertarian perspective assume that all people are equal, irrespective of their age. They view children as subjects entitled to civil rights and the autonomous exercise of those rights. For example, in the latest Concluding Observations regarding the situation with children in Kazakhstan, the UN Committee mentioned several problematic areas in the way the Convention has been implemented, including, the age limit for children to express their views (especially in the case of legal procedures; or in the family decisions affecting their lives). This case demonstrates differences between international organisations and Kazakhstan government in understanding the agency of children and their role in the society.

Moreover, the contradiction between protectionist and libertarian approaches explain slow development of legislation related to child agenda in Kazakhstan in general. For example, in 2006, the Ministry of Education and Science developed the State Programme ‘Children of Kazakhstan for 2007-2011.’ However, the programme was mostly focused on child protection issues, vulnerable children and children at risk while disregarding the full range of child rights (UN Committee on the Rights of the Child 2007).

Some of the programs in the area of education, healthcare, poverty reduction, family policies, migration, demography and youth policies to a certain degree are directed at the implementation of the child policy. These policy measures include ‘Action Plan to Combat and Prevent Offenses Involving Trafficking in Persons 2015-2017’; ‘State Programme for Development of Education in 2011-2020’; ‘Salamatty Kazakhstan State Healthcare Development Programme for 2011-2015’; ‘State Programme on Functioning and Development of Languages for 2001-2010’, etc. However, these documents are mostly focused on measures concerning specific groups of children while a full-blown policy pertaining the child population as a whole is still missing.

The achievements of the state child policy are certainly mediocre. On the one hand, ratification of the Convention as well as existence of legislation concerning children demonstrates the political will to put the Convention into effect. Starting from 1994, the state made several attempts to formulate comprehensive child policy when the national economy was in the middle of the severe recession. The government was not able to use the time of economic prosperity during the 2000s to develop a strategy on children. Almost twenty years later in 2015, when the UN Committee gave its critical commentary on the lack of progress in the implementation of the Convention, Kazakhstan is again in the midst of economic recession.

As a result of the collapse of the Soviet Union, between 1991 and 2015 Kazakhstan went through the political, economic and social transformation. The nation transferred from the

universal welfare system that provided benefits to diverse population groups, including children, to a more selective model with restricted categories of beneficiaries. Nevertheless, children remained their position as receivers of free healthcare until the age of sixteen, while secondary education remained free despite numerous reforms.

As a result of restructuring and reduction of the state budget, the families of children were forced to bare a lot of costs, including the cost of textbooks, school renovation, uniforms for children, school lunches, etc. Moreover, in the area of primary and secondary education, Kazakhstan moved away from equal educational opportunities for children regardless of social background, geographical location, gender or ethnicity to more stratified society. In the 1990s, due to the significant budget cuts, the government allowed the introduction of private pre-school and secondary school education.

The ratification of the Convention on the Rights of the Child in 1994 in Kazakhstan established children as full members of society with a complete set of rights only on paper. At the policy level, the state focused more on vulnerable groups of children, including children in the institutions, children with special needs, and other children at risk. This led to the creation of multiple policies directed at specific categories of children, at the expense of comprehensive child agenda. The public discussion regarding child's voice in the decision-making process has never been started.

The country legislation accepts the ideas of the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child, i.e., the concept of the child as an autonomous subject. However, the concept of childhood in Kazakhstan is centred around the idea that children and young people are in the process of growing up to become adults to contribute to the economic or political development of the country in the distant future.

Chapter 5. Research design

Research overview:

This research is taking into consideration work of James and Prout (1997) and the ideas of the movement for children's rights. In sociology of childhood, childhood is viewed as a social construction, while children are viewed as social actors, constructors, and 'beings', instead of immature 'becomings' (Qvortrup, 1994; Allison, Jenks and Prout, 1998; Qvortrup, 2008; James, 2009). The Convention on the Rights of the Child developed by the United Nations and ratified by almost every country in the world, addresses the importance of child and youth participation and their right to express their beliefs (Freeman, 1998). According to the UNICEF annual report 'The State of the World's Children' (2002, p.4): 'Participation may include a wide range of activities that differ in form and style when children are at different ages: seeking information, expressing the desire to learn even at a very young age, forming views, expressing ideas; taking part in activities and processes; being informed and consulted in decision-making; initiating ideas, processes, proposals and projects; analysing situations and making choices; respecting others and being treated with dignity. Put into practice, participation involves adults listening to children – to all their multiple and varied ways of communicating, ensuring their freedom to express themselves and taking their views.'

This research required gathering and analysis of both primary and secondary data. The secondary data included annual reports, social indicators databases, working documents of the United Nations agencies (UNICEF, UNFPA, ILO, IOM), the Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe and the World Bank, as well as local non-governmental organizations on the issues of child protection in Kazakhstan, Central Asian countries and the Commonwealth of Independent States. Sjöfn Vilhelmsdóttir (2005) refers to this as to the gathering of 'archival materials.' Studies of childhood are still an emerging field in Central Asia. Therefore, empirical investigation and systematic information about changes in children's living circumstances, social conditions and experiences covering the period of the 1990s and 2000s remains scant. Also, the information provided is typically indirect, that is system-based and not directly child-based. This scant information presents a remarkable contrast to the amount of worry and concern expressed in public over the numerous risks and threats that the events of the 1990s are assumed to have brought to children.

Quite often existing research on children focuses on the most vulnerable groups (including children with special needs, children in institutions or children at risk) neglecting the

general child and youth population, and this represents a serious omission. There is virtually no interest in studying child's and youth's perceptions of themselves and their views of the society.

This research is aimed at understanding versatile and evolving perceptions of childhood in Kazakhstan after the independence of the country. Within this context, the objectives of this study are:

- To understand how childhood and children are perceived and defined in the modern Kazakhstan society;
- To identify factors that influence and define representatives of this young generation of Kazakhstan, that formed their shared beliefs and behaviours distinguishing them from the rest;
- To analyse the role the girl plays in the modern Kazakhstan family, and to understand different factors that influence the position of the girl in the society.

The fieldwork for this study extended for ten months (between March – October 2014, with a second field trip conducted in May and June 2015).

The primary data included the results of interviews and surveys conducted with two target groups:

- Young people from 18 to 23,
- Experts in the field of child protection and child welfare, representatives of the university and non-governmental agencies at the national and regional level, and international organisations working with the issues of child marriage, violence directed at children, etc.

❖ Receiving access to young people

I conducted my research at the Kazakh National Medical University, a leading medical university in Kazakhstan, with a growing student body, including international students from Afghanistan and India (National ranking of Kazakhstan universities 2015). Currently, the medical school provides education to the students in three languages, including Kazakh, Russian and English. Being one of the oldest universities (established in 1930) and located in the former capital of Kazakhstan, it is still considered as one of the most prestigious because of education quality and access to the clinics and experienced members of the faculty.

Initially, I was interested in the diversity of the student body, with young people coming from both urban and rural areas, representatives of multiple ethnic groups, young people with diverse experiences and access to welfare. As a fieldwork location, the medical university was

perfect for my research since it accepted students who received scholarships to study for free,⁹ as well as students whose parents were paying for the education.

This university was identified before the beginning of my fieldwork. In the past, I had organised several training sessions for the members of the administration and the faculty at this university. I was well acquainted with the dean of one of the faculties. Therefore, negotiating access to students through the ‘gate-keepers’ was not a concern. Before embarking on the actual fieldwork, I visited the university during September and October 2013. The dean of the faculty welcomed me and unofficially agreed to my request when the possibility of conducting a research in their university was discussed. She showed her interest to the topic of my research. Before approaching students, I shared the questionnaire along with the form of informed consent with the dean and received permission to talk to students. After this, I had an opportunity to recruit participants for my survey.

To achieve research goals, I used a combination of qualitative and quantitative methods: surveys, in-depth interviews, and focus groups (the methods are summarized in Table 3).

❖ Survey

I decided to use cross-sectional surveys because they are considered efficient, easy to administer, and they provide accessible data. I chose written surveys over the oral ones since written surveys were self-reported by participants. Sanders (2005) mentions that one of the benefits of the oral survey is a personal conversation that removes barriers between the interviewer and the participant, and therefore, allows for observation of participant’s reactions. However, since at the later stage I was planning to conduct in-depth interviews and focus groups with those of the respondents who would volunteer, surveys were used to gather general information. The survey allowed to determine the characteristics of the interviewees (the age, ethnic group, urban vs. rural distribution, the size of the families, the level of education of parents, etc.).

The survey was administered in the regular university classroom after the class hours. The survey was administered for a group of 20-30 students at a time. Before every administration, the representative of the university introduced the researcher to the students. After this introduction, I talked about myself, explained the aim of the study, and asked students if they were willing to participate. Those, who agreed filled the form of informed consent and had a look at the questionnaire. I repeatedly mentioned to the students that they have the right

⁹ Under the government program, the Ministry of Education and Science is currently providing about 3,000 scholarships per year that entitle the best students who receive high grades at the school exams (Unified National Test) with access to free medical education.

to withdraw at any point. In order to clarify or to answer questions where necessary, I stayed in a room during the dissemination, filling the questionnaire, collection of the survey. Administration at each time point took about forty-five minutes to one hour. After the administration, students and I usually stayed for another forty minutes to talk about different scholarships and opportunities for receiving education in Kazakhstan and abroad, and this was my way of showing appreciation for their participation in my research.

Since I was interested in experiences of young people who grew up in Kazakhstan after independence, therefore I limited the participation in the survey to students who were born or lived in Kazakhstan for the most part of their lives.

I had an unsuccessful pilot conducted with the Kazakh language students. Unfortunately, student who studied in the Kazakh language left many of the questions in the survey unanswered. For this reason, I focused on young people who studied in the Russian language, but still I was able to observe the regional and ethnic diversity among participants. My second pilot study with ten participants helped to make sure that the questionnaire used clear and concise wording and that all respondents understood the questions (Sanders 2005).

Limitations of the chosen method:

Social or economic status proved to be impossible to measure since the majority of participants refused to reply to the questions regarding the level of family income. Knapp & Kirk (2003) discuss the circumstances in which respondents refuse to provide any information or give deliberately inaccurate information. These circumstances include fear of the researchers' judgment regarding disclosed information, an embarrassment to disclose attitude or behaviour that departs from social norms, and violation of privacy which usually include questions about religion, personal finance, sex, etc.

I assume that the question about economic status of the family was considered by the majority of interviewees as personal and this perception influenced the disclosure process. Except for the level of income, the respondents preferred to concede information about the marital status of their parents and parents' occupation. Several respondents whose parents were separated or divorced (as it was revealed during the interview) stated that their parents were married in the survey. The same applied to the question about the employment status of the parents. Several participants chose to mention that their parents were employed, even in cases when it was not so. The results of the survey conducted by the Friedrich Ebert Foundation (Умбеталиева, Ракишева and Тешендорф, 2016) show the importance of social prestige that remains one of the values for young people in Kazakhstan, which might explain why they

preferred to evade questions about the level of income and marital status of their parents, as well as employment status.

❖ Key informant interviews

I chose interviews for this research since they represent an excellent way to gain critical information from key respondents. As Tim Rapley (2004, 16) stated: ‘Interviews are... social encounters where speakers collaborate in producing retrospective (and prospective) accounts and versions of their past (or future) actions, experiences, feelings, and thoughts.’ They provide an opportunity for the interviewer to ask follow-up questions, while interviewees can elaborate on issues they consider important.

There were two groups of interviewees that I involved: young people and the ‘experts.’

• Young people

I interviewed twenty-two students attending different university in the cities of Almaty and Astana. The participants were a youth in the midst of the transition from childhood to adulthood. This period is one of the most exciting development in their lives because they were on the move from education into the labour market (Roberts 2010). Some of students were experiencing changes in family and housing circumstances since they had to move away from their home to the new city environment.

When contacting young people for interviews, I used two approaches. First, I approached students with whom the contacts were established during the survey. These students volunteered to be interviewed by providing their contact information on the survey form. Later on, they confirmed their willingness to participate in the interview by replying to my email or a phone call. However, due to the low number of responses I had to use the second approach. I asked the participants of the interviews to refer me to their friends. This method proved to be both efficient and effective. It allowed me to have conversations with more people within a short period. However, I understand that it introduced a bias since the method reduced the likelihood that the participants would represent a good cross-section of the population. Some of the interviews were impromptu, while most of the interviews were pre-arranged.

The majority of interview participants were students of the medical university. The rest of the participants were linked by friendship to some of the students from the first group. I conducted at least one interview with every informant to learn about them. Several students had more than one interview.

My knowledge about the students from the Kazakh National Medical University (KazNMU) was more detailed since some of them earlier participated in the survey, some of

them knew me through presentations and training sessions I organised at the university. However, I decided to include young people who were not KazNMU students in an attempt to have a more comprehensive picture of views on childhood and roles of young people in their families and the society.

The following information was collected during some of the interviews: biographies, aspirations and expectations, family background, the extent of parental control. As I mentioned earlier the young people I interviewed were self-selected. Those who gave me most of the information were usually more articulate, and at the same time, they were people I developed personal relationships with and who were prepared to trust me. It is necessary to note, the majority of interviewees were females: they were more willing to share their experiences with me than male students. Therefore, most of the data I have is skewed towards female views.

- Experts

I conducted fourteen in-depth interviews with experts to learn about their perception of younger generation and their needs. Participants of ‘experts’ interviews were representatives of non-governmental organisations and international organisations, working on the issues of child welfare, child protection, youth politics and human rights in Kazakhstan. I also interviewed a representative of the University where I conducted my research.

I had to rely on friends and former colleagues who provided me with contacts of possible interviewees. These interviewees were then asked for potential referrals after the interview. Out of 14 meetings, two were conducted over Skype due to the location of the interviewees in Astana. One interviewee preferred to reply by email. In reaching out to different specialists working in the area of child rights and child protection, I tried to get a range of views on the topic of my research (Rapley 2004). The main criteria for the selection of interviewees have been their knowledge of the problem as well as their experience of working in this field.

Compared with Europe or the US, the history of the NGO movement in Kazakhstan is very brief. Some local Kazakhstan organisations have been around since the end of the 1980s, but the proliferation of NGOs has happened since the mid-1990s. In the recent years, NGOs often faced accusation in the press that they were funded from abroad, that they were a Western import and a form of colonialism. Therefore, NGO leaders with whom I had an opportunity to talk were reluctant to tackle any controversial issues since they have to function in an unstable political environment and in many cases their funding depends on government. All my interviewees were women, and it can be explained by the perception of child rights, child

welfare and child education as ‘soft’ topics in Kazakhstan. At the same time majority of NGO staff are usually women.

All the ‘experts’ were educated Kazakhstani citizens working in the area of child protection and youth politics for more than ten years. Two interviewees contributed to the Alternative Report, an international monitoring tool that shows the implementation of the Convention on the Rights of the Child in Kazakhstan. All interviewees were very cooperative, none of them reacted in a negative way when I introduced my research project and explained its specifics.

❖ Focus groups, or group interviews

Group interviews or focus groups with young people were also conducted whenever the opportunities arose. While an interview is a method that provides an extended narrative and a chance to talk openly, a focus group gave room for discussion where several young people were sharing their experiences, agreeing or disagreeing on specific issues with their classmates. Participants of focus groups provided a ‘plausible audience’ that shared same experiences or had a different one (Macnaughten & Myers 2004). In two cases a focus group discussion with students led to the in-depth interview.

All focus groups and most of the interviews with young people were held at the university. I tried to structure the discussion around different questions that were already covered by the survey but required additional clarifications. Most of the group interviews centred around topics related to the participants’ views of childhood, adulthood, responsibility, relationship with representatives of the older generation. Every focus group involved about 7-8 students with usually 4-5 students who actively participated. The primary criteria for focus group participation was the willingness of young people to share their experiences. This method was more attractive for male students who were not interested in being interviewed individually but still wanted to talk.

During interviews and focus groups I used a phone to record the conversations. Although some researchers mention that informants may feel threatened by the presence of a tape-recorder, my experience indicated otherwise. Every focus group or interview I started with an explanation of the purpose of my research and then asked for the permission to record the conversation. Young people who participated in focus groups and interviews were making jokes that they hoped that my phone worked otherwise it would take another hour to answer all the questions again. Table 3 provides summary of the research instruments which were used for data collection

Table 3. Review of methods

Methods			
Survey (193)	Focus Groups (4)	Interviews with students (22)	Interviews with experts (14)
March-April 2013	April 2013, May 2014	June 17-25, 2014	April-May 2014

Challenges and constraints

I started the introduction to this work with a quote from ‘Before and after’ by Vladimir Sharov. The author ponders how his perception of Bolsheviks was shaped by the proximity of the chocolate factory Bolshevichka: ‘Whenever I had to write about the Bolsheviks, I would present them as soft and tender... (My) characters were written with such genuine love and affection that our old newspaper wolves said they envied my sincerity.’ Unlike Sharov’s character, I had to overcome own biases during this research. I was born and raised in the former capital of Kazakhstan. My career in child protection started from the moment of my involvement with UNICEF office in Astana. My knowledge of the political and social environment of Kazakhstan and my past experience in the area of child rights and child protection helped me to tackle this research topic. But at the same time my previous experiences were limiting my searches.

During my field work and data analysis, I tried to stay open to the information that was provided by the participants withholding my judgement and interpretation to allow the interviewees to provide their explanation. Many of the students who participated in the interviews and focus groups came from rural areas, while I was raised in the city. Nevertheless, I demonstrated my respect to participant’s beliefs in order to minimise my culture bias. I started every interview with general questions to learn more about participant’s background before asking specific ones.

Data analysis

The analysis of data started at the same time as the data collection, in March 2013 and lasted through the whole course of my study. Researchers often mention that there is no one best way for analysing the data (Beebe, 2001). However, they use various strategies for analysis, which have one thing in common – an on-going reflection of gathered data to identify patterns, themes or categories.

All interviews, focus groups, and questionnaires were conducted in the Russian language. During the conversations, some of the interviewees used phrases in Kazakh, and in the majority of cases, participants immediately provided a translation or their understanding of the words. In those instances where I did not understand the phrase during transcribing, I used a dictionary or asked a person with a good knowledge of Kazakh to help me with translation.

During the next step, I translated transcribed interviews to English. A problem with translating interviews is getting conceptual equivalence or comparability of meanings (Temple, 1997). Since I spoke the same language as the respondents, I did not have to use an interpreter. Nonetheless, at times, I found it difficult to find the equivalent of a Russian word in English, in which case, I transcribed the sentence in the original language, and I revisited the text later. My experience of working as a translator in the past often helped me in the process of translation. After translation, the process of analysis started: I read through data to attempt to determine sentences or words in interviews and focus groups which related to my research questions. Each data source was examined against a particular research question to identify an emerging pattern.

The approach to the analysis of qualitative data was based on Miles and Huberman's (1994) model. This model of analysis involves three steps: (1) coding the data and adding marginal remarks, (2) displaying it, and (3) drawing conclusions. The Figure 4 below illustrates the relationships of these aspects of analysis and the relationships of the analysis to data collection.

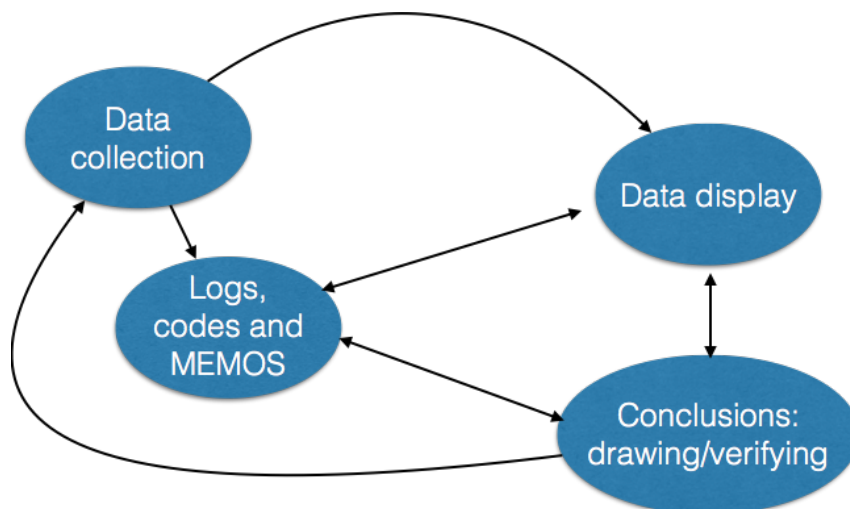


Figure 4. Components of Data Analysis. Source: (Beebe 2001, 65)

Research ethics, validity, and reliability

The quality of research is judged on its validity, reliability and observance of ethical principles, which in turn are closely interrelated with each other.

Ethics

❖ Cross-cultural setting of the research

The research was centred around young people in a cross-cultural setting. As mentioned earlier by choosing a national university I hoped to involve young people from different parts of Kazakhstan, both from rural and urban settings. My upbringing was different from the majority of the participants, and I hoped to avoid using alienating or offensive instruments to misinterpreting the results in a way that harms the participants or other members of their group.

❖ The issue of power

I took into account that I was going to interact with people who are extremely vulnerable due to their age and their societal status. Young people are often discriminated in Central Asian societies based on the assumption they are incompetent, unreliable and developmentally incomplete. During the interviews with participants, I encouraged young people to talk about themselves, and I demonstrated my respect to their point of view and their interpretation of reality. I used open questions and allowed young participants to tell their stories. I made arrangements of meeting my participants at the university to make it comfortable for them. During this research, I demonstrated respect to the views of young people, listening to their reasons and explanations in accordance with the ideas of the Convention on the Rights of the Child.

❖ Consent

The process of obtaining informed consent stands out as particularly crucial in studies involving children and young people since the participants of the research are extremely vulnerable due to their age and their position in society. The promise of confidentiality helped most of the participants to speak about their experience. But as some research demonstrates (Fontes 1998), the assurance of confidentiality might seem to contribute to the participants' perception that their labour and knowledge were being exploited by people in power, i.e., the researcher, in my case. To avoid this misperception, I spent time before the interview explaining the content of my research and reading out the consent forms, talking about the rights of the interviewee. Aronson Fontes (1998) stresses that it is helpful to read consent forms to participants instead of handing them the actual forms. The author points that certain participants may be uncomfortable about signing the forms, and in these cases alternatives can be used

including 'verbal consent with an information sheet.' However, I did not come across these cases when participants refused to sign the forms or questioned the integrity of the researcher.

❖ Financial compensation

I did not use any financial compensation for my key informants or participants of the survey. As a way of recognising young people's time and efforts for taking part in surveys, focus groups and interviews, after administration of the survey on several occasions I stayed with students who wanted to ask questions about my personal experience of studying abroad and applying for different scholarships. I shared my experience and provided information they were interested to hear. I stayed in touch over email with several students who later asked for my help in applying for scholarships, and I reviewed some of the applications.

Data validity

Selection bias in choosing participants is a significant confound to validity. Under the circumstances of my research, the true experiment was not possible, meaning that I was not able to assign participants at random from a single population to treatment.

Chapter 6. Childhood versus adulthood: being young in Kazakhstan

For a lot of young people in the global North, the transition to adulthood is a period of significant change and importance (Arnett 2000). Many individuals use this period as an opportunity to establish the foundation for their future lives in areas such as work, education and romantic relationships. However, in contrast to previous generations, this transition is no longer a short period in the life course. The results of surveys, focus groups and conversations with participants are discussed in this chapter. This chapter represents an attempt to understand how participants consider transition from ‘childhood’ to ‘adulthood.’

According to the university data, in the 2013-2014 academic year, there were 4,609 students at the faculty where I conducted interviews, including 884 students of the first year of education and 805 students of the second year. Female students constituted the majority of the student body (72 percent of the total number of students, and 68 percent of the 1st year students), which might be explained by the specifics of the particular field of study. The age of the 1st year students varied from 18 to 39. However, every second student was 18 years old (55.2 percent or 488 students). Students can enter the university right after graduating from high school at the age of 18 or after attending medical college, which is part of the vocational education and training (VET) system. Usually, college students are slightly older compared to the majority of their peers, because they transfer to a medical college after reaching the 9th grade at the age of 15-16.

Students who participated in the survey were 1st year (183) and 2nd year (10) university students. Tables 4 and 5 show distribution of participants by age (at the moment of data collection) and gender.

Table 4. Distribution of participants by age and gender

Age, in years	Numbers			Row %		
	Total	Male	Female	Total	Male	Female
Total persons	193	46	147	100	24%	76%
18	132	34	98	100	26%	74%
19	37	7	30	100	19%	81%
20	14	2	12	100	14%	86%
21	5	2	3	100	40%	60%
22	2	0	2	100	0%	100%
23	3	1	2	100	33%	67%

Table 5. Distribution of participants by age and gender

Age, in years	Numbers			Column %		
	Total	Male	Female	Total	Male	Female
Total persons	193	46	147	100	100%	100%
18	132	34	98	100	74%	67%
19	37	7	30	100	15%	20%
20	14	2	12	100	4%	8%
21	5	2	3	100	4%	2%
22	2	0	2	100	0%	1%
23	3	1	2	100	2%	1%

Majority of respondents were women, which might be explained by the specifics of the medical specialty (Tables 4 and 5). The share of women across all age groups was about sixty percent or more. The age of survey participants varied from 18 to 23. 18-years old participants represented the largest group across all ages for both sexes (132 respondents or 68 percent of all participants).

Table 6. Distribution of survey participants by gender and ethnic group

Ethnic group	Numbers			Column %		
	Total	Male	Female	Total	Male	Female
Total persons	193	46	147	100%	100%	100%
Kazakh	131	33	98	67.9%	71.7%	66.7%
Russian	18	2	16	9.3%	4.3%	10.9%
Uzbek	14	6	8	7.3%	13.0%	5.4%
Korean	5	0	5	2.6%	0.0%	3.4%
Uyghur	16	2	14	8.3%	4.3%	9.5%
Kurdish	1	1		0.5%	2.2%	0.0%
Azeri	1		1	0.5%	0.0%	0.7%
Turkish	3	1	2	1.6%	2.2%	1.4%
Tatar	2	1	1	1.0%	2.2%	0.7%
Dungan	1		1	0.5%	0.0%	0.7%
Ukrainian	1		1	0.5%	0.0%	0.7%

Majority of participants (131 respondents or about 68 percent) were Kazakhs with the second most dominant group being Russian (18 respondents, or 9 percent) (Table 6). In total, representatives of eleven different ethnic groups participated in the survey. According to the university data about the student body, out of the total number of students, the Kazakhs

constitute the majority (87.6 percent), followed by the Uzbeks (3.8 percent), the Uyghurs (3 percent) and the Russians (2.7 percent). The ethnic composition of the 1st year students was similar to the composition of the student body with the slightly higher proportion of Uzbek and Uyghur students (5.9 and 4.1 percent respectively).

Participants of the survey were asked what language they speak at home when communicating with their relatives, and 58 percent (=111) mentioned they used Kazakh (Figure 5). The Russian language was the second most popular language (31 percent of participants or 60 students), followed by Uzbek (7 percent or 13 students). About 41 percent of all participants (78 people) mentioned they were bilingual at home: the language combinations included Kazakh and Russian (66 participants); Uzbek and Russian (=2 participants), Russian and Ukrainian (1 participant); Russian and some other language (9 participants). Two participants mentioned they used three languages for communication with their relatives, including Kazakh, Russian and Uzbek.

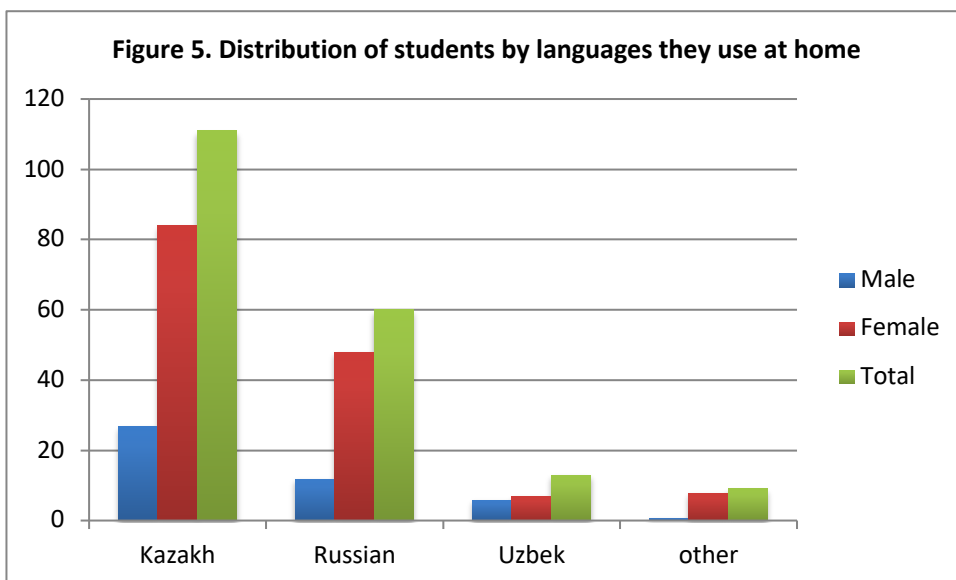


Figure 5. Distribution of students by languages they use at home

Based on the data gathered from survey participants, the majority (69 percent) of students came from urban areas (Figure 6), which is slightly smaller compared to 73.5% (or 3392 students) of a total number of university students of the faculty who described themselves as living in the urban area.

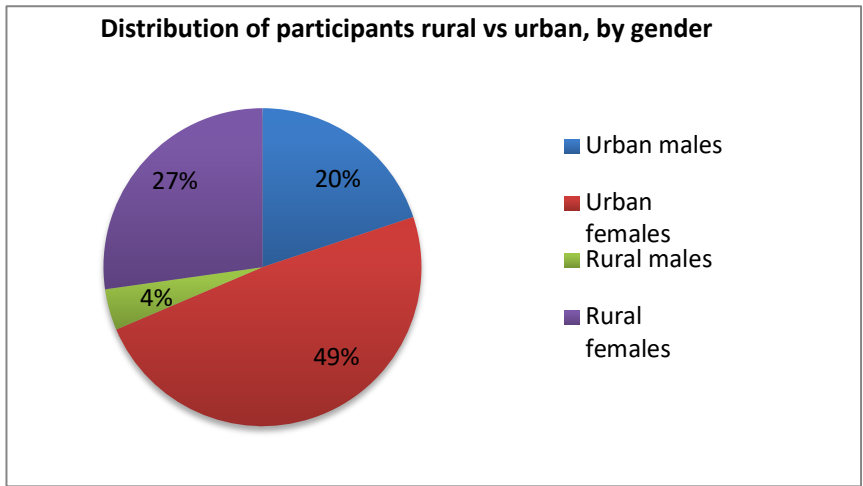


Figure 6. Distribution of participants by rural and urban locality

Participants of the survey represented thirteen regions and the city of Almaty (Figure 7). Almost every second participant was either from Almaty or Almaty oblast (42 percent). Every fourth student outside of Almaty arrived from South Kazakhstan region (25%), about 12 percent came from Zhambyl region. This skewed geographical representation could be explained by the location of the university in the city of Almaty, the former capital and the biggest city in the country. The Kazakh National Medical University could be considered as a preferred destination for students living in the southern parts of Kazakhstan.

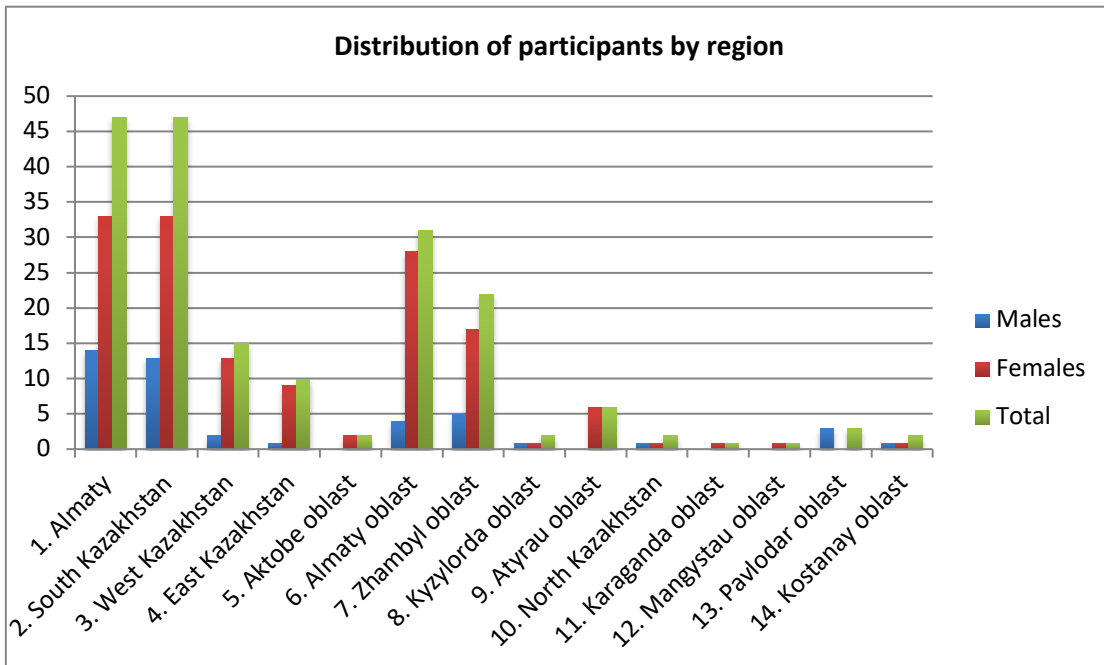


Figure 7. Regional affiliation of participants

The university does not gather information on the regions where students come from, and therefore, it is impossible to compare the information from the survey with general data.

Moreover, the university does not have access to the information about the social and economic status of students' families or any other data regarding the number of siblings, parents' professions, etc. Therefore, it would be difficult to make any conclusions about the representativeness of the sample.

About 92 percent (=181) survey participants mentioned they had parents, but only 83% (=164) lived with their parents before starting their education in the university. Some of the students indicated their parents were separated or divorced, and they lived either with one of the parents (=19 students) or with their guardians (=14). Only twenty-nine students were the only children in their families, the majority (=169) had siblings (Figure 8).

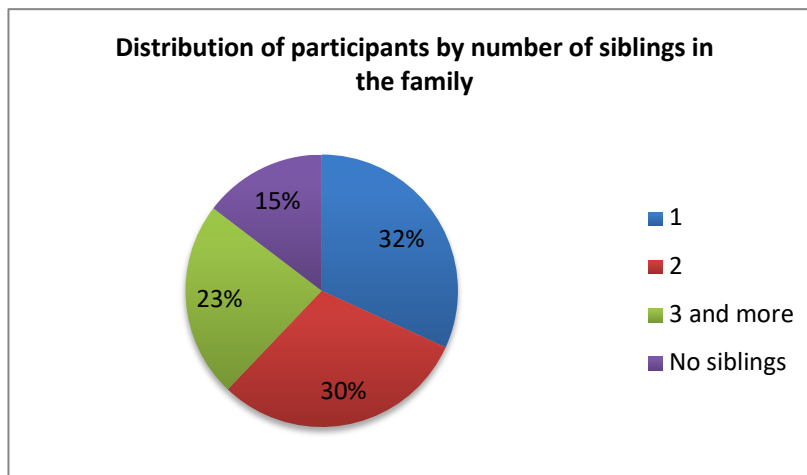


Figure 8. Number of siblings in the family

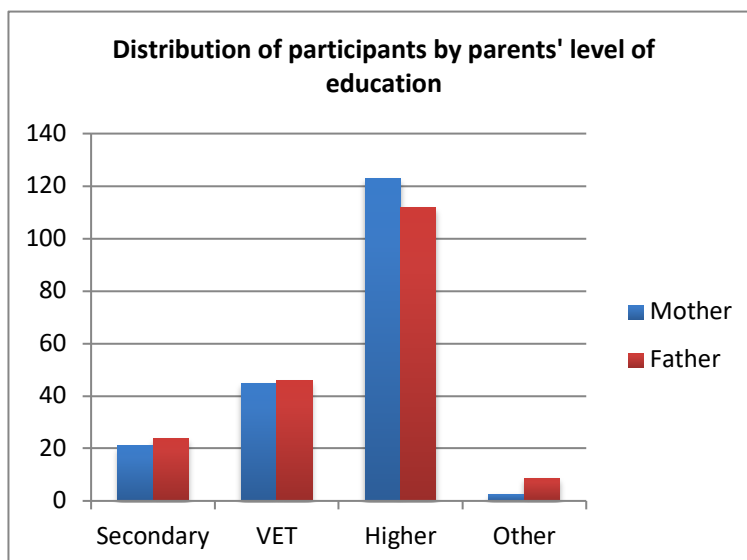


Figure 9. Parents' level of education of participants

Almost every second survey participant had a parent who received higher education (Figure 9). However, the share of students with educated mothers (64 percent) was greater

compared to a number of students with educated fathers (59 percent). Interestingly enough, participants whose mothers received higher education had siblings (107 participants), while only 19 students with educated mothers came from families where they were the only child. Two-thirds of students' parents were employed at the moment of data collection (70.92 percent, or 139 students mentioned that both of their parents were employed). However, almost the same number of participants (119 students) stated that in the past either one of the parents or both parents were unemployed. In every second case (53 participants) either one of their parents or both parents were unemployed for more than one year. It can be assumed that the majority of students experienced financial hardships when their parents were unemployed.

Almost all students (99 percent, or 196) evaluated their current financial situation in the family as good (the responses varied from very good to average). About 40 percent of students mentioned their family could afford to spend money on expensive things and everyday purchases. However, when asked to define their family's wealth in comparison to their peers, 152 of 197 students placed themselves in the category of the 'worse compared to the others.' When asked about the recent devaluation (February 2014), about 51 percent of students (=100) stated it affected their family financial welfare. But at the same time 67 percent (=122) said their economic situation did not change or even got better compared to three years ago.

To summarise, it could be stated that participants of the survey were young students who grew up in Kazakhstan after independence and who were born or lived in Kazakhstan for the most part of their lives. The mean age of participants was 18.6 years, and 87 percent of them were 18 or 19 years old. Female Kazakh students constituted the majority of participants. Surprisingly enough only about 40 percent of participants were from the rural area. Almost every second student was employed or had previous work experience at the moment of the survey. Most of the students had educated parents who obtained either college or higher education diploma.

Through the survey, I wanted to explore how the participants describe themselves, and how they believe the outsiders, including their parents, university faculty, friends of participants and society at large, perceive them. About 39 percent of respondents identified themselves as children, while 45 percent believed they were adults (Table 7). Even when the age of the respondents was taken into consideration, the sample was more or less equally divided between those who perceived themselves as children and those who were describing themselves as adults. Almost every second participant believed that parents viewed her or him as a child, while members of university faculty (89.5 percent), their friends (59.5 percent), and society at

large (77 percent) considered them as adults. In all cases, the age difference between the participants did not play a role. However, this also could be explained by a small number of older participants in a sample.

Table 7. Participants' perception of themselves

	Participants (%)	Parents, according to participants (%)	University teachers, according to participants (%)	Friends, according to participants (%)	Society, according to participants (%)
Child	39	51.5	3.5	31.5	12.5
Adult	45	36.5	89.5	59.5	77

When answering group of questions about perception, the survey gave participants an option to choose 'other' category. The share of the participants who chose this option varied from 6 to 14 percent depending on the question (How do you perceive yourself? How do you believe your parents perceive you?). Several participants described themselves as 'teenagers' (*podrostok*). Another popular answer was 'someone in between a grown-up and a child.' One of the participants (Participant 193) mentioned that 'for parents at any age we will always remain little children. While we are growing up, the parents come to an understanding that thanks to them we learned how to think, that we can solve our issues, problems that we come across, and they (the parents – AK) can start thinking about us as grown-ups.'

To learn about participants' understanding of 'adult' and 'child' categories, the survey asked to describe an adult. In the descriptions of the participants, the adjective 'responsible' was used most often (mentioned by 122 participants). While describing qualities of adults the participants most frequently used 'independent,' 'serious,' 'purposeful,' 'clever,' 'wise' and 'autonomous.' Only several participants used rather negative adjectives, including 'strict,' 'busy,' 'nervous,' 'tiresome' and 'selfish.'

The adjectives that have been used in describing the characteristics of an adult, were related to

- Status (for example: 'educated,' 'competent' and 'civilised'), therefore, implying that an adult is expected to have a certain level of education and is acquainted with a societal code of conduct (for example: 'polite' 'decent'). One participant mentioned the existence of a family as a sign of adulthood ('an adult is a person providing for his family'), while 'working' and 'a person who has a permanent job' points out to the employment status.

- Age. For example, “major” (*sovershennoletnyi*) or “mature” (*zrelyi*) in the description of adult implies that the person is older than 18, while ‘mature’ can also be related to the “responsible decision making. ‘Big’ could indicate both the age and height, and therefore, a dominance and superiority of an adult.

- Three participants introduced adjectives indicating almost God-like qualities of a grown-up (all-knowing, understanding [*vseponimayushyi*], well-rounded) (Table 8).

Table 8. Characteristics of an adult person

Positive characteristics	Negative characteristics
Responsible (122), independent (86), serious (55), purposeful (42), clever (34), wise (28), autonomous (20), confident (16), educated (15), major (14), civilised (13), reasonable (12), determined (12), understanding (10), adequate (9), experienced (9), self-sufficient (9), sensible (9), thoughtful (9), honest (9), free (8), strong (8), attentive (8), conscious (7), restrained (7), hardworking (7), punctual (6), intelligent (5), reliable (5), decent (5), mature (5), realistic (5), major (5), fulfilled his potential (<i>sostoyavshiyisya</i>) (5), calm (5), steady (5), literate (4), kind (4), thinking (4), sane (4), knowing (4), communicative (4), brave (4), just (4), precise (4), accurate (4), ambitious (4), scrupulous (3), communicative (3), responsive (3), working (3), developing (3), careful (3), patient (3), active (2), big (2), polite (2), decent (2), manly (2), thinking (2), persistent (2), loving (2), obliging (2), open (2), proper (2), pragmatic (2), hard-working (2),	Strict (4), busy (3), nervous (2), tiresome (2), assertive (<i>samouverennyi</i>) (2), selfish (2), individualist, anxious (<i>ozabochennyi</i>), experiencing problems, sullen (<i>ugryumyi</i>), down-to-earth

developed (2), self-critical (2), domestic (2), modest (2), self-collected (2), happy (2), tolerant (2), steady (2), adapted, reasonable, struggling, cheerful, demanded, omniscient (<i>vseznayushyii</i>), understanding (<i>vseponimayushyii</i>), well-rounded (<i>vsestoronnyii</i>), aged, enduring, farseeing, no-nonsense, well-wishing, judgemetic, curious, silent, well-read, uncomplaining, unselfish, secured, objective, exemplary, principled, erudite, providing for the family	
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In the next section of the survey, the participants were asked to provide adjectives describing a child. The most frequent adjectives included ‘carefree’ (57 participants), ‘cheerful’ (54), ‘small’ (37), ‘naïve’ (34), ‘irresponsible’ (24), ‘kind’ (21), ‘dependent’ (20), ‘capricious’ (20), ‘not serious’ (14), ‘happy’ (13), and ‘light-headed’ (13). Compared to the characteristics of an adult person many more description of a child had negative connotations.

Participants used adjectives like ‘small’ (*malen’kyi*) which might imply the height of the child as well as a dependent state compared to the adult. Adjectives like ‘defenceless,’ ‘dependent,’ ‘helpless,’ ‘incapable,’ ‘driven’ reflected child’s likely position relatively to an adult. From my point of view, the categories of an adult and a child are opposite to each other. Descriptions of an adult referred to someone active, wise and capable, while a child was portrayed as soft, light, sweet and dependent. However, some adjectives overlapped, including ‘responsible,’ ‘smart,’ ‘confident,’ ‘well-mannered,’ ‘free,’ ‘caring,’ ‘thinking,’ ‘knowing,’ ‘active,’ ‘open,’ and ‘happy.’

In general, many of the description of a child in the survey corresponded to the romantic concept of childhood, and the idealised vision of a child as an angel. Based on the adjectives used by participants it could be assumed that at ‘the age of the child,’ a person possessed qualities that disappeared in the process of growing up.

At the same time, I found interesting that participants were describing a very soft image that co-existed with an idea of the vandal, mugger, someone who might represent human nature in its untamed state. It seems that protectiveness towards dependent, soft, and almost angelic

version of the child is tempered by the perceived need for control of his or hers aggressive alter ego. It seemed puzzling that deviant image of a child was deficient of characteristics that were used in the description of the adult. The Russian language allows to use negative particles (“*ne*” and “*ni*”) before adjectives ‘to deny or disprove the existence of something, to cancel or to nullify the effect of something’ (Protassova, 353). For example, adjectives ‘indecisive,’ ‘inattentive,’ ‘uncertain,’ and ‘inadequate’ used by participants in relation to children’s qualities showed that children were opposite to the ‘decisive,’ ‘attentive,’ ‘certain’ and ‘adequate’ image of adults.

Table 9: Characteristics of a child

Positive characteristics	Negative characteristics
Carefree (57), cheerful (54), small (37), naive (34), kind (21), happy (13), nice (12), funny (10), defenceless (10), open (9), vulnerable (9), trusting (8), curious (8), playful (8), sincere (8), joyful (7), free (7), loving (7), emotional (7), dreamy (6), sweet (6), active (5), buoyant (5), favourite (5), energetic (5), innocent (4), spontaneous (4), mischievous (4), light (4), fostered (3), friendly (3), communicative (3), positive (3), smiling (3), smart (3), good (3), fragile (3), honest (3), pure (3), harmless (2), good-natured (2), thinking (2), interested (2), beautiful (2), versatile (2), wise (2), responsible (2), obedient (2), simple (2), developing (2), serious (2), sunny (2), shy (2), capable (2), confident (2), smiling (2), nimble (2), perceptive, sensitive, long-awaited, caring, mysterious, knowing, creative, curious, persistent, unique, optimistic, conscious, promising,	Irresponsible (24), dependent (20), capricious (20), contingent (19), not serious (14), frivolous (13), stupid (12), spoiled (12), noisy (8), indecisive (8), flighty (6), selfish (6), restless (6), not knowing (5), nosy (5), stubborn (5), talkative (4), harmful (4), naughty (4), helpless (3), inattentive (3), unable (3), careless (2), testy (2), lazy (2), hard-bitten (2), inadequate (2), unformed (2) uncontrolled (2), unrestrained (2), inexperienced (2), clumsy (2), needy (2), crying (2), driven, hyperactive, proud, malicious, yellow, quarrelsome, infantile, bothersome, short-sighted, immature, uncertain, uncomprehending, unpredictable, not adapted, non-punctual, unable to work, not thinking, tactless, unstable, touchy, deceived, passive, bully

moving, liberated, calm, bright, well-wishing	
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These variations in the description confirm that participants perceive children as different from adults. Moreover, participants consider childhood as a distinct period of life not related to adulthood. Majority of participants (92.59 percent or 175 respondents) believed childhood and adulthood were two different phases in a life of a person. When asked to explain the difference between these categories, some of the participants stated that any person was experiencing a transition from someone

- being cared for to providing care;
- living in the world without problems to becoming the one who is resolving them;
- having no choices in life to obtaining an opportunity to choose;
- accumulating information to applying it;
- being passive to becoming pro-active.

According to the participants, adulthood brings all freedoms impossible to experience when one is a child. In their description of this transition, the participants used expressions that had positive connotations. For example, ‘becoming an adult allows you to choose your path in life, to be creative,’ ‘as adults (*zrelyie lyudi* – mature people, AK) we can do whatever we want,’ and ‘adulthood (*maturity*) starts at the point when one can choose.’ One of the participants stated: ‘While we are children, we play the role of a child with all the privileges and taboos, while after growing up we become adults who have privileges and duties. To be limited and to limit oneself are two different notions’ (participant 195).

According to another group of participants, childhood is a carefree time. Participants used expressions like ‘childhood mistakes are forgiven,’ ‘we do not care about things during childhood, there are no problems, but they appear with maturity,’ ‘childhood is when one comes home with torn sneakers and does not even worry, because parents would buy a new pair.’ On the contrary, growing up implies additional responsibility and new problems. From the answers of some participants, it can be implied that adult world does not promise anything except for disillusionment and sadness. At the same time, childhood was idealised as a lost paradise with its freedom, happiness, and creativity, as well as innocence and inexperience. Like William Wordsworth in his ‘Ode: Intimations of Immortality from Recollections of Early Childhood,’ the survey participants described the process of growing up as a gradual oblivion of the true beauty and God. In the survey, participants portrayed childhood as a period of ‘bright colours,’ while adulthood was associated with a period when ‘one stops noticing beauty; or ‘believing in

miracles.’ As one of the participants noticed ‘the real world (of grown-ups - AK) is different from illusions and fairy tales that we experience during childhood’ (participant 96).

The participants of the survey listed several factors that from their point of view become a source of problems for adults, including:

1. Responsibility to

- meet expectations of the parents: ‘parents rest their hopes and trust on you,’
- become an example for younger siblings and other relatives: ‘you become an example for youngsters,’

- take care of others (parents, own family, children): ‘adulthood comes when the person understands that it is necessary to support one's family,’ ‘childhood is when parents carry you in their hands, while in adulthood you take care of the parents,’ ‘you take responsibility for yourself and your parents.’

2. The absence of parental support: adults should make their decision independently. As it was mentioned by one participant ‘at the age of 18-25, one should take responsibility for his actions and words instead of throwing yourself into your parents’ arms.’

3. Studies and work: adult people are expected to earn money independently and be self-sufficient in finishing their studies and starting work.

Based on answers from some participants it is possible to imply that child's world is restricted: it involves parents who provide care and financial support and solve most of the issues. However, during the transition to adulthood, the world of the person expands. Participants believed that experiences of an adult person involve three different actors:

- Own family to provide for and be responsible for: ‘when one is a kid, everyone cares about you, but when one is an adult, you understand that you ought to take care of others’;

- Parents, who should be taken care: ‘when you understand what you want in this life, you take responsibility for yourself and your parents’; ‘childhood is a time when parents indulge you, and in adulthood, you take care of the parents’;

- Society at large: ‘while we grow up, time and society require us to make true and rational decisions, as well as to acquire certain experience.’ At least several participants mentioned that experience of becoming an adult requires knowledge of how to socialize and to survive in the big world.

Even it might seem controversial to set the age range for identifying and defining ‘the child,’ I asked my participants to define the borders for childhood. I thought, that by defining

age limits, the participants reflect not only on the socio-political definition but also relate to how their society conceptualizes childhood.

There are multiple borderlines introduced in the Kazakhstan legislation that determine when a person can be treated as an adult. For example, according to the national laws, criminal liability starts at 16 years, while in case of felonies, including murder or kidnapping, this age limit is decreased to 14 years of age. Administrative and disciplinary liability applies for persons who reached 16, while civil liability starts at 18. Young people can receive a national identification when they reach 16 years of age. At 18, all young men are called-up for military service. Both young men and women are allowed to marry starting from 18. However, in certain cases, the age limit can be decreased to 16. Children who reached 14 are allowed with the permission of their parents to sign a contract with an employer, while at 16 their parents' permission is no longer necessary (Labour Code, art. 30). Therefore, society in Kazakhstan draws a border between two stages of life for several categories of situations, and students who participated in the survey and focus groups were reiterating on this topic.

For example, a female student Madina, a participant of the focus group on April 10th, 2014, mentioned that legal definitions should be used: 'We become adults when we receive documents, including a driving license or a passport. Being 18 years old could be considered as a transition time. [It is] a difficult moment in the development of a person because a child realises that he transfers to the life of a grown-up, which requires more responsibility. It is no longer a carefree childhood when you can scream "mommy-daddy." Now we need to make decisions ourselves. This is an adult life when you are on your own, a self-sufficient and responsible [person].' A female student B from a different focus group on April 18th, 2014 developed this point further: 'They say that you receive a passport at 18 and therefore, you are an adult. From 21 you receive a right to drive a car, and this is a significant step forward. You are responsible not only for yourself but the road, and people who surround you.'

When addressing the question about the borders of childhood, the majority of participants had no issue with identifying the age. The answers of participants varied from 8 to 30 (Figure 10). Majority of participants chose 18 (23.26 percent) and 16 (20.35 percent of all participants) years of age. However, when asked to compare their childhood with the childhood of their parents, some of the participants expressed an idea that their parents became adults at an earlier age. Below are examples of dialogues between participants of two different focus groups, where students compare themselves with their grandparents and parents.

For example, student A (May 4, 2014 focus group) mentions: ‘If you take an example of our grandmothers, they were prepared for their marriage from their childhood. They were told “you will become a mother, you will keep your family together, the family will be on you.” They were getting married at about 18-19, and I think this is early. Today even 25 years is early. The age when a woman is getting married today has increased.’

Student B (May 4th, 2014 focus group): ‘At our age, our grandmothers had three children. I heard that my grandmother gave birth at 14. She was married at 13. This was a Kazakh tradition to marry at very early age. When they married, they became responsible for their hearth and home, for their family, for their husband, parents of the husband, and they were becoming adults. When you look at the old pictures of parents who are our age, but they look so mature, and I do not know how to explain this. The upbringing was different; the society was different. In the Soviet Union, they all were adults and responsible. While we at 30 behave like children and feel as 18-year olds, we will not be ready for more serious family life. All the time we think that it is too early, but time flies.’

Student B (April 18, 2014): ‘They (the generation of the parents – AK) were getting married at 13-14, and they had children. We are 18, and we are children. I am still playing with dolls with my younger sisters. They (the generation of the parents – AK) were mature. At 16-17, they were going to war, and they were responsible for their adult decisions.’

Student A (April 18, 2014): It was time (in the past – AK) when the responsibility was required, especially from elder children, when they had to earn for the living, when they had to study, and when they had to be a good example for youngsters. I think they had to act like adults very early; (They were forced to become adults - AK) by the environment.’

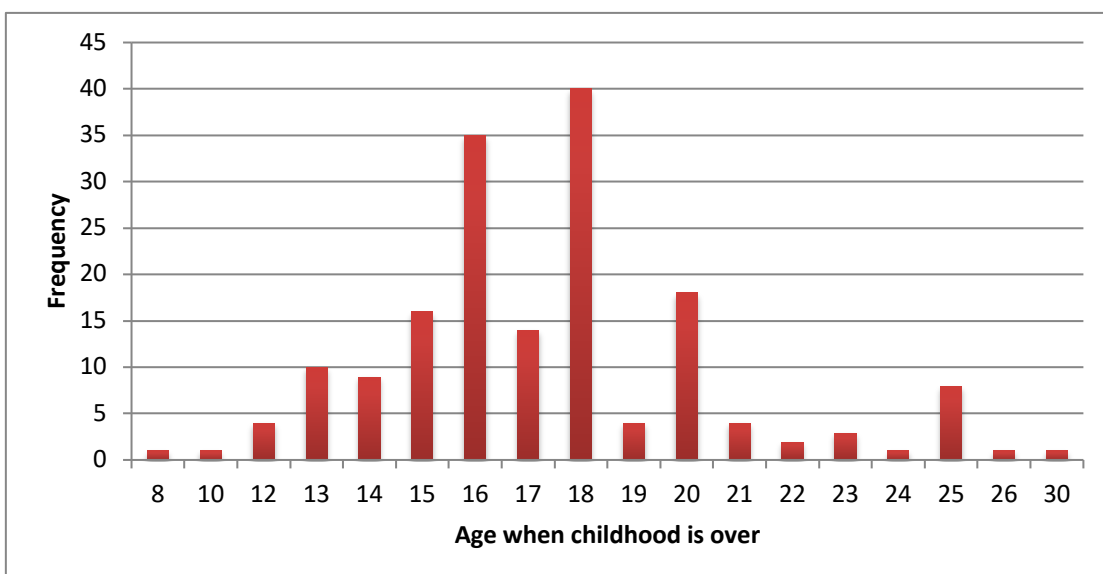


Figure 10. Age, when childhood is over based on the perceptions of participants

By referring to the ‘speeding’ adulthood of the generation of their parents, the participants raised an interesting issue of expanding and contracting transition into adulthood. One of the participants mentioned the Second World War as an example of the factor that contributed to ‘speedy’ maturity. Roche (2007) in their research on youth in Tajikistan provided a similar example: young Tajik men involved in the armed conflict in the 1990s, or labour migration, were offered ‘adulthood’ as a reward for speedy transition to maturity and responsibility.

In the discussion of ‘responsible’ behaviour of their parents and grandparents, the participants elaborated on difference between legal and emotional maturity. Answering an earlier question about the age when childhood ends in the additional space provided for comments, the participants mentioned the following:

‘It is difficult to specify a certain number of years because childhood lasts for a different period in every person. For example, I doubt that children born during the war had a childhood. The pain, the cruelty, and hardships deprived them of it (childhood – AK), turned them into adults. At the same time, I often observe childish behaviour in many adults. I am convinced that age in the passport does not make them adults. Adulthood is based on the actions (of a person – AK)’ (Survey Participant 4).

‘Age is a number. It is impossible to define the year or the day, or the moment when you transition from the category of a “child” into the category of an “adult.” This (transition – AK) is determined by people’s actions and thinking. There are 40-50-year-old people who are called adults just because of their age. Person’s behaviour defines him as an adult. In dysfunctional families, children grow faster compared to those (children – AK) who grow up “under glass.” (Survey Participant 35)

‘The person should retain at least a tiny bit of the childish attitude. The person should retain joy, initial childish perception, and this ability to feel and enjoy every day. The desire to evolve is inherent in the child: the child has curiosity, kindness, generosity, and all these qualities should be preserved by the adult person. As an adult, we face a lot of disappointments. Being a child helps an adult person to survive’ (Survey Participant 36).

‘According to existing social norms and legislation when the person turns 18 years old, he can control his life independently. However, in my opinion, childhood does not have a certain age framework, it (childhood – AK) may last until his death, and that is very good’ (Survey Participant 59).

Therefore, the legal definition does not play critical role in a maturation process. According to some participants during the transition from childhood to adulthood people also

undergo psychological and social maturation and they do not necessarily progress at the same rate. Several participants of the survey and focus groups mentioned a Russian language expression ‘a childish adult’ (*vzroslyi rebenok*), emphasizing the fact that people who are considered adults by legal definition or physical appearance do not perform as adults.

To illustrate this point a female and a male student during two different group interviews discussed an example from the Kazakh history when a young boy solved a difficult dispute:

Female student G: During the Dzhungar invasion, Khan Ablay was captured. The great *bi* (judge in Kazakh - AK), the father of Kazybek was asked to help in rescuing Khan Ablay. There was some controversy that was difficult to solve. The 15-year-old Kazybek walked into the *yurt* (a nomadic dwelling – AK), where this discussion (was taking place – AK). There were nobles, *bi*, *batyrs* (warriors), and he (Kazybek Bi) stated his opinion. All elders supported his point of view. So, it is being said: *žas adamy bala emes, qart adamy dana emes* (not every youngster is a child, and not every senior person is a wise man). Some people have lived for ninety years and ... have learned nothing. (Focus group, May 4, 2014)

Male student S: We know that Khan Ablay also known as Sabulak Ablay was raised by Tole Bi. Once there was a discussion, and there were some *bi* (judges in Kazakh – AK) there, including Tole Bi. A 13-year-old Ablay was there as well. He came up with an idea and he voiced it, but someone stopped him with the words: “You are a child, and you cannot talk in front of the grown-ups.” And Ablay said: “I am 13 and I can talk.” Therefore, in the past when a person turned thirteen he was treated as an adult and his words had value (Focus group, April 10, 2014).

It is interesting how this example drawn from history demonstrates both independence and rebellion of a young person in a traditional society. This story also shows that patriarchal society can accept children as participants in the decision making. And therefore, children and youth cannot be viewed as semi-adults and passive members of the society.

There was another group of participants who believed that childhood is indefinite, therefore, people remain children for life: ‘I believe that most of us inside remain children for life. When we become adults, our needs change, while our thoughts and behaviour are all the same’ (Participant 38).

Important responsibilities of adulthood in the past have been summarised as ability to provide, protect, and procreate – all of which involve duties toward others (Arnett, 1998; Gilmore, 1990). To understand what signs or factors participants consider as contributing to adulthood I asked participants of the survey to fill in a section with attitude questions where

respondents were asked to rate their level of agreement with the statements like ‘Living separately from your parents is a sign of adulthood,’ or ‘Graduation from school makes you an adult’ (Table 10).

Based on frequency analysis, more than 80 percent of respondents agreed that receiving higher education, getting a permanent workplace, becoming financially independent, supporting your own family are characteristics of an adult person.

About 35 percent of respondents either disagreed or neither agreed nor disagreed on the question of marriage that contributes to becoming an adult. Out of eight questions only in two cases, male participants expressed stronger views compared to females: male participants agreed with the statement that supporting your own family as well as becoming a parent is a sign of adulthood. And only in these two instances, the share of male students who agreed with these statements was a little bit higher compared to female students. However, in this particular case, this might be explained by the small number of male students in the sample.

About 69 percent of participants considered graduating from school as a sign of adulthood. For example, a female participant recalled how she was choosing her future profession: ‘Maturity comes to the person when the situation requires it the most. I would like to provide my example. I am 18 years old now, and at the moment of applying to the university, I was 17. At this early age, I was required to choose the profession. By making this decision I took a huge responsibility upon myself and my parents, because they believed in me and they are paying for my education. I am carrying this responsibility, because the choice of profession was mine’ (Participant 36).

A female student B during the focus group (April 18, 2014) gave a more elaborate answer by mentioning other factors that contributed to her transformation into an adult: ‘The adulthood starts when a child enters the university. This is the first (step – AK). When you live at home, you do not worry about anything, they (parents –AK) are responsible for feeding you, for (your – AK) development. When you become a student, when you graduate from school, you become a different person. During your first year at the university, you have to adapt to the city and other people. A person transforms into an adult when he leaves his home, when he becomes a ‘warrior,’ because he has to struggle for his life. He becomes responsible for himself. You are responsible for yourself, you are studying for yourself to become someone in the future, like your parents did.’

Living separately from parents as a characteristic of adulthood divided the participants. Almost every third respondent disagreed with the statement that living separately from parents

contributed to the process of transition into adult: the share of male students (=20 out of 44, or almost every second) who disagreed was slightly higher compared to the female students (36 out of 144, or 32%).

While discussing this particular factor during the focus group, a female student A mentioned: “When I am separated from my parents I always worry about them. This might be explained by (the fact that I feel – AK) responsible for the parents. I want to be there to help when they have problems. I believe that living with the parents is not an indicator of childish behaviour... When you live together with the parents, you show that you care about them” (Focus group, April 18, 2014).

A higher share of negative responses that came from male respondents could be explained by the cultural component that still plays a vital role in some Kazakh families. A female student A from the focus group on May 4, 2014, commented: ‘There is a tradition in the Kazakh people, that *kenže*, the youngest son in the family, should stay with the parents (even after marriage – AK). He should bring a wife into the family so the parents will not be left alone. I often think that we do not have a boy in our family. My sister and I will leave to the families (of our future husbands – AK), and it is unusual for a daughter to visit her parents often after marriage. This could be considered as disrespect (to the family of the husband – AK). So, I believe it is very important to stay with your parents, because they grow old, they require more attention and care. We should pay back for everything we received so far... at least partially. (This is - AK) our obligation and duty. This is very important.’

During the focus group on May 4, 2015, participants specifically discussed separation from the parents:

Female student D: I do not agree (that living separately from the parents is a sign of adulthood - AK). Even if you live separately from your parents as I do, they provide for me financially, I am 100 percent dependent on them, and I call them every day. I entirely depend on them not only in a financial sense, and therefore, I do not believe that living separately from them can be a feature of a grown-up person.

Female student A: I think this (living separately – AK) is one of the factors which allows to grow up. For example, some people turned forty and they still live with their parents, and their parents call them. You look at them and think that they have failed.

Female student M: You think: “The guy is forty and probably he is staying with his mother in one apartment.” Probably he cannot walk away from his mother. However, he

might love his mother a lot, and maybe we do not understand that. But from our point of view, he has failed.

Male student S: It does not matter if the person stays with his parents or separately. Maturity is a condition of a soul. The person can live by himself and remain a child. For example, we are students, but we depend on parents. I cannot say that I make all decisions independently. I consult with my parents sometimes. There are some people, who live with their parents, and they provide for their parents and they make their own decisions, and they are adults. They carry responsibility for themselves and their parents.

Male student B: I partially agree. In the beginning, the person lives with his parents for some time. Then he leaves and stays alone. Then he takes his parents to his place. There is a cycle. The person goes through all these stages, and any adult person should live alone, live his own life without parents with his own family.

Male student S: During this period when he lives alone he matures. This is the process of maturity.

Female student M: This is all relative. This does not mean that you take your stuff and leave. You live alone, you provide for yourself, and you become responsible for them (parents - AK). But it does not mean that you leave and *better körmeyisin* (don't see the faces - AK).

Male student B: Burned all the bridges behind.

Female student M: This is all relative. This is all done for the sake of society. (They would say – AK): 'She lives alone. *Öz kunin, özi körip otyr* (she looks after herself - AK).

It could be concluded that first of all, living separately from parents does not imply full independence in a financial or emotional sense. Moreover, according to some students, a tradition would require at least male children to look after their parents, and that would imply living together with them.

About 79 percent (148 out of 188) of respondents agreed that becoming a parent was a sign of transition to adulthood. For example, Participant 52 mentioned that 'before getting married, one should ask himself: "Am I mature enough?" The same question should be raised before becoming a parent.' Another participant (questionnaire 67) commented that adulthood implies 'support not only for the own family, but also for your parents. A grownup should teach (his children - AK), and (learn how to) be responsible.' However, during the later conversation, one of the students expressed their doubts about capacity of young people with children to act like responsible adults.

For instance, Student A during the May 4, 2014 focus group mentioned: '(At our age – AK) our grandmothers were already adults: they knew how to live. They were ready to reproduce life and raise a decent person. I think that young mothers today are not very good (at this - AK). And we are often observing that grandmothers have to take responsibility. Girls of our age, who marry... their mothers usually stay with their children...'

In the questionnaire, students had an opportunity to provide their suggestions about factors contributing to the transition to adulthood. The answers could be grouped around themes summarised in Table 11. Categories presented in Table 11 were developed by Arnett (1997) based on the results of his previous anthropological and sociological research. However, I adopted Arnett's table and introduced several changes. For example, in the category 'Family capacity,' the participants of my survey mentioned marriage and parenthood as two important signs of adulthood. Arnett stresses the importance of keeping the family together, while my participants pay more attention to creating the family and supporting it financially. Arnett also includes categories like 'norm compliance', 'biological transitions' and 'legal transitions,' that were addressed by participants during the focus groups, so I omitted these themes in Table 11. The category 'Other' was absent in the original table, but I decided to include it because while discussing responsibility toward hypothetical families and children, participants of the survey also mentioned importance of care for their parents, responsibility towards greater community and society, and their concerns about the future.

Table 10. Criteria for becoming an adult

	Agree						Neutral						Disagree						Total	Male	Fem
	Frequency	%	Male	%	Fem	%	Frequency	%	Male	%	Fem	%	Frequency	%	Male	%	Fem	%			
Living separately from the parents	88	47	17	39	71	49	34	18	7	16	27	19	66	35	20	45	46	32	188	44	144
Graduating from school	130	69	28	64	102	71	20	11	7	16	13	9	38	20	9	20	29	20	188	44	144
Receiving higher education	151	80	27	68	88	78	20	11	5	13	15	13	18	10	8	20	10	9	153	40	113
Being employed	165	87	35	80	130	90	12	6	2	5	10	7	12	6	7	16	5	3	189	44	145
Being financially independent	175	93	40	91	135	93	8	4	3	7	5	3	6	3	1	2	5	3	189	44	145
Providing support to your own family	186	98	44	100	142	98	1	1	0	0	1	1	2	1	0	0	2	1	189	44	145
Being married	124	66	29	66	95	66	37	20	9	20	28	19	28	15	6	14	22	15	189	44	145
Becoming a parent	148	79	37	84	111	77	21	11	2	5	19	13	19	10	5	11	14	10	188	44	144

Table 11. Criteria for becoming an adult

Individualism	Accept responsibility for the consequences of your actions	‘Understanding your actions, being responsible, helping to your close ones’ (73), ‘Having own personality and individuality in the society’ (97), ‘Being responsible for own life, actions and decisions’ (184, 192, 194), Solving your problems (195)
	Decide on personal beliefs and values independently of parents or other influences	‘Making decisions by yourself’ (9, 25), ‘Understanding of your ‘self’ and what this ‘self’ wants (opposite to wanting an ice-cream, one should understand what “I am” in this world, what do “I want,” and what “I should do” (37), ‘A grown-up makes his decisions independently, and no one can pressure him. Patience and actions that he makes are thought-through, so they are beneficial’ (77); ‘Having own view about life’ (123, 176)
	Financially independence from parents	‘Independence from everyone’ (165)
	No longer living in parents’ household	‘One becomes an adult after graduating from a high-school when he lives independently even if his parents support him until he graduates from the university and finds a job. He builds his own life, works, creates a family’ (80)
	Being an achiever	‘Demonstrate your strength as a woman, achieve everything by yourself’ (188)
Family capacities	Capable of creating a family	‘Marriage and parenthood are the stages of maturity. If you didn’t marry or didn’t become a parent, you are not mature (102)

	Capable of supporting a family financially	‘Being a source of support for your parents, providing for the future of children’ (154)
	Capable of caring for children	‘Being wise and decisive. Taking responsibility for the actions of your children (109)
Role transitions	Finish education	‘One becomes an adult after graduating from a high-school when he lives independently even if his parents support him until he graduates from the university and finds a job. He builds his life, works, creates a family’ (80)
	Being married	‘Marriage and parenthood are the stages of maturity. If you didn’t marry or didn’t become a parent, you are immature’ (102)
	Having children	‘Marriage and parenthood are the stages of maturity. If you didn’t marry or didn’t become a parent, you are immature’ (102)
	Not being deeply tied to parents emotionally	‘Solve your issues independently, being able to deal with stress’ (115)
Other	Being useful to the society at large	‘An adult should be useful to the society. Should help people. Should leave something valuable behind’ (2); ‘Help the others’ (38);
	Think about the future	‘Think about the future’ (128)
	Being realistic about the future	‘Do not have some abstract dreams but an understanding of what person should achieve in his life’ (21)
	Providing care of the parents	‘Having a trust of your family’ (9); ‘Taking care of people who helped you to become someone’ (190); ‘Provide moral and material support to the parents, make them happy’ (78); ‘Being able to support the parents (146); ‘Supporting not only your

		own family but the parents. A grown-up should raise his children, and be fully responsible' (66)
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When a child is born, there is an unspoken perception among the majority of adults that childhood should be a carefree, safe, secure and happy phase of human existence. In Chapter 3, I discussed that 'happy childhood' was a crucial part of raising an ideological child in the Soviet Union. The notion of 'happy childhood' was an instrument of the Soviet propaganda. I included several questions in the survey about the notion of 'happy childhood,' because I wanted to explore familiarity of the participants with the Soviet concept as well as their perception of it. Young people who were interviewed during this research grew up during the independence years, and therefore, none of the participants was familiar with the history of this expression. Nevertheless, students believed (97 percent of respondents) that they experienced a 'happy childhood.' According to their answers, 'happy' child's world was constructed around specific spaces, including home, kindergarten, yard (*dvor* in Russian), and school (Table 12). Participants mentioned components, that contributed to 'happy childhood,' including:

- A full family: 'Happy childhood is your mother and father. It implies full family, good friends, and carefree days full of joy' (participant 178),
- 'Caring' and 'loving' parents, 'I was a single child... My parents did and do everything for me, where 'everything' does not imply money, clothes or travel. I always feel their love and support' (participant 153)
- Grandparents: 'The best moment of my life is connected to my grandfather and grandmother' (participant 86), 'grandmother's stories' (participant 185), 'sounds of grandfather's *dombra*' (national instrument – AK) (participant 188), 'staying at grandmother's house during the summer' (participant 189)
- Siblings: 'I am not a single child. I have caring elder sister, whom I always followed, and younger sister, who I love more than anyone else in this world' (participant 110), 'my sisters were always close to me' (participant 129), 'jokes of my brothers' (participant 184)
- Games and school: 'we spent all days with friends. We were playing games. It was a happy time, time without a computer or other technical gadgets. I was going to school to have fun with my classmates' (participant 109)

• A permanent place to live: ‘happy childhood, caring parents, permanent place to stay, friends at school. A happy childhood is when care and love surround you, and you have lots of friends (participant 149).

Table 12: What ‘happy childhood’ implies?

Social context	Equality (concerning wealth)
Spaces	Home, kindergarten, yard (<i>dvor</i>), school
Experiences	Happy childhood is a time when a person can <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Learn from own mistakes - Receive full attention from parents - Be introduced to the big world - Has an opportunity to socialise
Relationships with	Parents (full family) Grandparents Siblings Friends
Behaviours	Socialisation (playing games outside with friends, attending school) Consuming products (specifically designed for the child)

Based on these observation, it can be assumed that during the independence, ‘happy childhood’ lost its ideological meaning. The phrase was no longer associated with the state and the government’s provision for families and children. While several participants mentioned the importance of ‘correct’ upbringing as a crucial component of ‘happy childhood’ (for example, ‘Happy childhood implies wise upbringing’), still none of them talked about the role of the president or government in the provision of ‘happy childhood.’ The bright moments of ‘happy childhood’ for the participants were connected to toys and other things that were bought for them by the parents. For example, ‘Happy childhood is when (parents) buy everything, you might need,’ ‘When parents decided to cheer you up or bought you something,’ ‘When parents buy everything you ask for,’ ‘Receiving everything you desire,’ ‘My most happy moment in childhood was when my mother bought dresses for my doll.’

Majority of participants were growing up at the beginning of the digital age, when technologies, including cell phones, tablets and personal computers, that help networking, and communication processes, were becoming more accessible for the general population.

Therefore, the childhood of participants was very different from the one that adults today remember (Livingstone, Haddon, & Gorzig, 2012), and ‘digital revolution’ is one particular aspect that was discussed and reflected on by some of the participants. For example, one of the participants mentioned, that ‘happy childhood is a childhood without the internet,’ while another contemplated that ‘we were the last generation of children who played outside... There are children (today – AK) who stay in front of their computers and phones, not noticing that their childhood is passing away,’ ‘I feel sorry for these children who waste their time staying in front of the computer’, ‘In my childhood there were games like “cops and robbers” (*voinushki* in Russian – AK), hide and seek, twelve sticks, which are currently so unpopular due to the existence of Internet’, ‘(happy childhood - AK) is carefree life, life without computer and other technologies,’ ‘happy childhood is a childhood without Internet, when everyone goes outside and plays.’

Several participants brought up the issue of financial stability and wealth. Majority of my respondents were born during the period of drastic economic changes in Kazakhstan. In the early 1990s, the government was implementing neoliberal market policies, which have reduced the proportion of the wage-employed population and had a significant impact on welfare policies. The turbulence of the 1990s was followed by the period of relative economic stability of the 2000s, the time remembered by some of my respondents as ‘happy childhood’ experience.

Some of the participants stated that ‘happy childhood’ implies ‘lack of arguments in the family: you don’t see financial problems and therefore, (you don’t hear – AK) all the arguments’, ‘there are no rich and no poor, everyone is the same at school,’ ‘(happy childhood) translates into lack of problems, lack of any serious questions, (it is about spending – AK) all your time with the parents, lack of any financial problems,’ ‘happy childhood (implies – AK) financial prosperity.’

As it was discussed earlier, the idea and the realities of childhood are continually evolving. But as in the traditional Kazakh society of the 19th century, the modern respondents considered childhood and adulthood as two separate categories or spaces. Young people who participated in this research did not accept the idea of children as active agents in their own right. Participants offered dependent, soft and overall immature image of a child. Contrary to the perception of a child, an image of an adult was independent, strong and mature. Some of the participants believed that transition from childhood to adulthood allowed to acquire almost Superman or godlike characteristics.

At the same time, the image of a child was more complex compared to the adult: on the one hand, it was soft and innocent but at the same time untamed and aggressive which might explain the necessity of both protection and control. According to the participants, adults bear the responsibility to provide supportive environment for all children so they can develop 'normally'. All these characteristics of a child conform with the ideas typical for paternalistic societies.

In their observations about childhood and adulthood the participants characterised growing up as a dynamic transition due to the changes in the level of responsibility of children versus adults, as well as in terms of limitations (for the adults, a world becomes limitless because they have additional choices). Several participants talked about their responsibility to provide care to his/her parents as a reciprocal act for being a recipient of this care in the past. The idea of reciprocity can be explained by the Kazakh traditional understanding of parenting, that comes with the expectation of children supporting their parents at the old age. And many participants referred to social norms of the past in their explanation of importance of spending time with their parents and supporting them financially.

As in some other traditional cultures, the transition to adulthood in participants' words is still associated with events such as completion of education, marriage, and parenthood. Moreover, the participants suggested several factors contributing to contracting and lengthening of this transition period, including war (that contributed to 'contracting' of childhood and speedy introduction to maturity in the past), and financial and emotional dependence on parents (that supported lengthening of the transition in case of the participants).

According to the majority of participants, they experienced 'happy childhood,' as a space that included components like a full family, caring parents, siblings, and grandparents. At the same time, 'happy childhood' excluded internet and new technologies. Some participants were reminiscing that the new technologies 'pollute' world of modern children. For the participants 'happy childhood' did not bear any ideological connotation with the Soviet Union.

Chapter 7. 'We are the future': young people and society

Young participants of this research were influenced by a unique set of forces: all of them were born after the independence of the country in 1991, they lived in the age of cell phones and Internet, their families experienced economic hardships during the crises of the 1990s and 2000s. However, despite the political or economic turmoil, these young people felt the steady support of protective parents concerned about their safety, their schooling, and their academic success. In this chapter I will identify factors that influence and define representatives of this young generation of Kazakhstan, and that formed their shared beliefs and behaviours distinguishing them from the rest.

High expectations at the family and societal level

Many of the young people who were interviewed along the course of this research mentioned that their families had high expectations of them. These high expectations manifested in a necessity to 'be an example' for younger siblings, to graduate from the university, and to achieve a high position in a society in the future. Participants often described high expectations as a prescription or a 'roadmap' drawn by the parents and often 'imposed' on children who were supposed to follow it. For example, a 20-year old Nuritdin, a medical student from Almaty mentions the importance of being an example for his younger brother: 'There is a saying in the Kazakh language: *Aldangy döngelik qaida barsa, artqysyda sonda barady*, meaning "where the front wheel goes, the back wheel follows." In their [parents - AK] hopes I am like the driving mechanism. If I succeed, then the younger one will benefit as well. Of course, they [parents] have high hopes for me. They want me to become a proper specialist.'

A 19-year old Komila, a resident of Almaty, who at the moment of the interview was working full-time and financially providing for her single mother, while considering an application to the law school, mentions that sometimes these 'high hopes' present a burden for children, and moreover, that children might not even share the dreams of their parents. In her interview, she talks about some of her friends: 'Young people are supposed to achieve something, to become a boss, to graduate from the university. Parents are imposing all this on children these days, and therefore, everyone is trying to achieve something... The child is born, and when he starts growing up, they say: you have to become someone in the future. The child is growing up with this thought. He starts believing in it. Maybe he does not feel this way, maybe he wants to do something else. They [parents - AK] are imposing this on the child. We have relatives like this, you come to their house and you only hear: "You are supposed to do

like this, and you should do that.” I do not like this attitude, and I do not think that I owe them anything.’

Economy major at a private university a 21-year old Elnara talks about her experience. She says that her parents choose the university and her major for her. She explains the burden of high expectations for her peers, contemplating that previous generations did not face the same fierce competition or the level of pressure that her generations experiences now: ‘I chose higher education to meet expectations of the parents. They [parents - AK] have expectations, and sometimes it is a lot of pressure. For example, regarding the studies. All the time you have to be the best because the parents expect this. I think this applies to all our generation... There are expectations at the state level. [They say - AK]: “You should [do this - AK] because you have all preconditions. We [the elder generation - AK] provided these conditions: there is a free education, education abroad, Bolashak [a Presidential stipend to study abroad – AK]. You have to study, and then you have to give back to the society.” Probably this is what is imposed at the university and in school. The teachers say, “You have to be successful otherwise you will get crashed.” I think this is the evolution of the society. I think in the past the competition was not as fierce, and the feeling of “you have to” was not as aggravated.’

What Nuritdin describes as an example for the younger sibling, two female participants mention as an obligation and even a burden. Ainura Absemetova, a free-lance trainer who works with Central Asian NGOs for almost 15 years and focuses on volunteering, explains the existence of this ‘roadmap’ from parents’ position: ‘Young mothers are trying to give the best to their children, they want to give what they were not able to receive during the Soviet times, these mothers impose their unrealised dreams on their children.’ However, this contradicts to the point made by Elnara, who mentioned these high expectations go beyond the family level, and they are imposed by all adults, including school and university teachers.

Allegiances to the state and family

There is an expression in the Russian language that can be translated as a consumerist approach (*potrebitel'skyi podkhod*), or consumer attitude (*potrebitel'skoye otnosheniye*), which implies taking for granted certain things provided by outsiders, including the state or the family.

Sholpan Baibolova, one of the NGO leaders working with children living in institutionalised settings, was the first interviewer who brought up this particular characteristic of a young generation. Ainura Absemetova agrees with Sholpan, stating: ‘We are raising the generation of consumers, who believes that everyone is obligated to them.’ In her interview,

Ainura Absemetova mentions: ‘You see this message on Facebook: the state is obligated to give them [young people - AK] work, healthcare, housing... The state feeds the message by saying, that we will allocate a certain number of square meters to young people. But the state is not supposed to do that. The state is only obligated to provide the economic and social security, and territorial integrity. The rest we should do ourselves.’

In the questionnaire mentioned in the previous chapter, there were questions about participants’ perception of responsibility of the state or the family regarding the ‘happy childhood.’ About 73 percent of participants agreed that the state was responsible for ‘happy childhood,’ while 17 percent disagreed with this statement, and 7.8 percent were undecided. At the same time, almost all respondents (99 percent) believed that the family bears a full responsibility for ‘happy childhood.’ In the follow-up question, participants were asked to clarify their answers. All answers can be grouped into four categories. Some of the participants believed that the state plays an active role in the provision of ‘happy childhood,’ others secluded a particular group of children for whom the state should deliver ‘happiness’. The third group of participants agreed that the state should be responsible for a certain category of welfare. And the rest said that the state should not play any role. Some of the typical answers are provided in the Table 13.

Table 13. Participants’ views on responsibility of the state in regard to ‘happy childhood’

The state is responsible	The state is responsible for certain group of children	The state is responsible only for certain services for children	The state is not responsible, but parents are
Children are the future: ‘State invests into children, into the future (participant 185)’; ‘The child is a citizen of the state, and every citizen is valuable	The state is responsible only for disadvantaged groups: children who experience exceptional circumstances such as abandonment or abuse (participant	The state is supposed to provide a guaranteed welfare package: support for young families, education programs (kindergartens and schools), leisure activities. ‘Children	The state provides peace and safety in the society; The state provides jobs for the parents; (participant 139). ‘Happy childhood’ means blowing soap bubbles, cooking

<p>for the state’ (participant 40); ‘All children were born on the territory of the Republic of Kazakhstan, and the future of the country depends on them.’ (participant 94)</p>	<p>198); ‘[The task of the state is to – AK] monitor problematic families, where the life of children is inadequate.’ ‘There are a lot of defective children. And in our country, we do not have opportunities to make their lives more comfortable so they will not feel alienated.’ (participant 15)</p>	<p>require support. (There are – AK) benefits, education programmes, an organisation of leisure activities for children, support for young families.’ (participant 63)</p>	<p>with your mother, [walking in the] park. Who will teach you to sew and ride a bike? The state? Happiness can be acquired only in the family’... “Happy childhood” is an aura, is a situation when you are loved by someone. The state is an apparatus, and according to its definition it is beyond any feelings and emotions;’ (participant 36). ‘The state cannot be responsible for anyone’s life. Because every child has their own family, where s/he will spend a happy childhood.’</p>
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According to the second group of the participants, there were two categories of children who required state intervention. The first category included children in need of supervision: those children who have engaged in theft or vandalism, and therefore, children who broke special rules of childhood. The second category included dependent or neglected children perceived by participants as victims. The third group of participants believed that the state should provide a right to welfare, including nutrition, medical care, and education, etc. It might be assumed that these participants believed in the contractual obligation to guarantee child

welfare. Some of the participants who were making this claim, mentioned the words ‘rights’. Finally, the last group of participants stated that the interests of the child lay exclusively with the family. Therefore, parents are the only people who should protect and nurture childhood, while the state’s role is limited to the provision of safety and peace in the society at large. The responses of the last group can also be explained by overall disappointment in the economic and social achievements of the welfare state in Kazakhstan after the independence.

As it was earlier discussed, the Soviet system of welfare disappeared with the collapse of the Soviet Union. The young generation has fewer guarantees than their parents had during the Soviet period (including free healthcare, education, employment provision, and retirement) (Kuehnast, 2000). And it is possible to assume that by rejecting the responsibility of the state, young people demonstrate their disappointment about it. Adeline Masquelier (2013) discusses similar feelings of disenfranchisement and disappointment about the state inability to provide high-level jobs among young people in Niger. Masquelier (2013) mentions that in Niger, young people graduating from universities face unemployment, low-level jobs, or working in the informal economy, unless they have necessary ‘connections.’

There are similarities with some of the participants of my research, who have clear understanding that the state cannot offer any sort of future security for them. Therefore, their allegiances lay with the family.

The results of the survey contradicted earlier statements from the ‘experts’ about young people’s expectations about the role of the state. For this reason, I asked one of the ‘experts’ to comment on the results. For example, Ainura Absemetova suggested that level of disillusionment would change with age. According to Ainura, the students who just started their education at the university would demonstrate higher level of expectations and so called ‘consumer attitude.’ At the same time graduates interested in finding employment or starting own business would understand their vulnerability in the hostile and often corrupt environment. Ainura mentions, ‘they face all these barriers: you have to pay here, and you have to bribe these people. They [young people – AK] start to understand that the state put them on their knees.’ From Ainura’s view, young generation, like some participants of the survey, would expect at least some level of support from their parents and their kin.

According to Elena Norakidze, a social worker by education and a program assistant in an international organisation working with young people, this reliance on close kin creates an unhealthy and dependent relationship between young generation and their parents. Elena states:

‘Their parents pay for them, their parents take care of them..., [and then] their parents decide for them.’

Limited in their choices and raised to abide

High expectations mentioned earlier serve as a ‘roadmap’ or a prescription that come with certain limitations. Limitations are set up to guide the younger generation to make safer choices. In the previous section, it was mentioned that older children are raised up to serve as an example, especially for the younger members of the family. However, what examples are given to older children?

During the conversation, a young NGO coordinator Bota Ilyas brings up the importance of examples in the upbringing: ‘The parents often refer to other people. They say, ‘*žurttyyn balalary*’ or ‘children of the people’ ... [They say]: ‘Here, look at other kids, and be the same...’” Bota explains existence of this notion by the Soviet experience: “Maybe it comes from the Soviet past. [Our parents] were afraid to be different from the others both in financial and in social terms. [Our parents] were afraid because of denunciations and repressions. They were afraid to be different.’

The expression *žurttyyn balalar* (in Kazakh) or *eldin baldalar* (in Kyrgyz) do not necessarily imply children of neighbours, or of friends and relatives. This expression might not be related to a particular person. Usually *žurttyyn balalar* are theoretical or ideal children. In Kyrgyz Internet space, the phenomenon of *eldin baldalar* was discussed and ridiculed after May 2015 publication on Kyrgyz parenting on Kloop.kg. In this article, the editorial board made the following statement:

‘Kyrgyz mother always has a friend, whose children (*eldin baldalar*) are more successful: her sons are receiving a high pay, while daughters are married well and have many children. These children never argue with their mother, quietly listen to her words, and buy her fur coats and gold every month. And you will always hear an example of the mythical children of your mother's friends’ (Идирис, 2016).

From participants’ point of view, the outsiders’ opinion is a factor that plays an important role in the upbringing in Kazakhstan. For example, during the focus group on April 10, 2014, with several students of the medical university, the participants discussed the limitations the younger generation face in their families.

Interviewer: As you mentioned earlier in our society children face plenty of constraints, which influence their development. Is that correct?

Berik: Yes. There is also excessive guarding, which is great from one side, but at the same time is not that nice.

Madina: We are growing up with all these limitations, and then we will tell our children “Do not wear this because in the future, [outsiders] will say about you that you are like this.”

Aigerim: You start doing something, and there is an immediate thought: “What others will say about this?” You always keep this in mind.

Berik: This is the first question that comes up, and not that your jacket is wrinkled or something else.

Participants of the April 10th focus group started the conversation with a notion that children are often facing excessive guarding from the parents. This is not exclusive to Kazakh families. A 20-year old Viktoriya, one of three children in the Russian-Ukrainian household whose head is a military person. In her interview, Viktoriya says that she always faced very rigid limitations in her family. During her childhood, she was not allowed to play in a different *dvor* (yard), and she was not let out outside, when not accompanied by her grandfather. Viktoriya mentions that “these limitations did not allow us [Viktoriya and her twin sister] to express ourselves fully. We face some problems now because [we are awkward at] socialisation. I think if we were allowed more flexibility, if we were allowed to do more, we would not feel so helpless now. For example, [I would be surer when I] travel to a different part of the city [without parents], or [when I] go to a different country.’

As the majority of interviewees were young females, they had faced a stricter level of control from their parents, and these limits applied mostly to dating men, returning home after certain hours, or behaving in a certain way. For example, 19-year old student B from a very conservative rural family from the South tells: ‘Parents often say to me [when I meet other people]: “do not show off, be modest, behave.”’

However, two young men interviewed for this study also complained about excessive guarding exercised by their parents. For example, Nuritdin discontentedly mentions in his interview that his upbringing was restrictive and could be compared to the way ‘girls are brought up’ in Kazakhstan. While discussing limitations, Nuritdin mentions that it was impossible to contradict to his parents, because ‘the eggs should not teach the hen.’ Nuritdin brings up an example of his younger brother, who still does not understand ‘the limits’ provided by the parents: ‘My younger brother is very young, and he suggests certain things. He says: “Let’s do this or that.” At these moments, one can feel these constraints. You have to feel them inside... My parents never had daughters, and I was raised in a strict way, almost like a girl.

When I was a teenager, [my parents] did not allow me to leave the house after 8 pm. They did not allow me to have sleepovers at my friends' places. I never liked [my parents attitude]. I thought that I was a guy, very sportive guy. But they always told me: "When you have own children, you will understand." As a result, I discovered the borders that I cannot cross, I understand what is right and what is wrong.'

Along with the 'limitations,' another word ('pressure') came up in several interviews. For instance, Elnara mentions that her peers who study abroad face a cultural shock when they come back home and re-acquaint themselves with the parents: 'I have friends studying abroad. They do not see their future in Kazakhstan. How could it be explained? Maybe by the fact that when they come home and they face their parents guarding, and they are constantly under pressure. [My friends] cannot survive here because they graduated from school and the university abroad. They are facing this Kazakh mentality that they have to marry [people chosen by their parents - AK], and they should follow what parents say. But [my friends] do not want to.'

To the contrary, a medical student Nuritdin states he does not receive any pressure from the parents. However, it is possible that the pressure from the parents is camouflaged as 'advice.' In the following paragraph, Nuritdin provides an explanation why he should listen to the parents: "I do not get any pressure [from my parents]. I receive advice, and I constantly listen to them. They are experienced people. [My parents] say that you are not allowed to make a mistake in a choice of a profession and a choice of a wife. I hope I did not make mistakes with my profession, and I will get through the next step. [In our family], we have freedom of expression and freedom of choice. Obviously [children are not allowed to] cross the border. [Parents] think that I am a grown-up person and I have a right to decide [myself] what I need and what I do not need...'

A 19-year old Tokzhan from Semey thinks along the same lines as Nuritdin: 'I consider myself free. But this freedom does not imply that I make my own decisions. I like the fact that I can consult with my parents. Not everyone has this option of consulting.' A 19-year old female student B gives a very similar explanation to Tokzhan: 'We have to abide the grown-ups. You have to make sure they agree with your decisions. They are older and more experienced.'

One of the other aspects that came up in the interviews was the education that the parents also wanted to control. Majority of students chose their majors because of their parents. As mentioned earlier Elnara applied to the university to meet the expectations of her family. During the conversation, she told that she considered herself a creative person interested in cinematography and design. However, she chose finance because her elder siblings made this

choice earlier, successfully graduated with a degree and were able to start their careers. Elnara says: '[By the time I graduated from school] I did not know what I want in this life, so I chose finance not to risk it.'

Another young female, a 20-year old Mariya who studies to become a child psychologist, discussed her 'democratic' parents and two situations that could be considered as milestones in a life of any person, the marriage and education prospects: "In regard to marriage, [parents] say, "This is your own choice." But when I wanted to leave school in the ninth grade to apply for college, they were against [my decision], and they told me: "It does not matter what you want, but you will go back to school in September." They told me: "Go to PTU [college], what will you achieve?" We had a huge fight, and we came to a compromise that I will continue my school but I will be able to choose the university myself not considering their opinion... But my parents put two major conditions: I was supposed to receive a higher education, and I had to apply to the state university... While my friends were receiving pressure from their parents about applying for a grant [free education], my parents told me this was not important. They told me that I should not stress, should not aim high.'

Education was a priority for parents of Viktoriya as well. She remembers that when she was in secondary school, her parents put pressure on her and her sister to be more diligent with her studies: '[Parents] were saying all the time: "You are not writing this well enough. Sit down and re-write the whole book," or "Why you received such a bad grade?" They were nurturing this perfectionism from the first grade, and then it went like this. As a result, we thought that it was necessary to apply to the university. When you have good grades [at school], what else you can do with them?

Zulfiya Baisakova, an NGO leader, working with vulnerable young women, mentions that in Kazakhstan the majority of adults exercise control over their (often grown-up) children: 'As a result, quite often we face a 18-year-old who has no life skills. They don't have skills, and they don't know how to live independently in this world, and our Kazakh mentality leads to the moment that many children who are fifty years old are still accompanied by their parents. [Children] are getting married, [children] are given an apartment, [children] are given a car, they are sent to vacation. A grown-up child still lives with his parents. Our understanding of parenthood and childhood is completely reverse.'

Dependent

Most of the respondents were financially dependent on their parents, who covered their tuition fee at the university and other expenses. Naturally, all the respondents had to negotiate their financial expenses with their parents, but this negotiation spread to other areas of life. The respondents consulted all decisions even the smallest one with the older members of the households. Claudia Valbuena, a leader of another NGO providing education for young women, explains this dependence from the position of the younger generation: ‘Children are dependent because they believe that the family [decide for them to help] their future and their well-being.’

It was mentioned in the previous sections that young people had issues in voicing their opinion to the parents. When asked if they discuss and argue with their parents about politics, or fashion, or any other subject, most of the respondents tried to avoid the answer, saying that usually, it is not worth having an argument. For example, Tokzhan, a medical student from Semey says: ‘Our views are always the same in all situations. We usually do not discuss politics. My father reads all the news and tells us. We always listen. You cannot say [to my father] “you are wrong.” We always listen, and I avoid discussing politics because it is dirty.’

Galiya, a 20-year old outspoken economics student from AlmaUniversity mentions in a conversation that her family members do not talk about politics because ‘there are enough negative things happening around the world.’ During her summer vacation, Galiya spent several months in the US within the frameworks of Work&Travel programme, where she had an opportunity to meet young people from other CIS countries, including Ukraine. The conflict between the Russian Federation and Ukraine over Crimea was vividly discussed by all news outlets in Kazakhstan. For centuries, Kazakhstan was in the area of Russian political interests. Therefore, to avoid antagonising the northern neighbour, Kazakhstan media presented Ukrainian side as terrorists and extremists. During her vacation, Galiya decided to learn the opinion of her Ukrainian peers about the conflict. After her return to Kazakhstan Galiya stated to her parents that the information she learned in the US was different from what they were told by Kazakhstan and Russian mass media. Galiya recalls: ‘I was told at home [by my parents] that the girls [from Ukraine were biased, they] were trying to protect their country. After these words, I am not [discussing politics] with my parents. I keep silence.’

Viktoriya agrees with Tokzhan, and her tactics are similar to Galiya’s. Viktoriya prefers to keep silence when she disagrees with parents, but she can discuss opinions with her twin sister: ‘Usually we [Viktoriya and her sister] just keep silence. So, what? Our opinion is different [from our parents]. We do not confront [parents]. If there is an argument... any

argument, any eagerness to speak out will be perceived as negative. We are not used to having arguments.’

A young coordinator at the international NGO Bota summarises the inter-generational dynamic within a family quite well: ‘I think that young people are amorphous and very passive and this is reflected in society as well, which is passive and very compliant. We, as [members of the] society, do not encourage critical thinking. We never encourage conflict, which is important for relationships with parents and relatives. [Young people] need to be assertive to know themselves. In any case, it is impossible to agree with everything.’

Bota Ilyas reflects on her observations: ‘My relatives from Kyzylorda who are about my age are conservative, and they do not conflict with their parents, and generally with the authorities.’ Bota explains that young people in the families she observed, live in ‘absolute obedience. [Their parents] love to put down their children. “*Koiš* [stop in Kazakh],” they say. There is a saying in Kazakh that could be translated as “look at the length of your blanket while stretching your feet.” That is the spirit. [Adults] destroy any initiatives, and they dampen creativity.’

Viktoriya provides a perfect illustration of what Bota discusses. In her interview, she describes several possible scenarios (studying abroad, dating a young man, and working), and within seconds she describes an adverse reaction from her parents: ‘If I express my interest in studying somewhere, there are a lot of cons revealed explaining why I cannot do it. Because I will not be able to cope with it; I will not be able to monitor the expenses; I will get lost, etc. Even about guys. My father believes that if I start dating someone, it will not lead to anything good.’ Viktoriya concludes with a phrase: ‘Our parents have kept us in a tight grip. I never worked, and my parents will not allow me. I sometimes think about working, but it will be difficult to find [a place to work] and to start doing it... But probably my parents would consider me differently [like a grown-up].’

Over the course of the conversation, Viktoriya repeatedly mentioned her dream of studying abroad. However, whenever she talked about her parents supporting her decisions, she used the future tense. Moreover, according to Viktoriya, she would not be able to make any decisions independently until the moment when she gets a job or graduates from the university: ‘Our parents believed that we were dependent. I think that I am not socially adapted and it would be difficult for me to be by myself in a foreign country. Maybe at some point when I get some support, when I acquire a profession, or knowledge, maybe I will have ground to do things

by myself.’ In the communication with her parents, Viktoriya postpones independent decision-making, and this could be considered as a coping strategy.

Another interviewee, Malika A, a student from the medical university, who came to Almaty from a rural area and has a conservative background, just prefers to keep silence. Malika A believes the initiative has to come from the elders who are more experienced. During the interview, she mentioned that in all situations, even when her opinion was different, she listened to the advice of the elders: ‘At some point, [the situation] turns the way [parents] said. Even if I was forced [by the parents] to make the decision, at a certain point, I understand that they were right. Therefore, I am trying not to object, I listen instead.’”

At some point during the interview, Malika A expressed her concern about a situation at the university: she was not happy with a change implemented by the university administration. However, while Malika A mentioned her preference to be consulted, she was not willing to express her opinion in public.

Interviewer: Would you want to have influence over decisions that concern you?

Malika A: Probably, yes. It would be nice to consider our [students’ - AK] opinion, especially when it applies to [teaching us]. I would want [the administration of the university] to talk to us, to ask us what we do want and what we [prefer to avoid]. So, when [university administration] is making decisions about us, they would ask us instead of ignoring us as it often happens.

Interviewer: So, do you believe that you have an opinion, that should be voiced?

(Malika nods)

Interviewer: The decision-makers just do not ask you?

Malika A: Unfortunately, yes. There is a simple example. Last year we had a different assessment system at the university. [The university administration] changed the system, and many [students] liked it, while I do not like it. But [students] were not asked if we want to stay with the old system or [it should be] changed.

Interviewer: What prevents you from writing a letter or creating a petition to express your disagreement?

Malika A: I think no one will listen. They made this decision without asking us, and they will not ask us in the future.

Easily manipulated

In the previous sections, I demonstrated that respondents were dependent on the opinion of the parents or other authority. Like Malika A, interviewees explained that life experience of

the elders or the authority justifies obedience. A 20-year old Tokzhan from Semey (East Kazakhstan) in her interview discussed her father's prejudice against people from the southern regions of Kazakhstan: 'My father says that you cannot be associated with the southerners. He always says they are cunning. Even they are Kazakhs; he always tells me to avoid them. He says: "They say a thing today, and do something opposite tomorrow."'

When asked about a possible scenario of marrying a person from the South, Tokzhan confidently rejected this option: 'Thank God, I am not going to [marry a person from the South]. I think my father will not allow this. He would rather allow me to marry a Russian, but not a southerner. He is not a racist, but I will be afraid even to introduce him. I will keep away [from southerners] to avoid upsetting him.' Earlier in the interview, Tokzhan mentioned that she studied with several students from the southern regions. Tokzhan described them as people with a different mentality. However, according to Tokzhan, during the first year of medical school she was able to find common ground with these students. Despite this, further in the conversation, Tokzhan disregards her observations and experience substituting it with the comments of her father who described the southerners as cunning and not trustworthy.

Ainura Absemetova explained this particular trait by lack of critical thinking. When describing young people who participated in her training, she stated: '[Young people] do not have critical thinking skills, and most of them are childish and dependent in their thinking, so naturally they consume what appears in Internet, media. They take everything at face value.' To illustrate her point, Ainura provided an example of an argument she often heard: "When I say [to young people]: "You should think for yourself, you have to have your own opinion, you need to question everything," they refer to what their uncle, grandfather, grandmother said, or what they read in the Qur'an. They build their arguments on someone else's thoughts and dogmas.'

Looking for stability (norms and traditions)

According to Ainura Absemetova, the young generation born in 1990-2000s is more conservative in their beliefs and interpretation of social values. The expert explained this by drastic changes that shaken so many aspects of young people's life. Ainura Absemetova stated, 'Financial (fluctuations of the exchange rate), political (regime change) aspects were changing, the economy and technology were changing. The durability of things is reduced to one year. If during our childhood, we used things for decades, now they last one or two seasons. When a person lives at such a speed, he unconsciously tries to find something permanent. When there is no external constant, he is trying to establish an internal constant in the form of values,

traditions, and religion.’ Bota Ilyas agrees with Ainura’s observations: ‘They are [looking up to traditions] to find support. All [young people] have the same need: to preserve, to find something that will last. [Young people] prefer to follow the rules, certain traditions, and customs in all that relates to their personal lives, their everyday life, things they choose.’

An expat living in Kazakhstan for almost ten years, Claudia Valbuena immediately provides an example of a tradition in Kazakhstan: “There is an important thing that you do not find now in many Western countries: the respect to older people, the love, and care. I remember talking to my students about euthanasia and things like that, and it was challenging for them to understand that some people would want to have that. [Young people in Kazakhstan] understand the value of tradition. Also, because it is a common situation that grandparents are the ones educating the eldest child.”

Young people were more cautious, especially when asked if they received a traditional upbringing. The majority of young respondents usually dismissed ‘traditional’ as something backward, stressing that their parents are democratic and supportive of their life choices. Only several students referred to their upbringing as traditional and strict.

A 19-year old Dilbar from the rural area in South Kazakhstan in description of her family used words ‘traditional’ and ‘conservative’. According to Dilbar, her ‘family does not accept new views of life right away. For example, Internet: not all of us are using it. My father is conservative; he adheres to the old traditions, old views. Everything should be by tradition, including upbringing. The girl should not go out or stay out late. In the beginning, my [elder] sister was not allowed to study in the city. But she was an excellent student, and she studied thoroughly. She even [was offered] an opportunity to study abroad, but she was told that it was more important to create a family at a certain age. [My parents] disregard our new views on life. And I try to adjust my opinions.’

Another respondent, a 20-year old Ibadat, describes the upbringing she received at home: ‘I often hear that I was raised in a way that our grandmothers were raised, I was raised by old traditions. [According to] old traditions, [the girl is supposed to be] modest. You cannot do certain things, you cannot leave the house [in the evening]. I do not go to the nightclubs. I do not consume alcoholic drinks.’

Dilbar and Ibadat came to Almaty from South Kazakhstan region. And according to Madina from Taraz, South Kazakhstan is more conservative: “There is [difference between] northern and southern [regions]. In the southern regions, the rules of conduct [in the families] are rigid. I studied in the south, and they have moral principles there. You sit at the table, and

unless the grownups permit you to talk, you cannot say a word (Focus group, April 10, 2014). According to Madina, these strict rules explain the existence of hierarchies within the family, as well treatment of children by family members.

A 19-year old Tokzhan is different from Dilbar and Ibadat. She grew up in a city in East Kazakhstan and later on came to Almaty. According to Tokzhan, traditions still play an essential role in her family: ‘[I know all traditions] from my mother and father. [It is important] to know traditions, to know your forefathers, *zheti ata* [seven generations of ancestors]. We celebrate all national and religious holidays at home. This is required.’

A 20-year old Russian Darya is from Almaty. Both of her parents are working full-time. To the question about traditionalism she replies, that patriarchy is defined by decision-making. She mentions that all the decisions are made by her farther, who is the primary breadwinner in the household: ‘[He] provides for us, and therefore he takes all the responsibility [for the decision-making].’

I was perplexed by the fact that many students who participated in the survey considered themselves religious (86 percent of all respondents), and the majority was able to name their confession (either Islam or Christianity). All young respondents who participated in the interviews mentioned they were believers. The meetings with interviewees took place during the month of Ramadan when Muslims fast during the daylight hours from dawn to sunset.¹⁰ And when asked about their religion most of the respondents accepting the fact they were Muslim, felt they had to make excuses about fast or ritual prayers. The majority of the respondents did not fast or performed prayers because of their studies. In almost all cases, respondents had religious parents or relatives, however, sometimes, according to the young people’s words, their parents’ faith was ‘lacking depth’.

For example, Elnara, who grew up in Almaty and studies at a prestigious university, admits that even she is Sunni Muslim, she does not consider herself as real Muslim: ‘I am religious, but not in an extreme way. I belong to Islam, but I do not perform *namaz* [Muslim prayer]. I do not have the right to consider myself a real Muslim. I just believe that there is God and every evening I sincerely pray and thank for everything I have. When I pray I think that all my relatives and people around me will be ok.’

¹⁰ The fast during Ramadan is one of the Five Pillars of Islam, including belief in Allah and his Oneness, the *shahada* or testimony; the five daily prayers, *namaz*; charity, or almsgiving, *zakat*; and the pilgrimage to Mecca, *hajj*.

A 20-year old Aidana from South Kazakhstan, who has a different family background from Elnara, shares almost an identical view: ‘I believe in Allah and I am Muslim, but my workload does not allow me to observe all the rules. I am spending the whole day at the university. People say that you can read *namaz* once a day. I do not agree, because I think that everything should be according to the rules. In the future, I will observe all the rules. My parents are religious, but my father lived during the Soviet times, and he does not have an understanding of the religion. He reads Qur’an and goes to the mosque, but he does not have depth.’

The testimonies of the respondents confirm the results obtained by Ro’i and Wainer (2009). In their research on religious practices of young people in five Central Asian countries, the authors came to the conclusion that Central Asian Muslims do not see contradiction in their identity of Muslim and the fact that most of them disregard the Five Pillars of Islam. Like the participants of this study, majority of respondents in Ro’I and Wainer research exercised ‘religious minimalism,’ but still identified as Muslim. I agree with the position of the authors, who explain this phenomenon by the uniqueness of the history of Central Asian Islam, that was not as dogmatic as Middle Eastern version.

According to my respondents, the faith provided them with a sense of stability and comfort. For example, a 19-year old Dana from West Kazakhstan became more religious after coming to Almaty. She mentions that during her first year at the university she was staying with her religious aunt. Dana tells that she had difficulties adjusting to her new life in the city and religion provided an opportunity to believe in herself: ‘Religion helped me. I had some difficulties when I came here. A new city, different people, everyone is new. Religion gave me more confidence.’ However, Dana explains that due to the workload at the university she does not fast: ‘I am Muslim. [But] I do fast because I have classes now. My mother is also religious, but she does not express the same rigour. She does not fast. When I talk about religion, she gets upset and says that [I] do not need it. I understand her. She grew up during the Soviet times. And she thinks that there are different terrorist organizations. She does not want me to talk about this. And I don’t share things about religion with her.’

A 20-year old Tokzhan from East Kazakhstan is the only person who fasts, but she does not perform regular prayers: ‘I am a believer, but not a deep one. I do not observe [all the rules] in a strict sense. But I do not wear open sleeves, or short skirts. I fast once a year. I do not pray [five times a day] because I am afraid I will not adhere to it. I think if I stop [praying], it is even worse compared to not doing it at all. My mother and brother perform *namaz*. They never told me I should do it; they always tell me to do what I consider right.’

It seems that religion, and Islam in particular, provided a sense of stability and was a source of morality for young people who live in a volatile society. Islam can be considered as a part of culture and tradition in Kazakhstan, but contrary to the past, young people perceive Islam as a component of individual (not collective family) identity. In some cases, the elder generation, including parents of respondents expressed their reservations about open practice of Islam by young people in light of recent government campaign to diminish the social importance of the religion.

Certainty about the future

The questionnaire that was mentioned in the previous chapter offered a set of questions regarding the future. More than 80 percent of respondents expressed confidence about future employment after graduating from the university, and about 88 percent of respondents stated they were sure about their future. However, during interviews, most of the respondents talked about their doubts and their fear of what the future might bring. All respondents mentioned two areas for concern: an ability to earn money and therefore, to provide for the potential family, and marriage. In case of female respondents, the first aspect played a particular importance.

For example, a 19-year old Komilla shares her concerns about future employment and family arrangements. Komilla is the only one person in the group who was working full time and supporting her single mother. She expresses her unwillingness to be dependent in the future: ‘I am worried about my employment. I do not know what I want, and I am not sure in what direction should I go. But I do not want to get married and to become a housewife. [I do not want to] require certain things from my husband. I know that I can be independent, I can provide for myself. If you depend on the person and if something happens to him and he is not going to be there for you. What if you have family and children? I do not want to be dependent on someone else.’

A 20-year old Nuritdin mentioned both family and career on the list of his concerns. However, he prioritises family over career: ‘Career holds the second place [for me]. I am thinking about the family. I will be the provider for the family. [I want to] be able to earn enough to buy diapers or baby formula for my children. Would I be able to buy a fur coat for my wife? I am thinking about all these life issues. I am asking all these questions, and I cannot provide the answer so far. I will have to provide [for the family].’

A 19-year old female student B reflects on her interest in getting married and having children after graduation. She also mentions importance of socialisation after marriage. She stresses: ‘I am not that interested in earning money and career. I hope that nothing will prevent

this. Studies are important, but I want children. And I do not want to work for the salary, but I prefer to have my space, my colleagues so that I will not be isolated.’

Dana, whose mother was ‘stolen’ by her father, and therefore, she has a negative view of marriage, mentions: ‘I want to marry, but I want to do this consciously, so we will be dating for a long time [before marriage] and we will not leave each other.’ Dana is also worried about the financial situation in her family. She is currently dependent on her mother, a family breadwinner: ‘[I am worried] about financial issues. My mother is working, but her salary is tiny. I will have to earn money [in the future]. I am thinking about finding a job [now].’

Aidana, a 20-year-old studying at the medical university is worried about her marriage and relationships with future in-laws affecting her career: ‘I worry that I will get married and I will stay at home. [After getting married] I will enter a different family, and I will have to adopt, not them. It will have to adjust to them. How will they perceive me? How my husband will perceive that I want to carry on with my studies, that I want to progress?’

Elnara, who is 21 and will be graduating in two years from the university, is concerned that her future job would be tedious so she would not enjoy it: ‘I have doubts [about my future]. I do not know if I will be able to succeed. You need a certain element of luck. I am worried about my employment. I am worried that I will not be able to remain there. I know for sure that I will not be able to stay in a bank from 9 am to 6 pm because I can imagine all this negative energy there. If you are working in the office and do not enjoy it, you will be the unhappiest person in the world. And I am afraid to have a job that I will not enjoy.’

As it was mentioned earlier marriage, future family and permanent job provide a recurring narrative in the interviews with the respondents. Viktoriya Tyuleneva, a director of Freedom House, who for last two years was organising and participating in leadership schools for young people across Kazakhstan, reflects that young people are most interested in three aspects that would make them feel successful and financially stable in the society: higher education, employment opportunities, and real estate. Viktoriya comments: ‘[Young people] have these three main priorities. Given the situation in Kazakhstan, these three priorities are wrong for the society and the country. Their whole life is reduced to solving three narrow, personal issues. [You can] make money, [you can] have a family, and an apartment. But [they are] not an end in itself, you can have it to invest in the society. However, [young people] focus on three interests, and they believe that by attaining them they will realise their life goals. And it is not the lack of ambition, these are ultimate dreams. Living well is their ceiling.’

Viktoriya Tyuleneva sees the reason in the system of education and the family upbringing. She believes that the society in Kazakhstan is producing unfree personalities, who are avoiding to have own opinion. Irina Mednikova, the head of the youth NGO, also came to the same conclusion: ‘Young people are quite passive, driven, executing whatever they are told. [They] act in the given framework and do what the others say, and at the same time [they] feel a sense of happiness - this is one of the characteristics of the youth.’ Through the course of interviews, other experts draw a sad picture of the younger generation as passive, quiet, submissive, and disciplined.

Existing literature (Ешпанова and Нысанбаев, 2004b; Кебина, 2004; Ешпанова, Айтбай and Айдарбеков, 2008; Тесленко, 2012) on Kazakhstan young people describes the new generation as following market standards (choosing economic freedom, being entrepreneurial, flexible, and risk avert). According to the literature, young people in Kazakhstan are striving to have decent lives, they want to rise above the average level, and most of all they value freedom and material prosperity. However, Kazakhstan sociologists also agree that due to the unstable financial situation the majority of young people are more dependent on their parents than ever before. According to Ешпанова & Нысанбаев (2004a), 80 percent of young people in the age group from 15 to 29 relied on the financial support provided by their parents regardless if they lived with their parents or separately from them, started their own family or were still single, were working or studying full time.

From my point of view, the entrepreneurial freedom requires personal freedom and the ability for critical thinking, while financial dependence can hamper the former. In the conversations with the experts, the topic of dependency on the older generation was re-emerging. Young people themselves agreed that they were facing different levels of limitations created within their own families, and what was more important, they agreed to live with these constraints. Moreover, respondents were relying on the elders for constant advice and support. The interviews also showed that in many cases they preferred not to express their own opinion.

According to the results of Ешпанова et al. (2008) and Шаукенова (2015), young generation was ready to face the challenges of the future. The results of my survey correspond to the findings of the researchers, however, interviews showed the opposite. Young respondents were concerned about their future, and anxious about employment and marriage. The so-called market values, including the desire to have a decent or even prosperous life, played a critical role in the agenda of all young respondents. However, Viktoriya Tyuleneva, a director of Freedom House in Kazakhstan, characterised interests as ‘personal.’ It can be concluded that

dreams of a permanent job, apartment and family were bringing stability that seems essential for young respondents, while their reliance on parents' decisions could be considered as a risk avoidance strategy and avoidance of responsibility per se.

Chapter 8. Raising a girl in Kazakhstan: role of a young woman in society

Soviet Kazakhstan was a patriarchal society with prevalent traditional ideas about female and male public and private roles. Having children for a married couple was considered as a natural scenario, and even the question itself about having children was rarely raised since the answer was taken for granted. The perception of a woman was directly connected to her role as a mother. Moreover, the idea of a perfect woman alluded to the one who wanted to become a mother, who took pleasure in giving birth and upbringing of children. The role of the father was different since the man did not have a desire and an ability to raise a child, but he established the family and later on kept a distance from it. In general, male figures were considered as providers even in the double breadwinner model that existed in Kazakhstan and was earlier addressed in Chapter 4. It is possible to argue, that this trend has remained after the independence.

This chapter will discuss the differential treatment of young women in the family and society, and coping mechanisms these women develop to adjust. At the end of the chapter, I will look at the ‘re-traditionalisation’ of society, a reinstatement of traditions that are targeting women. These so-called traditions provide a new set of rules for women in terms of appearance, behaviour, and belonging.

Young females constituted the majority of my respondents, and during the interviews, I had an opportunity to talk about their upbringing in the family and the society that is currently re-discovering traditions with specific emphasis put on representations of motherhood and ‘traditional’ femininity. I wanted to understand respondents’ perception of these processes. The results of these conversations are presented in this chapter. Most of my respondents were from relatively well-off families, and their parents were able to support their education. Four out of twenty respondents were raised by a single parent (mother). The majority had several siblings of both gender. Most of the respondents were from an urban area, and majority described their families as non-traditional. There were some regional and ethnical differences which will be further discussed in this chapter.

Differential treatment of daughters and sons

Gender preferences for children have been widely observed around the globe. In Chapter 2, it was mentioned that even despite relative equality of male and female children in the traditional Kazakh family, male children usually received a preferential treatment due to their position of the potential heir in the family. Differential treatment of daughters and sons in

Kazakhstan is not as adverse as in some countries of East Asia, including China, but from the position of experts who were interviewed within the frameworks of this research, it does exist.

Ainura Absemetova, one of the experts, mentions that in a Kazakh family ‘by herself a girl does not hold any intrinsic value unlike a boy, who has value by himself, as a future successor.’ This perception of a girl in the family is connected to her being born into constructed role and status. According to Ainura, in the Kazakh society the boy is not born into the role associated with ‘guardianship and protection.’ The boy is not born as a husband and father, or this association is rather minimized. As to a girl, by existing social norms, she is constructed ‘to become a future mother, and therefore, she is supposed to know how to cook, how to clean and how to run the house.’ Ainura recalls that in her youth she felt incomplete because ‘I did not know how to cook, and therefore, I was failing [my role] as a woman, [from a position of my family] I was lost for this world.’ From Ainura’s point of view, at the moment of birth, a young female is more disadvantaged, while ‘a boy does not have all these responsibilities. As soon as he marries his wife will take care of him.’

When Galiya, one of the young females who participated in the interview, talked about her family, she mentioned that her parents ‘arranged this during childhood so that [my elder brother and I] were treated in an equal way.’ Galiya’s choice of words shows that this equal treatment in her family required a certain ‘arrangement’ from her parents. And Galiya adds a little bit later: ‘I am very proud of this arrangement in my family, because in many families they have favourite children, and we did not have this. I have a good relationship with my brother. He is my friend.’ Galiya’s phrase demonstrates a feeling of pride for her parents and her brother. She also underscores the uniqueness of her family and their treatment of children, which from her point of view does not happen in other cases. Later on, when Galiya talks about the upcoming marriage of her brother, she states with pride ‘I am the daughter, my father's daughter.’

Another respondent, Ibadat, says that she was spoilt when compared to her brothers. However, she explains her preferential treatment by the dominance of boys in her family: ‘Maybe, I was more spoilt, because I am the only daughter. We have two boys in the family, and it happened so that among all the children [in the extended family], there are a lot of boys, and just two girls. Therefore, [girls] were spoilt. My dad allowed me a lot because I was a girl. When I was doing something, he never made comments. For example, in the first and second grade when I did not want to study my father allowed me to do whatever I wanted. He probably

did not think about my future. On the contrary, my mother forced me to study. My mother has beaten this habit into me, and thanks to her, I am [receiving higher education].’

Both respondents with older or younger brothers feel that they have to explain their special treatment or even equal position in the family. In case of Galiya, she praises her parents for not differentiating her from her brother, while in Ibadat’s case she tries to justify her father’s attitude.

Another respondent Symbat also has an older brother. During the conversation, Symbat jokingly mentions that her father always liked her more, while her brother was the ‘mother’s son’: ‘I do not think that he was allowed to do something, that I was not allowed. Regarding the education or financial aspects, I never felt the difference between us.’ However, Symbat mentions limitations that the family imposes on young women, as it was already discussed in the previous chapter. These limitations in all cases were stricter for young women than men: ‘The only difference is that he can return home in the morning, while I have to be home in the early evening. He is allowed to go out by himself. But I do not consider this as a ban but as a concern for me. I am a girl, and I am physically weaker, and if they know that my brother can protect himself, in my case this notion is questionable.’

Perception of societal discrimination against women

However, even if young females felt equally treasured by their parents, they faced sexism and societal discrimination in the world outside their family.

A medical student from South Kazakhstan region Aidana was the only respondent who believed that social position of women in the country was improving. She passionately stated: ‘We became a democratic country and women do not face patriarchy. They do not experience the pressure [they used to have]. There is progress for the better.’

Galiya, an outspoken young and attractive woman, had a different experience. According to her ‘the [situation] is complex. There is a problem in our society in ways men and women are perceived.’ Several times during the interview Galiya mentions that she takes a pro-active position in her university, and she hopes to have a successful career in the future. However, when she starts talking about the way she is perceived by men, her tone changes: ‘I think the situation in our country is different. I can feel it when I go to the forums and other public events. I have ideas and thoughts, but often when people see me, they think that I am a stupid girl, who has money. [They say]: “The parents gave her a car, and she is taking it for a ride like a bimbo.” They consider me this way until I say something.’ Galiya obviously finds it unpleasant to be

perceived as ‘a stupid girl’ because of her appearances and possessions (her phone and her car), instead of someone who is capable of expressing her thoughts and ideas.

Kazakhstan journalist Gulnara Bazhkenova blames Kazakhstan society for the objectification of women. According to Bazhkenova (2016), a woman is treated as an object, ‘like a flower in a garden, or a sofa in the living room.’ From her point of view, this could be proved by the fact that the society developed particular standards for women in terms of appearance, behaviour, and belonging to a certain space (for example, family). The society believes in its right to criticise a woman for violating the standards that were developed for her. Gulnara Bazhkenova provides an example of a woman who was approached by a colleague only to comment about her appearances: ‘You look horrible, you are not similar to your pictures on Facebook.’ According to Bazhkenova (2016), this deliberate comment was used as a method of influence and a weapon.

Elena Norakidze agrees with Gulnara Bazhkenova and her statement about the importance of ‘good looks’ in Kazakhstan society. Elena even names it a “cult.” According to Elena, an ideal young woman in Kazakhstan ‘must look great, she should be beautiful, because we have some perverse cult of beauty. Not health, but beauty. She has to be skinny, like a Barbie.’ At the same time, Elena states this standard of beauty does not apply to a man: “If the husband is fat, lazy, constantly watching football on the couch; if he does not work, it is because he is an unrecognised genius, and no one understands him. All of [women] should look like Barbie!” Another expert Claudia Valbuena expresses a similar idea but less radically, when she comments that ‘it is often implied that girls should be feminine which from my point is still the relic of the Soviet Union.’

To achieve her goals in the society, my respondent Galiya had to develop coping mechanisms. In the conversation, she mentions that she likes to attend events related to business start-ups, and she often has questions. So, to receive answers to her questions, especially when she has to address older men, Galiya had to develop specific approaches. Galiya mentions that men often think she is trying ‘to hook up’ with them, so to avoid this unwanted attention, Galiya says: ‘If I have questions about a project, I am trying to find a young man in a crowd, who will go and ask them for me, and then he will come to me and provide me with an answer. I find certain ways.’ Galiya continues: ‘Currently I am dating a young man, who supports me. If we go somewhere together, he presents himself as my fiancé, so people perceive me differently. They do not see a girl, but they look at me and evaluate my professional skills. When I am alone, it is more difficult.’

Galiya concludes that Kazakhstan society ‘does not like clever women. I sometime think that when they see me as a stupid girl, is not that bad. I am only ninetee, and I have my whole life ahead of me. I know that I can achieve everything with my brains, while people would prefer to ignore this.’

Symbat agrees that young women are facing more barriers when they are looking for employment. However, she does not treat it as a serious issue. Komilla has a grimmer view of the state of the society in Kazakhstan compared to Symbat. From Komilla’s point of view, a young female is a passive and obedient being, but this applies only to female’s role in the family. As it was discussed in the previous chapter Komilla expressed her fears of this fate: ‘We have this mentality that when a girl gets married she has to stay at home, clean, cook, keep quiet. She does not have the voice, and she will do whatever her husband says. I do not like this. I think there should be mutual respect, and not in a way: “I am the man, and I am in charge here, and you are no one, go cook.”’

Bota Iliyasa, a young specialist on human rights, agrees with Komilla and other participants: ‘I believe a woman in our society has a lot of responsibilities. She has to have a family and children, and she should serve her husband. She combines functions of several people in one. Girls are expected to behave modestly, to agree with many things, to avoid mentioning their own opinion, to be more pliable. When I was younger, I often heard that I should not ever argue with what adults say, and agree on everything they recommend me.’

Aiman is a medical student dreaming of becoming a neurosurgeon. In the beginning of the interview, she jokingly mentions she avoids dating Kazakh men because of their attitude to women. Later Aiman talks about unequal treatment of women that from her point of view exists in the society: ‘Kazakhs treat men in differently, in a better way. A guy is a personality, who can achieve something, can be trusted with things. He can become a neurosurgeon.’ From Aiman’s point of view this perception of women as inferior creatures could be found in history books: ‘When in the books they wrote a genealogy tree, they never mentioned names of women, as if men were born by themselves.’ According to Aiman, only a well-established woman can achieve respect: “I think that our society starts treating woman respectfully when she already established, when she matured, when she became a personality, when she can help for real, when she can save the world from the Third World War, and only at this point [the society] will say, “she has the right to live.””

Aiman provides a disturbing view of the society, which reminds of Margaret Atwood description of Gilead in *The Handmaid’s Tale*. When asked about societal perception of

Aiman's role, Aiman stated that women's reproductive capacity represents the only reason for their existence: 'They think of me as if I am a walking reproductive organ.' And her answer echoes the Atwood's protagonist description of her condition: 'We are for breeding purposes. We are two-legged wombs, that's all: sacred vessels, ambulatory chalices.'

Changing gender roles in the society: Young women about their family and career

According to Ainura Absemetova, the society in Kazakhstan has a traditional understanding of a position of a woman. Ainura believes that so-called success for a woman is achieved as soon as she reaches the 'peak of her utility,' when she becomes a wife and a mother. Ainura states: 'We still have a cult of a woman who is a mother, which implies a person who sacrificed everything for her children, who gave up on everything, who provided the very best [for children].' Claudia Valbuena disagrees: 'If you look at the history of Kazakhstan, there are years of women [contributing to] the labour market. I am sure that women worked before the 1990s. I do not think it is [possible] for women to go back to the *yurt*, [to stay with] the babies waiting for the husband. I don't think this is happening [in Kazakhstan now].'

Student B supports Claudia Valbuena's overview and belief in change. During the interviews student B mentioned that the generation of parents was raised with patriarchal views ('you are a girl, and your main task is to get married, build up a family, give birth to children'). Acknowledging that these views were connected to the lack of higher education among women of the previous generation in contrast to a man, student B adds: 'Husband was the most important thing: he was meant to have an education, while a young wife stayed at home with husband's parents and children.' But in contrast to the generation of her parents, student B's peers are 'supposed to have a career.' At the same time, she notes with sadness, that young women of today 'are forgetting about the family, the fact that we are supposed to get married.' She mentions her older sisters who are postponing marriage because 'they feel they are still young, and therefore, they are not in a hurry.'

Reflecting on her own experience, Student B notices she was proposed several times, but rejected all proposals. Explaining this decision, she mentions: 'I feel that [young men] do not want an educated wife. They want a wife who will stay at home. They do not want someone who will earn. They want a nice meal at home, children looked after, everything in order. They do let their wives study, but not for a very long time. But when [the wife] receives a degree, she will not be allowed to work.' This contradicts her own plans because Student B is interested in having a career. She stresses: 'I want to [work]. I think it is important. I see these women who stay at home. Their conversations are not interesting.' Student B explains that several of

her former classmates got married and already live in a different world surrounded by their children, and even she remained in touch with them she feels a distance: ‘They are sending photos of their children. My phone is full of their children. They ask, how I am? I have a lot to tell, but then I think they will not understand all these things about my studies and student life. And I think that if I stay at home and devote myself to the family, this would be very noble. Then in twenty years my husband will look at me, and he will be so upset that there is nothing he can talk with me about.’

Another female respondent Nazira agrees with observations of student B. Moreover, Nazira believes that career plays a more important role compared to the family in a life of a modern woman in Kazakhstan. Nazira says: ‘Obviously, the family is important, but probably it holds the second place [in women’s life]. First of all, the young woman wants to realise her potential, to reveal herself, to achieve success, and after that, she will build a family.’ However, Nazira does not associate herself with this view. ‘[Personally], I do not think it is necessary to have a career. I was explaining what is going on in Kazakhstan. As to me, the family holds the most important place, but it does not mean I do not want to realise myself.’ Nazira adds that she plans to remain in the labour market even after creating a family. She stresses: ‘As a woman, I want to be independent from my husband. I want to try myself, to develop [myself]. I do not want to be stuck in one place, [I want] to develop in my way, not to remain behind my husband, because I do not think that husband should be responsible for the whole family.’ Nazira is interested in sharing responsibility with her partner in the future, and she hopes to fulfil her plans even after marriage.

A medical student Aidana also mentions that there are rapid positive changes taking place in Kazakhstan regarding the position of women. Aidana believes that Kazakhstan society is less patriarchal than before. From Aidana’s point of view, this change is timely because family requires democracy with equal contribution from both parties. To prove her point, Aidana uses an example of her studies: ‘As we studied in biology, there are many processes in the [human] organism, including reproduction, and they depend on both sides. If every side shows their respect, there will be no conflicts.’ Aidana turns to a more philosophic mode in the discussion of the factors requiring mutual respectful treatment, including upbringing and education of the person, as well as their surroundings. She concludes with a statement on equality of genders in the family: ‘I believe that everything should be equal, so it is fair both at the family level and within the society. Everything should be done together, absolutely everything. The man should consult with a woman, and a woman should consult with a man.’ Discussing her future plans,

Aidana stresses her belief in working women: ‘As to the wages and work, I stand against women who do not work. For example, a man earns [for a living]. and a woman earns. What is wrong about it? I do not see anything wrong. When you have energy, you should work, progress, and change something.’

Based on these responses it can be concluded that traditional gender roles prevail in the family. At the same time, all three young women felt that career would play a crucial role in their life. All three females mentioned the importance of realising their dreams and achieving success, while one of the respondents justified it by necessity to stay interesting for her future husband.

Changing gender roles in the society: Young women about marriage and family

In Kazakhstan, young women in their 20s are often asked about future marriage prospects, which raises a question if marriage is the only thing they were born to do. For example, Claudia Valbuena mentions: ‘Here [in Kazakhstan] the concept of marriage is powerful. You have to get married, you have to have children. Otherwise, you are not complete. I am not married, and every time I visit the doctor I feel I should explain as if I have a problem.’ During their interviews, all female respondents expressed their interest in getting married before or after graduation from the university. The following section will provide two very similar responses from young women with entirely different backgrounds.

A 19-year-old Dilnaz comes from a rural conservative family in the southern part of Kazakhstan. She is a medical student who received a state scholarship to attend the university. She admits that she is one of many students in her group, who did not choose her profession independently. One year before finishing school Dilnaz cherished a dream of becoming an interpreter or a diplomat. However, her father did not allow her to realise her dream. During her last year at high school, Dilnaz decided to become an engineer, but her family turned her down one more time. Her parents preferred her to become a doctor, and as Dilnaz says: ‘I chose biology [for the Unified National Test], but understood nothing because I was not interested in it. I applied to the medical university because I thought it was prestigious. [The studies] became interesting only when we started internship. I understood that my parents made a right choice of sending me to the medical university.’

Dilnaz is also a representative of an ethnic group (Uzbek) living in the south of the country. In her interview, she was often referring to her conservative community with a traditional view of marriage. Dilnaz comments that ‘among Uzbeks, it is necessary to get married at the age of 18-19.’ The young women who were accepted by universities ‘are allowed

to graduate' ('Those girls who are studying, they are graduating and then getting married'). As to the young women who decided against higher education, or who failed to get placement, they usually marry. Dilnaz provides an example of her own sister-in-law: 'a girl, who married my brother, was born in 1996 [she was 18 at the moment of the interview].' Dilnaz jokingly mentions her reaction to the news about brother's wedding: 'I told my mother: "Mom, I am an old maid."'”

A 19-year-old Aigerim has a different background. She was raised in a wealthy family in the former capital of Kazakhstan. At the moment of the interview, she was studying at a prestigious private university. Aigerim's parents wanted her to become a doctor, and she was considering a future career in the medical field until the middle school. However, after the seventh grade, she decided that medical school was 'too long and challenging,' so she chose finance for her major. Aigerim notices that her university does not provide full or partial scholarships, so her parents fully cover her tuition and maintenance fees. To the question about marriage, Aigerim replies: 'My parents will be happy if I marry [soon]. My mother is telling me: 'Aigerim, it is time to meet someone.'”

These conversations with two different young women support the expression Elena Norakidze used that 'marriage for a young woman in Kazakhstan is a social norm.' According to Elena, '[from the moment of birth] a girl or a young woman is programmed to marry, to give birth to children, to obey her husband, to cook *borsch* [a Ukrainian soup], to work, to raise three children while taking care of her husband.' Two of my interviewees did not object to this role.

The 'forgotten Kazakh traditions': stealing of a bride and *uyat*

In the Kazakh history stealing of a bride existed along with the matchmaking, but the former was extremely rare (Ларина & Наймова 2010). As it was discussed earlier in Chapter 2, in the traditional Kazakh society the time interval between matchmaking and marriage could have been stretched over several years due to the existence of *kalym*, or the price for a bride. *Kalym* was paid by the family of a groom in multiple instalments. The Russian statesman Konstantin Pahlen (1964) mentions several cases when the groom's family failed to pay a full price due to change in financial circumstances. This violation of the initial contract led to the cancelation of the marriage. The situation was complicated even more, when the groom attempted to steal a bride. This deed had severe consequences for the relationships between the families, and for the future of young people.

Heroes of Mukhtar Auezov's novel about the life of the national poet Abay told a story about stealing of a bride for romantic reasons. In Auezov's description two young people, Enlik

and Kebek, fell in love with each other. However, the parents of the young woman, Enlik, has promised her to a different person, which forces the young couple to run away. The consequences for the couple are tragic with both young people perishing at the hands of their families.

In modern Kazakhstan, young men steal women without the consent of the latter. A young woman is brought to the house of her stealer and potential husband, where the mother of a 'groom' puts a scarf on a head of a 'bride,' and for questionable reasons, this 'ceremony' creates a bond between the stealer and his victim. Even if a young woman was taken to the house of a groom by force and against her will, her family is often reluctant to take her back because she spent the previous night at the house of a single young man. Usually, the women who were 'stolen' do not appeal to the authorities because this creates ambiguity regarding to their further position in the society. For the same reason, the statistics regarding these cases does not exist. In the discussion of this issue, members of the public brand this violent act as a tradition, neglecting the existence of the punishment in the Criminal Code.

None of the respondents in my study were married. However, two young women who were interviewed (Aiman and Dana) mentioned that their mothers were "stolen." According to Aiman's story, her mother studied in Almaty, where her father 'saw her, fell in love and stole her.' The family of Aiman's father did not accept the young woman. Aiman comments that her father's mother 'was pretending as if my mom and I did not exist.' The story ended by separation between Aiman's parents. While retelling the story of her mother, Aiman focused on the stormy relationships between her parents, dismissing the fact of 'stealing' as something almost natural. Later, when she talked about violence that she observed in her family Aiman said: 'When Kazakh [men] were stealing [women], it was normal, it happened often, but the relationship within the family were not violent.'" For Aiman, the original act of violence that led to stealing of her mother was justified by the tradition. At the same time, Aiman was disturbed by repeated violence directed toward her mother during the time when her parents remained married.

Another student, Dana, mentioned 'stealing' almost casually: 'My father stole my mother, therefore, I have a bad impression of marriage.' Dana further explained that she would prefer to date her future husband for prolonged period before marriage because even at the moment of the interview she still vividly remembered the divorce that her parents went through.

Asiya Khairullina, a representative of an NGO protecting women's rights, explains that often those people who are involved in the stealing of a bride, including the victim, refer to this

crime as a tradition. She mentions that this interpretation of tradition is rather superficial. According to Asiya, in the Kazakh customary law *adat*, the ‘stealing’ of a bride was considered as a serious crime that oversaw harsh measures for the violator, including execution, condemnation or exile. Asiya Khairullina comments that after the collapse of the Soviet Union there were several changes made to the Criminal Code: ‘These articles [that involved punishment for ‘stealing’ young women] were removed from the Criminal Code. [The new Criminal Code] adopted a universal language [regarding] abduction and sexual harassment of a minor. This created plenty of loopholes that allow avoiding punishment for the violators.’ In cases when ‘stealing’ involves women younger than 20 years of age, or even children, who cannot defend themselves, justice does not take place. In every case, according to Asiya, these loopholes allowed to justify this criminal act through tradition.

The status of a woman in the society also plays an important role. According to existing prejudice, a young woman cannot return to the house of her parents because she spent time at the house of a single young man. By returning home, she brings shame on her family, which is summarised by a Kazakh word *uyat*. Generally, ‘*uyat*’ implies any shame, disgrace, or unworthy act or an event that may cause the condemnation of society. However, in the context of bride stealing, *uyat* is no longer gender-neutral since it does not apply to a young man who violates a woman.

Lately *uyat* has been used in contexts related exclusively to women. This word was applied by predominantly male audience condemning candid online photographs of pop stars and actresses or even regular women. *Uyat* reappeared when both male and female users denounced young women who accused a civil servant of harassment. And finally, *uyat* was used to condemn women in Kazakhstan who were sharing stories of sexual harassment and sexual violence committed against them within the framework of campaign #IAmNotAfraidToSpeak (#яНебоюсьСказать, #яНебоюсьСказать), a campaign started by Ukrainian social activist and joined by many women across the world. Recently, *uyat* is being narrowly defined to relate to the role and place of women in the society. A Kazakh journalist Madi Mambetov (2016) defined *uyat* as a recent phenomenon directed at denying women the right for independence.

Changing gender roles in the society: gender relations in the family

During the interviews, several respondents mentioned that they lived in patriarchal families. For example, for Symbat, patriarchy is expressed through decision making of the male head of the family. Symbat says that ‘patriarchy in Kazakhstan is oppressive, and my family is

not an exception. In certain issues, things will be done the ways my father said. Otherwise, we are gathering at the family table in the evening and discussing things that are taking place around the world. My parents always encouraged us to speak out and think critically. We do not criticise but discuss, and my father likes to hear my opinion... But sometimes, it is impossible to say: “Papa, you [using *siz* or respectful form of “you” - AK] are not right.”

Aidana, who also comments on Kazakh society being patriarchal, associated it with ‘women getting pressure’ from men in the family. However, later she stated, ‘In the patriarchal society, men are expected to do everything. But he is also a person. We should not forget that he is also getting tired, and he needs support, and a woman should understand and support [him].’ In Aidana’s description, a man presents a major decision-maker and provider for the family, a person who is involved in all processes, and for this reason, Aidana pities him, stressing that ‘he gets tired.’ For Aidana, female’s involvement is even logical because she helps a man to carry his burden.

From the point of Sholpan Baibolova, a head of Kazakhstan NGO, Aidana’s position is somewhat unusual. Sholpan Baibolova comments that young women are willing to play a passive role in the future marriage: ‘young women... have this perception that they will marry and the husband will provide everything [for them]. And I am asking: “What are going to provide in exchange? The husband is a human, and he also needs certain things. What are you going to give him?”’ Sholpan Baibolova even compares this treatment of the male figure to the ATM. She stresses: ‘[A man] is not an ATM.’

In her interview, another representative of an NGO Asiya Khairullina explained the existence of this view by perpetrating societal stereotypes regarding men’s and women’s behaviour. She mentioned: ‘Our organisation often says that successful tomorrow is created today and sometimes I feel that boys are not part of this process. If you look at the popular literature [on the upbringing of children], it is full of horrible stereotypes. Boys are supposed to be masculine, as if they are robots. And the girls are the cats. If you check any popular resource on the upbringing of boys and girls, and there are millions of resources like this, and all of them are filled with this information’. In response to Asiya Khairullina’s comment Aiman, a medical student draws a picture of a proper young woman: ‘She is modest. She does not think. She is religious. She follows [all orders]. Having an opinion? What does it mean? She has to cook, to clean, to love [parents of the husband] more than hers, to kiss their feet. She has to cook for forty guests and give offspring.’

According to Ainura Absemetova, regional differences influence female's role in the family. She comments there are differences in a way woman is treated in the northern regions, compared to the south. Ainura mentions, that due to the geographical closeness to Russia and therefore, the constant exchange of cultural codes, 'there is more responsibility sharing between male and female in the north.' As it was discussed earlier, the southern part of Kazakhstan is more traditional. Describing complex hierarchies, existing in the southern families, Ainura makes a comparison with entangled family relationships in the popular series 'The Game of Thrones': 'In the south, there are distinct roles [divided between the members of the family]. There is no nuclear family [which includes] a husband and a wife. [Instead], there is an extended family with sisters-in-law, *kudalar* [parents-in-law], sisters, and brothers. And everyone has their niche in this big complicated, twisted family, and everyone has their script.'

A medical student Aidana from South Kazakhstan, travelled to many Kazakhstan cities and 'had an opportunity to compare people.' Aidana states that the South is more traditional compared to any other regions. Even she does not consider herself traditional, she notes that certain traditions are sensible, including the respect for elders. And as Aidana believes, some traditions are more visible in the South compared to other regions.

While describing western regions, Ainura Absemetova commented that prevalent cultural codes and behaviours within the family stop being relevant when financial issues come into the picture. 'Western Kazakhstan has harsh conditions: there is no place for intrigues. There are rules. The mother-in-law is the head [of the family], and the daughter-in-law has to follow. However, if the daughter-in-law earns more than everyone else [in the family], the rules change. There is power-money relationship due to severe poverty. Therefore, the person in the family who owes money rules the family.'

According to the young respondents, ethnicity and division between the city and rural area also contributed to perception of gender role. The traditional perception of woman's role was observed in rural areas among all ethnic groups. Nevertheless, Dungan and Uyghur ethnicities were more conservative even in comparison to the Kazakhs. There were several young women among my respondents who came to Almaty from rural areas. Malika A was one of those students. Her interview was particularly interesting because she was also a representative of a Dungan minority. Dungans, an ethnic group of about 40,000 people in Kazakhstan, live on the territory of several Central Asian countries. They are believed to be descendants of Chinese Muslims who migrated to the Tsarist Turkestan at the end of the 19th century.

Malika A describes her community in the following way: ‘Rural life is entirely different, people have a different mentality, there are only Dungans there. Here [in the city] people are different.’ Malika A mentions that during her first year at the university she went through a cultural adjustment that lasted for several months: ‘People [in the city] are different in every sense. [Their] thoughts and interests are different. Because we are Muslim, in our community young women stay at home. They graduate from school and get married before turning twenty. This is according to Chinese and Muslim [tradition]. About 95 percent of young women do not have education, and they do not go to the university after school, while here [in the city] girls do not even think about marriage.’ To the question why women get married in her community, Malika A remarks that at twenty, a single Dungan woman is considered an old maid. Malika A draws a parallel to the Kazakhs: ‘The Kazakhs are the same, with only exception that for the Kazakh [girl] [the critical age] is 22-23.’

With amusement, Malika A mentioned a story of her classmate who announced her decision of remaining single: ‘I had a classmate last year. She did not want to get married at all (Malika laughs). She was saying she would prefer to live with forty cats.’ Based on her observations of city life, Malika concludes that bold young women in the city are ‘independent’ and ‘they think the way guys think: they have their own goals,’ which is different from her native village, where ‘a [regular] girl dreams about getting married, having children and living good life.’

Claudia Valbuena believes that young women in Kazakhstan are experiencing pressure about fulfilling their destiny. She also admits that in the society the idea of having children is similar to being married: ‘children are another inescapable part of the scenario.’ Describing a regular young woman fulfilling her child-bearing function, Elena Norakidze mentions: ‘she is supposed to give birth to the offspring because this is her duty.’ However, from Elena's point of view, some young women are trying to escape the social construction of their role by ‘running away from the plan their parents developed for them, which involves being married and having kids,’ similar to Malika’s classmate mentioned earlier.

In Malika’s words, her experience of city life had made her more ambitious. According to her expression, she ‘no longer wants to be dependent on her parents and [future] husband’ even though she is still interested in getting married.

Echoing ideas about crucial social and cultural issues, feature films often reflect the ways we perceive these issues. In 2016, Kazakhstan film industry introduced two different films about the fate of women in Kazakhstan. Both films addressed several narratives that were

discussed by my respondents: an importance of the status of married woman; a choice that has to be made between achieving professional goals and building a successful career versus creating a family; importance of preserving traditions, and flexibility of these traditions where financial arguments are involved.

In a comedy ‘Married at Thirty,’ Askar Bisembin, a successful Kazakhstan director showed adventures of a hapless young woman who remains single despite turning thirty, a venerable age for marriage according to multiple comments in the film. A protagonist in the movie, a successful young woman, feels constant pressure to get engaged. The idea of getting married is so strong, that she compromises her integrity, when she meets the ‘perfect man archetype,’ a dream of any woman in Kazakhstan. In the film, the female protagonist is willing to sacrifice her career and her dreams to preserve this relationship and to fulfil the societal expectations about her role of future wife and mother. The creators of ‘Married at Thirty’ presented viewers with a happy ending, uniting the couple despite all obstacles and lies.

The second movie “Tokal” touches upon semi-legal institute of second wives (*tokal* in Kazakh). It should be noted that starting from the beginning of the 2000s, several members of the Kazakhstan Parliament made attempts to legalise polygamy by repeatedly proposing amendments to ‘The Law On Marriage and Family’ and using the demographic argument. In the film, a wife of a successful businessman learns about his second family. Her parents advised her to embrace the status quo because at some point in the past a similar arrangement was made by her parents, and her mother accepted this idea. The female protagonist protests against the established institute of *tokal*. This drama touches upon ‘the perfect woman archetype’ in Kazakhstan. According to this movie, the society offers only two roles to a woman: successful career women, or obedient housewife.

Both films reflect an existing situation with a public and private role of a woman in the modern Kazakhstan society. By raising questions about marriage and family, screenwriters one more time demonstrated that a woman in Kazakhstan lacks choices. I started this chapter with an assumption mentioned by Ainura Absemetova that a girl in the modern Kazakhstan society is born into the construct or a role that comes with prescribed functions and that deprives young woman of her traits and turns her more or less into a symbol or an object. As several interviewees mentioned over the course of our conversations, the role of women in the family and often in society is limited to traditional notions associated with femininity and motherhood. As in the 19th century, female roles are associated with making tea, preparing food and giving birth to children. There is certainly a paradox because in Kazakhstan society Soviet ideas of

equality between genders and 'double-breadwinner model' coexist with hierarchised gender roles inside the family. This chapter allowed to demonstrate an emerging trend of 're-traditionalisation' of society, including revival of such norms as 'bride stealing,' '*uyat*,' revival of the institute of second wives (*tokal*), etc. Re-traditionalisation reinstated hierarchical gender relations, where masculine dominates feminine in various social spheres, including family, work, education, and others.

Chapter 8. Discussion of the results

This research was devoted to the evolution of the notion of childhood on the example of Kazakhstan. The idea of childhood as a social construct was suggested by Philippe Ariès and further developed by several generations of sociologists. Sociology of childhood introduced a concept of children as independent agents. As Wartofsky (1983, 7) mentions adults as actors and constructors can be more effective than children, or adults are better in exploring and explaining the world around us. Nevertheless, a child is ‘an agent in its own construction and as naturally an agent as any adult.’

This research allowed to discuss dynamic construct of childhood in Kazakhstan that evolved over time under the influence of historic and cultural factors, including Kazakh traditions and Soviet perception of the role of children in the society. Through my study of pre-Revolutionary Kazakh society, I showed an important value held by both male and female children. Their birth and upbringing were celebrated through rich and complicated rituals. These rituals followed both male and female children on their path from immaturity to maturity. However, if a young man turned into adult with establishment of his household, a young woman for all her life remained under protection and control of her father or her husband.

In the Soviet Union, the child was ‘the object of state upbringing’ (Stearns 2010, 104). In the 1920s, the original image of the child as an equal partner and a small adult was driven by the revolutionary ideas of the New Society. However, by the mid-1930s, the Soviet propaganda has changed the construct of the child due to the collision between the personality cult of Josef Stalin. New fragile and vulnerable childhood required a reinstatement of the institute of the family, which takes place in the 1930s. For example, Svetlana Boym describes this cultural transformation of Soviet society during this period: ‘the family metaphor is back, with Stalin in the roles of lover, father, husband, and grandfather of the people’ (quoted by Alexopoulos 2008, 97).

During the Stalin years the Soviet state became a living metaphor of the family. The Soviet ideology promoted a very rigid family hierarchy with children as docile and obedient beings at the bottom of the pyramid, while Stalin evolved into fatherly figure, taking care of all children in the Soviet country. This construct of a child was exploited by the Soviet state even

after Stalin's death. The image of an obedient child remained undisputed throughout the Soviet period, and even after 1991.

The ratification of the Convention on the Rights of the Child in 1994 in Kazakhstan revived an idea of children as full members of society with full set of rights. However, the state preferred to focus more on vulnerable groups of children, including children in the institutions, children with disabilities, and other children at risk. This led to the creation of policies mostly directed at these group of children, at the expense of promotion of full set of rights for all groups of children living in the country. In the discussion of childhood in Kazakhstan at the policy level it is still widely accepted that children and young people are in the process of growing up to become adults to contribute to the economic and political development of the country in the future. Whereas repeating the notion that children represent the national treasure and therefore, they are the most important members of the society, in the state documents children are portrayed as 'vulnerable' and therefore, in need of protection (Nazarbayev, 2012).

Kazakhstan remained a paternalistic society and therefore the state does not accept the idea of the younger generation as active agents in their own right. Childhood is still defined in a relation 'to adult life, never simply in and of itself' (Knight 2009, 791) and in opposition to the concept of an adult. However, by defining categories of childhood and adulthood, young participants of this study confirmed existence of asymmetrical power-relationship between these two constructs at the family level as well. The image of a child described by the participants was soft and innocent, while the construct of an adult acquired Superman or even godlike characteristics. Discrepancy between prevalence of negative characteristics in the category of the 'child' versus positive characteristics in the category of the 'adult' also proves asymmetrical power relationships. According to participants of this study, children cannot be treated equally because they are not old enough, which leads to the conclusion about their incompetence and irrationality.

The experts who participated in the interviews expressed their concern regarding passivity, silence, submissiveness, and discipline exercised by young people in Kazakhstan. For example, Irina Mednikova, the head of the youth NGO concluded, that 'The youth is quite passive, driven, executing whatever it is told. [They] work in the given framework and do what the others say, and at the same time [they] feel a sense of happiness.'

This study allowed to demonstrate that contrary to the Soviet period, the upbringing of children in modern Kazakhstan is no longer the responsibility of the state. According to the

participants, parents and therefore, the family should protect and nurture childhood. Young people agreed that they were facing different limitations created within their families, and what was more important, they decided to live with these restrictions. Young participants were relying on the elders for advice and support, they delegated decision making to the parents in the spheres of education and career. The interviews also showed that in many cases young participants preferred to suppress their opinion even in the most basic situations. This dependency on the older generation has lengthened the transition period between ‘childhood’ and ‘adulthood,’ or lengthened the period of ‘childhood’ for participants.

This particular feature could be explained by two factors. First of all, Kazakhstan sociologists remind us that due to the unstable financial situation the majority of young people were more dependent on their parents than ever before. According to Yeshpanova and Nysynbayev (2004a), 80 percent of young people in the age group from 15 to 29 relied on the financial support provided by their parents regardless if they lived with their parents or separately from them, started their own family or were still single, were working or studying full time. The results of this earlier study were confirmed by this research, where almost all participants were entirely dependent on their family funding.

The second factor might be related to the element of traditional upbringing. Historians (Teslenko 2012; Masanov 1995) mention the ultimate power of the male head of the household over his children. Moreover, in the traditional Kazakh family, even after receiving independence (after marriage), the older male children were supposed to follow their father’s orders or wishes. At the same time children of any age were expected to express their gratitude and obedience towards parents during their whole live.

Modern parents of the respondents were interested in controlling every aspect of the life of their offspring, from the basic ones (for example, political views) to the most critical decisions about future life choices (for example, choice of profession and prospective partner). And young people who were interviewed for this research justified these interventions by the traditional notions of parenthood, by obligation of children towards families to be obedient and grateful.

Considering the strict control exercised by the parents towards their children, it is possible to assume, that young people will continue to negotiate their future social participation with their parents. As a result, this generation of young people in Kazakhstan will be, to borrow an expression used by Hansen’s, ‘stuck in the compound’ (Hansen, 2005). Therefore, hierarchical

structure of the family that existed in Kazakhstan for centuries, suppression of the views of young people explained by the 'tradition' and current economic instability, will prolong the transitional stage of life (transition from childhood to adulthood) for undetermined period of time.

Masquelier (2013) describes a similar phenomenon in Niger. In the world of scarce jobs, her respondents bemoaned their dependence on the family and especially on the older generation for their stability and welfare. However, as the author mentions this also denies young people opportunities and advancement. This lack of ambition is reflected in the dreams of participants about the future. Commenting on their future aspirations, young respondents voiced their desire to have stability in their lives, including a permanent job, an apartment and a family. Viktoriya Tyuleneva, a director of Freedom House in Kazakhstan, characterised all these interests of the participants as 'personal.'

In this regard, religiosity and Islam, can be considered as a factor that brings stability and comfort to the current lives of young people. It is worth noting, that participants who considered themselves religious often choose Islam independently from the adults. For many of them, religion was the only area where it was possible to avoid interference of their parents and other adults.

This research also demonstrated that position of a young woman in family is even more vulnerable compared to a young man. A girl in modern Kazakhstan is born into a construct or a role that comes with prescribed functions and that deprives young woman of her personal traits and turns her more or less into a symbol or an object. As several interviewees mentioned, the traditional role of a women in the family is limited to making tea, preparing food, and giving birth to children, which did not change for several decades or even centuries. As in the 19th century, a construct of a women as obedient and docile deprives females of a chance to become full members of the society. Female participants of this research demonstrated that they were fully adjusted to this oppressive treatment, moreover, they were providing theoretical justifications for the oppression, by constructing it as traditions.

By constructing children and young people as passive recipients of adult protection in the child-adult relations, Kazakhstan society is depriving younger members of the society of exercising responsibility for their lives (Lansdown 2001). This situation reflects the discussion on children and young people as 'human beings' or 'human becomings' (James 2009). As Lee (2001) defines, the human beings are stable, complete, self-possessed and self-controlling, capable of independent thought and action. While, the human becoming is changeable,

incomplete and lacks the self-possession and self-control, therefore lacking independence of thought and action. The division between ‘beings’ and ‘becomings’ is that between the complete and independent and the incomplete and dependent. Qvortrup (1994, 4) suggests ‘human beings’ approach rather than ‘human becomings,’ therefore, allowing them to have their own activities and their own time and their own space, – so they would not be defined as subordinate beings. The treatment that children and young people receive as ‘the future of our society,’ ‘the next generation’ and ‘our most precious resource’ deprives them of an existence of human being in the present. From the position of the society, children and young people should wait patiently to become an adult and start living (James 2009, 388). An alternative construction was provided by the Children’s Forum who declared in their official statement to the UN General Assembly ‘you call us the future, but we are also the present’ (Children's Forum 2002).

Limitations and Future Directions

The accounts presented in this dissertation are partially based on available secondary material, including scientific studies, statistical data, government reports, administrative documents, etc. The amount of empirical investigations and systematic information-gathering on changes in children’s lives and their social conditions and experiences in Kazakhstan after the independence, remains scant. Also, the information provided is typically indirect, that is system-based and not directly child-centred. This is in fact in remarkable contrast to the amount of worry and concern expressed in public over the numerous risks and threats that economic changes are assumed to have brought to children. However, with Kazakhstan joining the agenda of Sustainable Development Goals, there is a hope that national agency of statistics will start providing more disaggregated data related to children, so there will be more statistical information available for the analysis in the future.

There is a need for additional studies of social and cultural contexts of childhood to identify experiences of children depending on ethnic (for example, Dungans and Uyghurs), regional, urban versus rural, and other characteristics. Future research should investigate how and why the ideas of participants change depending on their social and economic status.

A limitation of the present study is connected to the group of participants who chose higher education trajectory. I did not consider views of young people who worked full time or chose vocational education.

This study was conducted with a relatively homogeneous sample in terms of ethnic group, socioeconomic status and even their gender. Unfortunately, despite participation of both male

and female students in the survey, female students expressed more interest in sharing their experiences with the researcher, compared to male students. Most of the data I had was skewed towards female views. Therefore, further studies are needed to assess how perceptions for young men and women may differ.

Selecting participants for interviews, I did not consider pre-school or school children. The preschool group is particularly important, because it has almost no voice in existing studies on childhood in the post-Soviet space. In her research of preschool group in revolutionary Russia, Lisa Kirschebaum (2001, 165) provided a brilliant quote of Barbara Beatty on her study of American preschool education: ‘young children are the most silent and silenced of historical actors.’ This quote is relevant even today.

This study paid insufficient attention to parental background and paternal jobs. Unemployment or underemployment are frequent in families in Kazakhstan, especially in the midst of the economic crisis. And it is logical that unemployment of the parents has negative effect on the family’s economic circumstances and child welfare (Parcel & Menaghan, 1994). Considering existing dependency of young people on their parents, it is interesting to understand how the dynamics in the relations between children and adults change in the situation of unemployment or underemployment of the parents.

Finally, this study did not pay enough attention to the religiosity of participants. Despite the fact that some authors mention that even during the Soviet times, Islamic customs remained a significant factor in Kazakh culture (Hiro, 1994), there is an overall consensus that Kazakhstan stayed more or less secular before the independence in comparison with other Central Asian republics. In the 1990s, the country experienced religious revival (Omeliicheva, 2011, 2016b). Due to the increasing mobility of the country’s population, different Islamic practices were brought to Kazakhstan from the outside, including Saudi Arabia, Egypt, and Turkey (Yarlykapov, 2008). As a result, there was significant interest in Islam, especially among young people (Yemelianova, 2014).

Almost 87 percent of participants of this study described themselves as religious. It can be explained by the fact that many of the participants were growing during the time of the rapid spread of various Islamic practices and spiritual literature. However, as Alma Sultangaliyeva (Султангалиева, 2014) points out this number does not address the level of religiosity. According to her research on the religious identity of Kazakh people, the share of Muslims regularly attending mosques in Kazakhstan does not exceed 17.4 percent, while every second Kazakh who considers himself as a believer, does not observe religious rituals. Unfortunately,

it is also difficult to make assumptions about versions of Islam prevalent among respondents. Moreover, during my research, I did not have an opportunity to explore if religion played merely a ceremonial importance in lives of the participants, or it was a need to fill the moral-ethical vacuum or a symbol of protest against a total parental control of young people's lives.

Implications for practice

The United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child reaffirmed the status of the child in the society as a human being with a full set of rights. Ratification of the Convention in Kazakhstan in 1994 helped to shift children to the centre of policy agenda. However, so far Kazakhstan policymakers have been reluctant to support the inclusion of children and youth in the process of decision-making. Policymakers in Kazakhstan (as majority of adults) rely on a paternalistic view of children's capacity that leaves little room for children's agency and competence.

In this regard, Prout (Prout, 2003) observes that 'children's participation is a subject high in rhetoric for the most part, but, low in practical application.' Consultations with children is a new practice in Kazakhstan. Possibly, juvenile courts are the only example of children's participation and consultations. Despite the existence of youth and child parliaments in schools and universities across the country, this form of children's and youth's engagement was less than successful and did not have any effect on improvement of their well-being.

In this regard, research by the international organisations, including UN Children's Fund allowed to study children's views of their world and to learn more about their problems and concerns. Studies by UNICEF and Save the Children (and recently, the Friedrich Ebert Stiftung) involved children and young people as participants. However, as it was mentioned earlier, these organisations tend to focus on 'vulnerability' of children, including children with disability, children in the institutional settings, and children at risk. It is understandable that this approach allows to draw the attention of the government to the most problematic areas of social welfare, education, and healthcare. But focus on 'problematic' children shifts attention from the agenda of all children and young people. It is important to study 'everyday experiences' of children to understand their relationships with family and community, to learn about different aspects of their lives during their playtime and studies in various physical spaces and social contexts. Ideally, the participation of children and young people should imply their involvement at all stages, including planning and delivery of services for beneficiaries.

Kazakhstan society is restrictive and oppressive in the way it constructs children, young people, and women. In this regard, to make opinions of these groups be heard, it is vital to overcome biases and stereotypes prevalent in the society.

Appendix 1. Form of informed consent

Evolving notions of childhood: the example of Kazakhstan

Researcher: Anel Kulakhmetova, PhD Candidate, Centre of Development Studies, University of Cambridge.

This research is conducted to understand changing notions of childhood in Kazakhstan after the collapse of the Soviet Union in 1991. This research will allow to understand how young people aged 18 to 25 perceive themselves, how they understand relationships with their peers and their families, and how they see their future. This research is being conducted for PhD in development studies.

You are chosen to partake in this research under the following conditions:

- 1) You are a youth, between the ages of 18 and 25 years old
- 2) You were born in Kazakhstan

Your participation in the research involves participation in the survey with follow-up interview.

The results of this study might be published or presented, while the identity of all study participants will remain anonymous.

Any questions concerning the project or the information provided in this form can be directed to Anel Kulakhmetova (PhD Candidate), Center of Development Studies, Department of Politics and International Relations, University of Cambridge, email: ak792@cam.ac.uk

If you have any concerns about the project or you believe that your rights of a participant of this study were violated, please, contact Centre of Development Studies, University of Cambridge, 7 West Road, Cambridge CB3 9DT, by email: devstudies-adm@lists.cam.ac.uk

Your signature on the form of informed consent signifies, that:

- you understood the information presented in the form
- you had an opportunity to ask the researcher any questions you consider relevant and to present your own opinion
- the researcher provided answers to all your questions

- you understand the idea of research as well as all possible benefits and

I understand and agree that my interview will be recorded and that I can withdraw my consent at any time.

Participant _____ Date _____

Researcher _____ Date _____

Appendix 2. Interview questions for young participants

Can we start this interview by talking a little bit about you? Can you tell me where are you from? What region? City? Tell me about your family? How do you spend your time?

You are studying at the university. How did you make decision about applying to your field? Why did you choose this particular field?

How in general decisions are made in your family? Do you make decisions together with your parents? What about financial decisions?

From your point of view, you parents support critical thinking? How?

How do you understand a notion “traditional family”? Does it correspond to the image of your own family?

Do you communicate with grandparents? What role do they play in your life?

You mentioned you have (older, younger) sibling (brother, sister). Do you think you have same opportunities in your family? In the society? Do you feel difference in the way parents treat you? Society treats you?

There is a phrase: “Youth is our future”, or “Children are our future”. How do you understand this phrase? Do you see yourself as future? What about present?

Do you connect your future with Kazakhstan? Why? From your point of view, what state is expecting from your generation? What do you expect from your future? Is it positive? What worries you about your future?

Appendix 3. Interview questions for experts

Can you talk a little bit what your organization does? I read about (your recent project).

Can you tell me some specifics?

There are different groups of children and young people you are helping. In the conversation with (previous respondent), it was mentioned that children do not complain, so how do you work with them?

How children/youth come across your project? Who is your audience? Is there a particular way to describe them? Do you work with different regions? What cities? Do you think there are regional differences?

Can you talk about the value that children/youth represent for the state? It is often proclaimed that children and youth are very important for the state.

You mentioned earlier that the state considers this population as “not yet” (not yet ready to accept responsibility, not yet ready to work, not yet experienced enough, etc). Can you explain what are particular reasons for this perception? Was situation before 1991 any different? Do you believe that Soviet approaches/Soviet model is different from the current one?

There are several groups of rights in the Convention on the Rights of the Child, including protection rights, and participation rights. How would you categorise activity of your organization? Would you say you realize participation rights of children and young people? Their voice is usually absent in discussion.

Children/youth in the official proclamations are often described as the future. How do you see this phrase? Why they are not present? What is their value for our society?

Appendix 4. Questionnaire on perception of childhood

This questionnaire is part of the research project which aims at finding out more about childhood experiences. Your university has been chosen to be part of this project. Please reply to the questions below by choosing the answer which fits you the most. Your reply will be anonymous. Individual answers cannot be tracked back to the respondent. Filling in the questionnaire will take about 30 minutes. Your reply is very important to us.

Thank you for your time!

In this part of the survey, I will ask you about your perceptions of childhood and adulthood

When you think about yourself, do you consider yourself (choose everything that applies)?

- A child
- An adult
- A teenager
- Other, please specify

How your parents perceive you?

- A child
- An adult
- A teenager
- Other, please specify

How you teachers perceive you?

- A child
- An adult
- A teenager
- Other, please specify

How your friends perceive you?

- A child
- An adult
- A teenager
- Other, please specify

How society perceives you?

- A child
 - An adult
-

- A teenager
- Other, please specify

In the following space provide your definition of an adult? Choose five adjectives that come to mind?

In the following space provide your definition of a child? Choose five adjectives that come to mind?

From your point of view childhood stops at age ____

From your point of view, is there a difference between adulthood and childhood?

If your answer is yes, please elaborate why there is a difference?

If your answer is no, please elaborate why there is a difference?

Do you agree or disagree with the following statements:

From your point of view to be considered an adult you have to	Strongly agree	Agree	Neutral	Disagree	Strongly disagree
Leave separately from your parents					
Finish school					
Receive higher education					
Get full-time job					
Become financially independent from your parents					
Be able to support a family					
Marry					
Become a parent					
Other, please explain					

Additional comments:

Are you acquainted with the expression “happy childhood”?

What does “happy childhood” imply? Choose five adjectives that come to mind to describe “happy childhood?”

Do you think you experienced “happy childhood?”

Do you think the state should play a role in the provision of “happy childhood?”

If yes, please elaborate why the state should do that? Please, explain how the state can provide “happy childhood?”

If no, please elaborate why the state should not do that?

Do you agree or disagree with the following statements?

Statement	Strongly agree	Agree	Neutral	Disagree	Strongly disagree
Every child should have a happy childhood					
Children are our future					

Additional comments:

In this part of the survey I will ask you about you and your family

Before starting at KazNMU did you live with your parents, including adoptive parents??

- Yes, with my mother and my father in the same household

Are both of your parents alive?

- Yes, both of my parent are alive
 No, only my father is alive
 No, only my mother is alive
-

-
- | | |
|--|--|
| <input type="checkbox"/> Yes, with my mother, but not my father A teenager | <input type="checkbox"/> No, both of my parents have passed away |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Yes, with my father, but not my mother | |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Yes, with my mother for some of the time, and with my father for some of the time | |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Other (Please, say who you lived with) | |

Do you have other siblings?

- Yes
 No

How many siblings do you have?

- 1
 2
 More than 3

What is educational status of your father?

- Secondary education
 Professional technical education
 Higher education
 Other, please, specify

What is educational status of your mother?

- Secondary education
 Professional technical education
 Higher education
 Other, please, specify

From your point of view the economic condition of your family is?

- Very good
 Fairly good

To what extent has the recent currency devaluation affected the economic conditions of you and your family?

- Not at all

-
- Average
 - Poor
 - Very poor

- A little bit
- Quite a bit
- A lot
- I don't know

Three years ago the economic condition of your family was?

- Better than now
- About the same
- Worse than now
- I don't know

How do you think your family is managing with money?

- I think we have enough money for ordinary things and special things
- I think we have money for ordinary things but not for special things
- I don't think we have enough money for ordinary things or for special things
- I don't know

Compared to your classmates do you think your family is?

- Most well off
- Better off than most
- Among the average
- Worse than the average
- Among the poorest

You are currently studying at KazNMU, are you studying?

- On a grant
- On a credit
- You are paying for education yourself
- Your parents are paying for your education
- Other, please explain

Have you ever worked for pay?

- Yes
- No

How old were you when you started working for pay?

- Less than 15
- 16
- 17
- More than 17

About how many hours a week did you work?

- Less than 5 hours
- 5-10
- 10-20
- 20-40
- More than 40

What type of work do (did) you do? Start with current one

How much do (did) you earn in a month?
(State your latest income

Are you currently looking for work?

- Yes
- No

Are your parents employed?

- Yes, both of my parents are employed

What type of work do (did) you do? Start with current one

-
- No, my father is currently unemployed
 - No, my mother is current unemployed
 - No, both of my parents are currently unemployed

How much do (did) you earn in a month?
(State your latest income

Are you currently looking for work?

- Yes
- No

Have your parents been unemployed in the past?

What type of work do (did) you do? Start with current one

- No, both of my parents were always employed
- Yes, my father was unemployed
- Yes, my mother was unemployed
- Yes, both of my parents were unemployed

How much do (did) you earn in a month?
(State your latest income

Are you currently looking for work?

- Yes
- No

In this part of the survey, I will ask you about your education experience

How old were you when you graduated from previous educational institution?

What type of educational institution did you attend?

- Regular school
- Lyceum
- Gymnasium
- Special school for gifted children
- Multigraded school
- Other, please explain

What type of school did you attend?

- Government
- Private

Where did you attend your school?

- City
- Town
- Village
- Other, please explain

What was the main way you usually traveled to school?

- Walk
- Cycle
- By car
- By bus
- Other, please specify

When you were at school, did you usually?

- Have school (free) lunch
- Take a lunch from home
- Go home for lunch
- Buy your lunch from a shop/kiosk/other
- Not have a lunch

When you were studying at school, would you say your performance was?

- Very good
- Good
- About average
- Bellow average
- Poor

Do you agree or disagree with the following statements?

Statement	Strongly agree	Agree	Neutral	Disagree	Strongly disagree
I enjoyed studying at school					
The grades at school fully reflected my level of knowledge					
I enjoy studying at the university					
Studies at school prepared me well for further studies at the university level					
I will easily find the job after I graduate from the university					
I am certain about my future					

Additional comments

What do you think you will be doing after graduating from KazNMU?

- Continuing my education full time
- Working full time
- Working part time
- Continuing my education part time and working part time
- I will be unemployed (please, say why you think you will be unemployed)
- Other (Please specify)

Thinking about your future, do you think that you will stay in Kazakhstan, or you will leave the country at some point?

- I will stay in Kazakhstan
- I will leave Kazakhstan to study abroad
- I will leave Kazakhstan to work abroad
- Other, please specify

Why do you think that you will leave?

- Better job prospects elsewhere
- To seek a better future in general
- Because of a relationship
- Other, please explain

If you decide to leave Kazakhstan, what country you will go?

This is the last part of the survey. I will ask general questions about you:

Are you male or female?

- Male
- Female

How old are you? Please write your age

What ethnic group do you belong to?

- Kazakh
- Russian
- Uzbek
- Ukrainian
- Other, please specify

What language(s) do you speak at home?

Choose everything that applies

- Kazakh
- Russian
- Uzbek
- Ukrainian
- Other, please specify

Are you religious?

- Yes
- No

What is your religion?

What region you are from?

What place (city, village) do you consider your home?

Would you describe the place you
consider your home as?

- A big city
- The suburbs or outskirts of a big
city
- A small city or town
- A village
- A farm or home in the country
- Other, please, specify

What is your status?

- I am single
- Married
- I am in a serious relationship

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