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Top-Down Nationalism in Post-Soviet Kazakhstan

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Top-Down Nationalism in Post-Soviet Kazakhstan

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Submitted for partial fulfillment of Master of Science degree in Geography

Portland State University

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List of Acronyms

APK- Assembly of People of Kazakhstan

ASSR- Autonomous Soviet Socialist Republic

CIS- Commonwealth of Independent States

FSU- Former Soviet Union

GULAG- Main Administration of Corrective Labor Camps and Labor Settlements

LAD- Republican Slavic Movement

SFSR- Soviet Federated Socialist Republic

SSR- Soviet Socialist Republic

STS- Semipalatinsk Test Site

VGAR- Volga German Autonomous Republic

USSR- Union of Soviet Socialist Republics

Abstract

Kazakhstan was the most multi-ethnic country to emerge from the former Soviet Union and the only one to have its titular ethnicity as a minority. This paper examines the top-down nationalism that has occurred since independence in 1991. The government of Kazakhstan has used elements of the theories of nationalism and territoriality in their effort to build a strong and unified post-Soviet national identity. The role of language, treatment of minorities, changing demographics, and the multi-ethnic nature of Kazakhstan make this a difficult task.

Top-Down Nationalism in Post-Soviet Kazakhstan

When independence from the Soviet Union was declared on December 16, 1991, ethnic Kazakhs made up 40 percent of the population of Kazakhstan, ethnic Russians made up another 40 percent, and the remaining 20 percent was comprised of Volga Germans, Koreans, Uyghurs, Uzbeks, and a host of other nationalities (Olcott 2010). There are 130 nationalities represented in Kazakhstan today including Tatars, Tajiks, Chuvash, Chechen, Polish, and Kyrgyz, among others. This was the most multi-ethnic country to emerge from the Former Soviet Union (FSU) and the only nation with its titular ethnicity in the minority (Olcott 2010). In 2009 ethnic Kazakhs once again became a majority in their country at 63 percent of the population for the first time since 1926. Kazakhstan is the most multi-ethnic country in the region (Olcott 2010). This paper explores how Kazakhstan has attempted to create a cohesive national identity while at the same time embracing diversity.

At independence in 1991, the Kazakhstani goals of state building were to first, “nurture patriotism for a civic, all Kazakhstani state identity”, then, to “enable different ethnic groups to discover their own individual cultural identities”; lastly “reserving a special place in this new state for the cultural reawakening of the titular ethnic Kazakh group” (Cummings 2006, 177). A statement released in 1993 by the President of Kazakhstan, Nursultan Nazerbayev, calls for the need to strengthen inter-ethnic peace and unity, and to educate Kazakhstanis to no longer identify with the USSR or CIS (Commonwealth of Independent States). He urged all citizens to accept Kazakhstan as

their common “Motherland”, no matter what ethnic background of her citizens, and to maintain “tender” feelings for symbols of the State (Cummings 2006).

While Kazakhstan struggles to find a solid identity, the country has the added task of acknowledging their shared history with the Russian Empire and USSR, and recognizing how that has helped shaped them as a nation and independent state. This paper examines what steps Kazakhstan has taken towards achieving the goals of post-soviet state-building and whether they have they succeeded in creating an “all Kazakhstani state identity” or remained a nation where citizens identify first by ethnicity, and only then, politically?

Nationalism

Nationalism has had multiple meanings and interpretations and since the seminal work by Ernest Gellner, *Nations and Nationalism* was published in 1983, there have been three major waves of thought related to nationalism studies. Gellner is considered the founder of the modernist theorization where he contends that nationalism comes from people moving from agrarian to industrial societies. His student, Anthony D. Smith, created his own approach to nationalism called ethno-symbolism (Smith 1993). A third wave of thought, post-modernism critically examines nationalism and national identity and what the causes and consequences are of this political framework. Along with nationalism, the concept of territoriality and what it means for a nation to be connected to its land is equally important.

Modernism

Nations and Nationalism not only defines terms but asks how nationalism originated and what it means in the modern world. Gellner begins his book by defining nationalism as “primarily a political principle, which holds that the political and national unit should be congruent” (1983, 1). Furthermore, nationalist sentiment is the “feeling of anger aroused by the violation of the principle, or the feeling of satisfaction aroused by its fulfillment” (1983, 1). However, nationalism cannot exist without the state, the political unit that concentrates and specializes in maintaining order. Not all nations have a state, and nationalism does not arise out of stateless societies, according to Gellner, since one must have a boundary to judge whether that boundary is congruent with the nation that inhabits it. Defining a nation is much harder than defining a state, and Gellner uses a short illustration to describe his definition of a nation:

1 – Two men are of the same nation if and only if they share the same culture, where culture in turn means a system of ideas and signs and associations and ways of behaving and communicating.

2- Two men belong to the same nation if and only if they *recognize* each other as belonging to the same nation (1983, 7).

Gellner stresses that the emergence of nationalism is closely related to modernization, which is closely related to the emergence of literacy and education. Education and literacy provide the tools by which the state can extend its reach over a particular territory. Literacy creates a way for language to be homogenized throughout a particular area, and with this homogenization of language comes the creation of a similar

culture of the people. Nationalism was first an elitist idea of the intelligentsia, but with modernization it has permeated the cultures of most western societies and has led the world into what Gellner describes as the “age of nationalism” (1983, 39). He is very adamant that nationalism “is *not* the awakening of an old, latent, dormant force... but is the consequence of a new form of social organization” (1983, 48).

Eric Hobsbawm was a British historian and Marxist who, among many other influential works, wrote *Nations and Nationalism since 1780* (1990.) He asserts that all nations develop in a particular time and place with complicated reasons and denies that there is a one specific factor that makes a nation (language, religion, ethnicity, etc). Hobsbawm approaches nationalism from a top-down perspective (nationalism is created by the state) but also gives weight to the bottom-up perspective as well (nationalism is created by the people). In order to understand nationalism he says “it must be analysed from below, that is in terms of the assumptions, hopes, needs, longings and interests of ordinary people” (1990, 10). He insists that “official ideologies of states and movements are not guides to what is in the minds of even the most loyal citizens or supporters” (1990, 11).

As a modernist, Hobsbawm discusses the origins of nationalism similarly to Gellner, but does not define what a nation actually is. Though he agrees with Gellner that nationalism is a political principle, he disagrees that the decolonization process in the mid-20th century was a result of a new age of nationalism, but was a result of anti-imperialist attitudes. Hobsbawm also introduces the differentiation between top-down and bottom-up nationalism that is further defined by Flint in *Introduction to Geopolitics*. “Top down is a form of nationalism that promotes the ideology that the state is the natural

and obvious political geographic expression of a singular nation” (2006, 108). Bottom-up nationalism can also be seen as violent nationalism where the goal is to “create a pure nation-state, in which only one culture or national group exists” (2006, 108).

Ethno-Symbolism

Anthony D. Smith is an influential contributor to the field of nationalism studies. Though Smith agrees that nationalism is a modern sentiment, he believes that all nations are built on an ethnic core that predates modern times. He was the first to label Gellner as a “modernist” and the first to introduce the term *ethnies*, a word that became an important and common fixture of the vernacular of nationalism studies, as a way to describe both the racial and cultural similarities that define a nation. He is also known for separating ‘civic’ and ‘ethnic’ types of nations defining a “civic nation” as a country that allows any person, regardless of ethnicity, to attain citizenship and an “ethnic nation” as a country that only grants citizenship to people of specific ethnicities (Smith 1995). He is dismissive and critical of modernists who solely focus on civic states as he claims that a modernist view cannot explain the emotional forces of nationalism and national identity. He created a new interpretation of nationalism, basing its principles on those of modernism but adding what he believed to be important aspect of nationalism and national identity which he called ethno-symbolism (Smith 1998).

In *The Origins of Nations*, an article published in 1989, Smith uses the rise of a civic England and France as examples of how ethnic communities contribute to the creation of modern states:

The process of ethnic fusion, particularly apparent in England and France, which their lateral *ethnies* encouraged through the channels of bureaucratic incorporation, was only possible because of a relatively homogenous ethnic core. We are not talking about actual descent, much less about ‘race’, but about the *sense* of ancestry and identity that people possess. Hence the importance of myths and memories, symbols and values, embodied in customs and traditions and in artistic styles, legal codes and institutions. In *this* sense of ‘ethnicity’, which is more about cultural perceptions than physical demography, albeit rooted perceptions and assumptions... came to form a fairly homogenous *ethnies* (Smith 1989, 151).

Smith’s extensive writings on the topic include: *National Identity* (1991); *Nations and Nationalism in the Global Era* (1995); *Nationalism and Modernism* (1998); *Myths and Memories of the Nation* (1999); and *Ethno-Symbolism and Nationalism* (2009). Throughout these works Smith outlines five crucial goals of ethno-symbolism when researching nations and nationalism:

- Use historical methods to discover the origins and formation of nations in order to detach nations from the theory of modernization and examine their ethnic roots.
- Distinguish the *ethnie* from the nation. A nation must have its own state while an *ethnie* can be stateless; however, Smith iterates that nations are the consequence of the civic development of *ethnies*.
- Examine how myths, memories, and symbols of the *ethnie* factor into the formation of a nation.

- Establish which route a nation takes in its formation, either the lateral incorporation where one *ethnie* is the dominant core of the nation, or the vertical route where the elites and intelligentsia rediscover their ethnic past and in doing so creates a common ground where the lower strata of society can be moved to political action and an ethnic nation can be born.
- Determine what the role of nationalism is in a newly formed nation.

The tenets of ethno-symbolism have been a solid starting point for my research into the nation building strategies of Kazakhstan, but it has been political nationalism, as defined by John Hutchinson, that has benefited my research the most. John Hutchinson is widely regarded as one of the most influential scholars of the ethno-symbolism school of thought that was created by his former advisor, Anthony D. Smith. Hutchinson went further than Smith in his first book, *The Dynamics of Cultural Nationalism* (1987) in defining the differences of cultural and political nationalism. His 1994 book *Modern Nationalism* links cultural and political nationalism to the collapse of communism and the rise of religious nationalists.

Hutchinson defines political and cultural nationalism as “two quite different types of nationalism that must not be conflated, for they articulate different, even competing conceptions of the nation, form their own distinctive organizations, and have sharply diverging political strategies” (Hutchinson 1987, 122). Political nationalists look towards rationality and creating a civically minded state of educated citizens united by common laws that surpass ethnic differences. Contrarily, cultural nationalists strive for the re-creation of their distinctive national character and “perceive the state as an accidental, for

the essence of a nation is its distinctive civilization, which is the product of its unique history, culture, and geographical profile” (Hutchinson 1987, 122).

Post-Modernism

Michael Billig’s *Banal Nationalism* focuses on nationalism of the everyday, the “powers of an ideology which is so familiar that it hardly seems noticeable” (1995, 12). The central theme of his book is that in established states there is a continual reminder of nationhood, not the “flag which is being consciously waved with fervent passion; it is the flag hanging unnoticed on the public building” (1995, 8). Billig introduces the concept that only other states have ‘nationalism’ for when speaking of one’s own country we tend to use the term ‘patriot’ or ‘patriotism’ (1995).

Patrick Hogan follows up on this analogy of ‘our patriotism is their nationalism’ in *Understanding Nationalism* by defining national identity as “fundamentally, a matter of dignity. It gives people reasons to be proud, whether they have any active participation in it or not” (2009, 36). Hogan goes further to say that nationalism only exists to make people feel good and national identity is just an extension of one’s personal identity. On that same spectrum, racism and genocide are extreme manifestations of normal group identification and behavior.

Territoriality

Nationalism cannot exist without territory. Nations and people become attached to a specific place in a profound and immutable way. George White in *Nationalism and Territory* (2000) presents two reasons why place is significant to nations. First “they contain within them the natural resources that contribute to the particularities of human

culture” (White 2000, 21) and secondly “nations express their identities in the cultural landscape of places and territories” (White 2000, 21). This identity is then passed on to the next generation and with time it becomes impossible to separate the cultural identity of a nation with the natural features of their territory.

David Storey declares that “people shape territories and territories shape people” (2001, 28) and describes how the land itself can become something of a sentient being with its own history and mythology. Instead of a group defining a territory, the territory comes to define the group. Rivers, mountains, plains and other physical features of the land become sacred and are as important to the cultural makeup of a nation as the people. Territory “creates a collective consciousness by reinventing itself as a homeland” (Herb 1999, 17).

Territoriality can be seen as the politicization of space, a place that can be measured, mapped, and controlled by the nation that inhabits it. Guntram Herb asserts that “political power- particularly in the form of a sovereign state- is almost exclusively defined and exercised territorially” (Herb 1999, 10). Storey iterates that “territory is the only tangible evidence that a nation exists” (2001, 111). A nation’s power is predicated on territory and national identities are tied to it.

Territoriality is the “key geographical component in understanding how society and space is interconnected” (Sack 1986, 3). Territoriality is always socially constructed and is the primary geographical expression of social power. Robert Sack defines territoriality as “best understood as a spatial strategy to affect, influence, or control resources and people, by controlling area” (Sack 1986, 1). The modern state is dependent

on both territory and sovereignty to survive, and in turn, a nation exerts its power by controlling a specific territory where its sovereignty can be defended (Storey 2001).

Benedict Anderson declares that “since World War II, every successful revolution has defined itself in *national* terms” (1983, 12). He recognizes that “nation-ness is the most universally legitimate value in the political life of our times,” (1983, 12) however, he equates a nation with an imagined community, which is both limited and sovereign. Similarly, Eric Hobsbawm in *The Invention of Tradition* asserts nations are part of the larger “invented traditions” which is a “set of practices, normally governed by overtly or tacitly accepted roles and of a ritual or symbolic nature, which seek to inculcate certain values and norms of behavior by repetition, which automatically implies continuity with the past” (Hobsbawm 1983, 1). He states that nationalism, national symbols and national histories are all invented and by the power of repetition become so natural that nations require “no definition other than self-assertion” (Hobsbawm 1983, 14).

Kazakhstan has been using the principles of nationalism studies and territoriality to help guide them in their attempts to build a national identity while avoiding ethnic conflict. At independence in 1991, Kazakhstan granted citizenship to all people who were living within the borders of the country at that time, though most FSU countries granted citizenship rights based on ethnicity alone (Olcott 2010). Kazakhstan has focused on building a political and civic national identity where all people share the benefits of citizenship. However, keeping civic national identity in mind, Kazakhstan has also been attempting to reserve “a special place in this new state for the cultural reawakening of the titular ethnic Kazakh group” as they stated in their goals of state building (Cummings

2006, 177). Kazakhstan's attempt to do both, while maintaining ethnic harmony, has proven a difficult task.

Kazakhstan in Context

Kazakhstan is the world's ninth largest country by area covering approximately 2.7 million square kilometers. It is the world's largest landlocked country but is in possession of a significant coastline with the landlocked Caspian Sea that is almost 2,000 kilometers long and comprises most of the western border of the country. To the north Kazakhstan is bordered by Russia with the world's longest continuous border of almost 7,000 kilometers. Kazakhstan is only separated from by Mongolia by a distance of 30 kilometers in the east and shares the majority of its eastern border with China. The south is bordered by the Central Asian republics of Kyrgyzstan, Uzbekistan, and Turkmenistan. Though most of the country is located on the Asian continent, a portion of the country in the northwest lies west of the Ural Mountains making Kazakhstan part of Europe as well. Kazakhstan has embraced their Eurasian status and aspires to be a bridge between the two continents (Brummell 2011). Figure 1.

The east and southeast are home to high mountain ranges that include the Tian Shan along the borders of Kyrgyzstan and China. Kazakhstan's highest peak, Khan Tengri reaches 7,000 meters. In contrast, Kazakhstan's lowest land elevation reaches -132m at the Karagiye Depression in the Mangistau region in the west. Three of Kazakhstan's five main rivers flow north and west from the high mountains in the southeast. The Irtysh River, along with its tributaries the Tobol and Ishim Rivers, flow

north to Russia and eventually joins with the Ob River which ultimately leads to the Arctic Ocean, the Ile River feeds the 16,000 square kilometer Lake Balkhash, and the Syr Darya flows to the Aral Sea. The two south running rivers are the Ural and Emba Rivers, which begin in the Ural Mountains and end in the Caspian Sea.

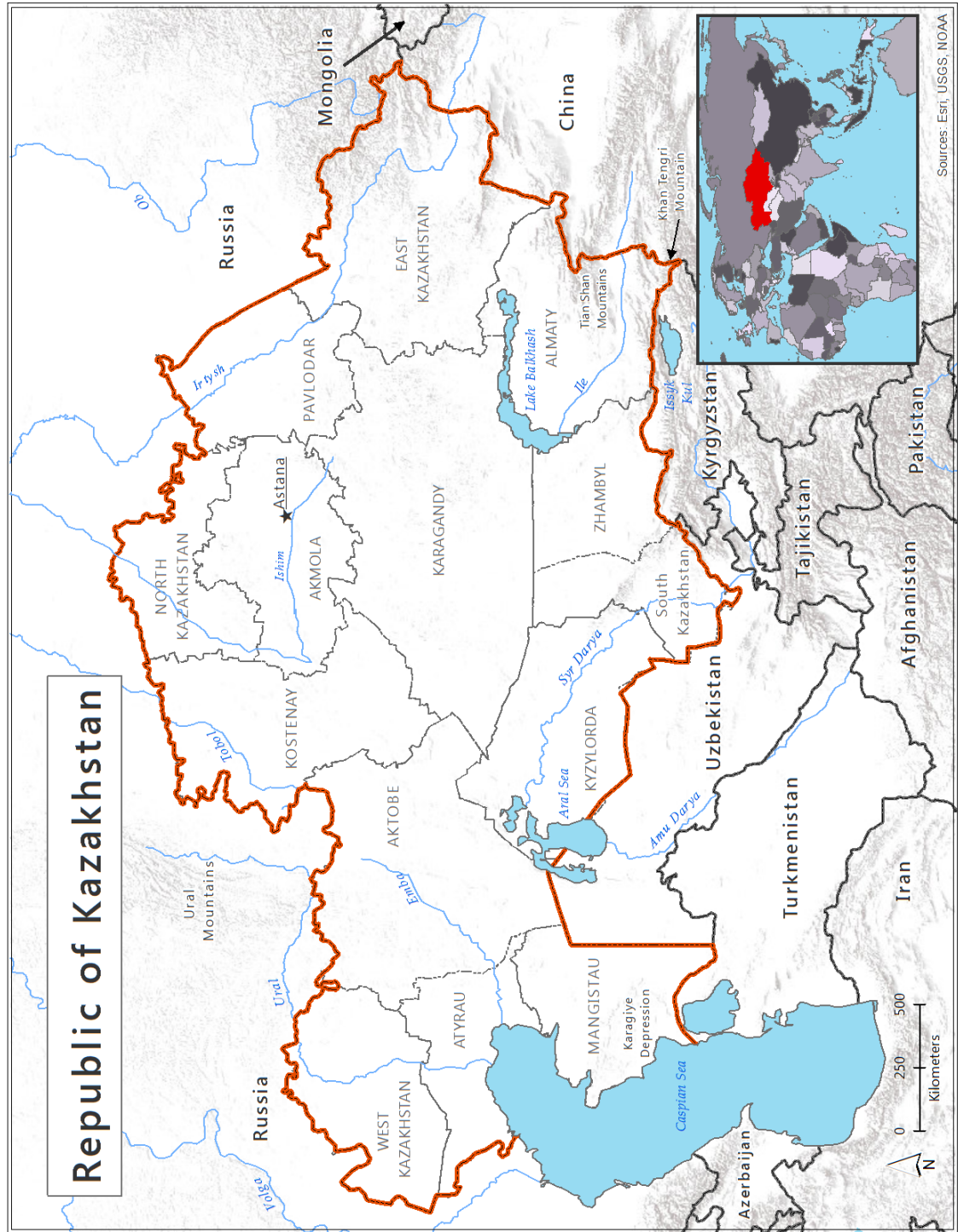


Figure 1: Kazakhstan in Context. (Data source ESRI ArcGIS online data 2012)

Much of north Kazakhstan is made up of the world's largest dry steppe region which covers more than 800,000 square kilometers. This gradually turns into belts of semi-desert and desert farther south that cover three fourths of the country. High winds are a prominent feature of the steppe and semi-desert. Rainfall is low in most of the country, from about 400mm in the north and 150mm in the south, which means irrigation is required to support crops. Kazakhstan's extreme continental climate has an average temperature in January ranging between -19 and -4 degrees Celsius (-2 and 24 degrees Fahrenheit) and average July temperatures between 19 and 26 degrees Celsius (66 and 78 degrees Fahrenheit). There is substantial differentiation between the climate in the north and south as the south has more mild winters and warmer summers than the north (Brummell 2011).

Land Use and Population

Despite 80 percent of its surface being desert or steppe, Kazakhstan has a large agricultural sector. 8.82 percent of the total landmass is arable, 0.3 percent is able to grow permanent crops, and 91.15 percent is 'other', a variety of desert, semi-desert, steppe, rivers or lakes, foothills, or mountainous ranges (CIA World Fact Book 2013). Even with such a small percentage of arable land available, Kazakhstan produces about two percent of the world's supply of wheat with between 10 and 17 million tons grown annually (Foreign Agricultural Service 2013). . 75 percent of the country's wheat is grown in the north and central provinces of Kostanay, Akmola, and North Kazakhstan (Foreign Agricultural Service 2013). Between two and eight million tons of wheat are exported each year (Foreign Agricultural Service 2013). In addition to wheat there are about two million tons of barley produced annually, as well as small amounts of oats,

corn, rice, and cotton (Foreign Agricultural Service 2013). . In addition to agriculture about 70 percent of the total landmass of Kazakhstan can be used for animal husbandry (CIA World Fact Book 2013).

With a population of 17.7 million and a land mass of 2.7 million square kilometers, the population density of the country is extremely low at six people per square kilometer (CIA World Fact Book 2013). However, 54 percent of the population lives in urban areas and only 46 percent are considered rural, which leaves vast areas of the country uninhabited. At independence in 1991 there was a spike in immigration to urban centers from the countryside due to the changing economics of the new country and better opportunities for workers in the cities. This has led to a new identification among ethnic Kazakhs who often hyphenate their identities as ‘Kazakh-Urban’, or ‘Kazakh-Rural’ (Yessenova 2005).

The largest city, the former capital, Almaty, in the southeast corner of the country on the border of China and Kyrgyzstan has a population of 1.3 million people (Brummell 2011). The second largest city is the new capital, Astana, in North Kazakhstan with a population of 775,000 (Brummell 2011). Shymkent, in South Kazakhstan, has a population of 650,000 (Brummell 2011). It is located only 120 kilometers from the Uzbek capital of Tashkent, and has an Uzbek population numbering approximately 81,000 (Brummell 2011). The fourth largest city is Karaganda, located in Karaganda province of north-central Kazakhstan with a population of 450,000 people (Brummell 2011). This city, once home to a large concentration of Volga Germans, lost about 15 percent of its population during the 1990’s (Brummell 2011). Before Astana became the new capital in 1997, Karaganda was the second most populated city in Kazakhstan and

was a contender to become the new capital city (Brummell 2011). The fifth largest city is Taraz, one of the oldest cities in Kazakhstan, located in South Kazakhstan between the cities of Almaty and Shymkent. The population is roughly 400,000 and it celebrated its 2000 anniversary in 2001 (Brummell 2011). (Figure 2).

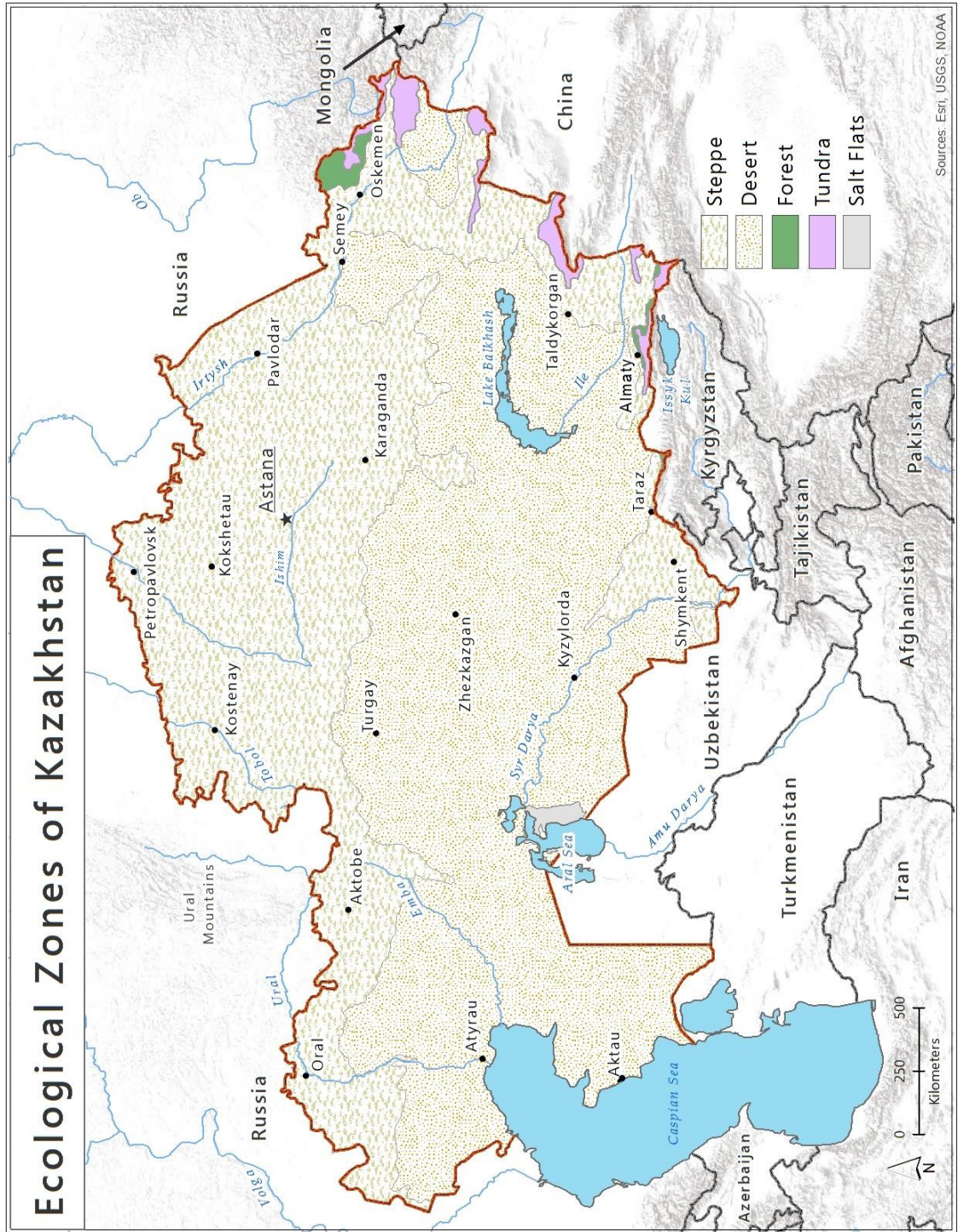


Figure 2: Ecological Zones of Kazakhstan. (Data source ESRI ArcGIS online data 2012)

Natural Resources

Kazakhstanis have boasted that underneath their soil can be found almost every element on the periodic table. They are in the top ten in the world in oil, gas, coal, and uranium reserves and also mine gold, silver, copper, lead, chromite, phosphorous, iron ore, beryllium, manganese, titanium, and others. Kazakhstan is the largest exporter of uranium in the world and is home to the largest oil field located outside of the Middle East at Kashagan field. Sixty percent of the exports of Kazakhstan are oil and oil products, 20 percent are ferrous metals, and the remaining 20 percent is machinery, chemicals, grain, wool, meat, and coal (Olcott 2010).

Oil is an important factor of the economic success of Kazakhstan; the country produced 80 million tons of crude oil in 2010 and is on track to produce 150 million tons a year by 2015 (Olcott 2010). The three largest oil reserves are located at Tengiz field, on the northeast shore of the Caspian Sea, the Karachaganek field located in the northwest of the country on the border with Russia, and the Kashagan field located offshore in the Caspian Sea (Brummell 2011). Main export routes are the Caspian Pipeline Consortium and the Atyrau-Samara pipelines into Russia, the Atasu-Alashankou pipeline into China, and plans to feed into the Baku-Tbilisi-Ceyhan pipeline that runs from Azerbaijan to Turkey with Kazakhstani tankers crossing the Caspian Sea (Brummell 2011). Figure 3.

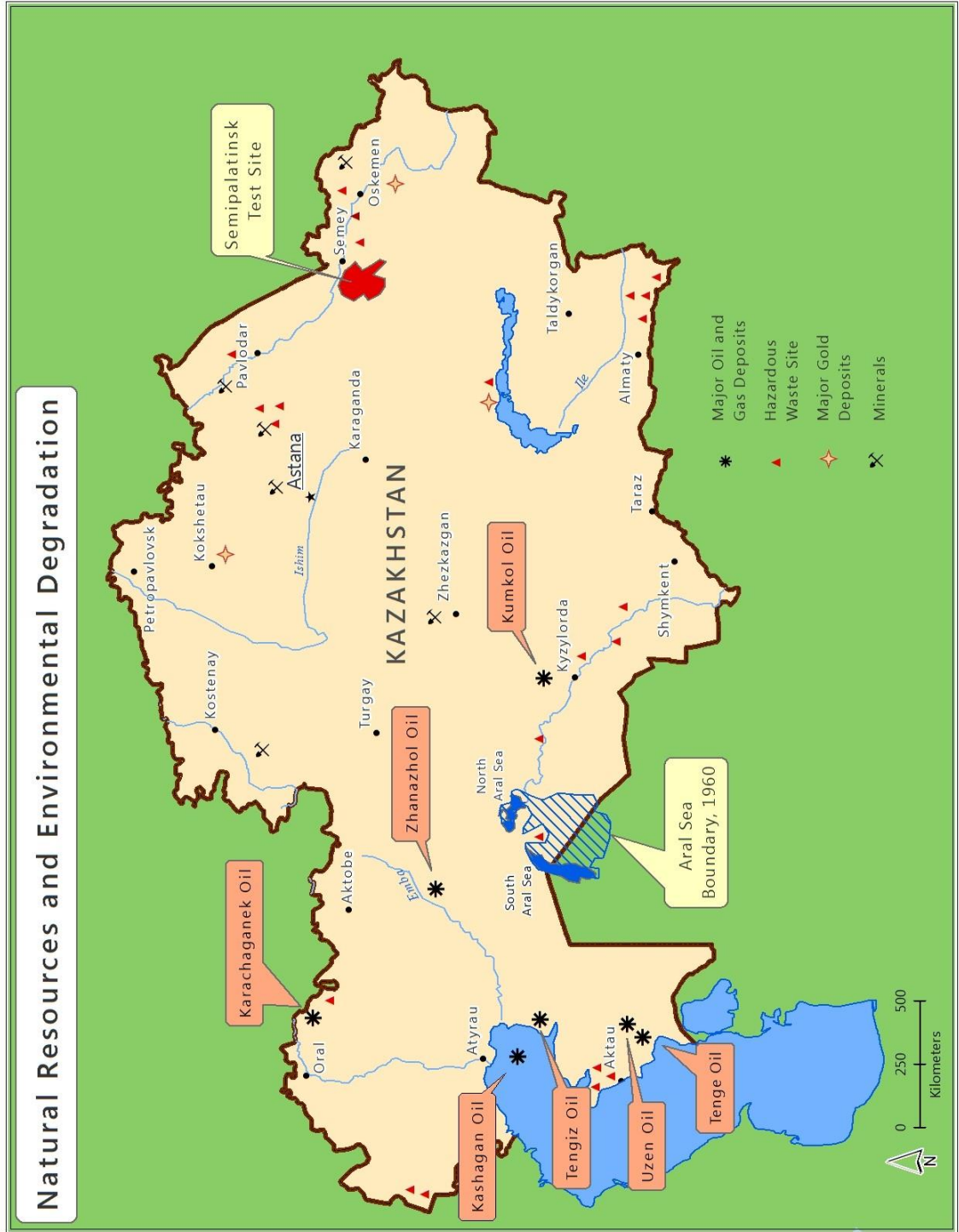


Figure 3: Natural Resources and Environmental Degradation. (Data source: Olcott 2010).

Environmental Degradation

Human activity has resulted in two major environmental catastrophes within Kazakhstan: the desiccation of the Aral Sea, following the diversion of the Syr Darya and Amu Darya rivers to support cotton cultivation in Uzbekistan and Turkmenistan, and the decades of nuclear testing at the Semipalatinsk Test Site (STS) which has resulted in high levels of radiation poisoning of the land and human and animal populations of the area.

Aral Sea

The destruction of the Aral Sea began in the late 1960s when the waters of the Syr Darya and Amu Darya rivers were first diverted. Originally at 67,500 square kilometers, the Aral Sea was the fourth largest inland sea in the world. By 2006 the sea had shrunk to 17,000 square kilometers and only about 25 percent of its surface area and 10 percent of its volume remains (Blinnikov 2011). The Aral Sea has split into two unconnected evaporation ponds with the northern section entirely within the boundaries of Kazakhstan and the southern section shared between Kazakhstan and Uzbekistan. Some water from the Syr Darya still reaches the smaller northern section but no water reaches the southern section making it likely to disappear completely by 2015 (Blinnikov 2011).

The loss of most of the water of the Aral Sea has caused the remaining water to severely spike in salinity levels from 1 percent in 1960 to 8 percent in 2006 (Blinnikov 2011).. For comparison, the salinity of normal ocean water is 3.5 percent, the Great Salt Lake is between 15 and 18 percent, and the Dead Sea is about 30 percent (Blinnikov 2011). This increase in salinity has caused 30 fish and 200 invertebrate species to completely disappear from the remaining water. The salt from the dry river delta is

whipped into salt storms by the dry desert air and blown into neighboring towns, causing the incidence of lung disease in this region to be three times the average rate of Kazakhstan (Blinnikov 2011).

Kazakhstan has devoted itself to restoring the Aral Sea and the construction of the Kokaral Dam in 2005 resulted in the rise of the level of the northern section of the Aral Sea by 13 percent (Brummell 2011). There is currently has a proposal to divert 10 percent of the Irtysh River to flow into the northern section, to replenish the sea and concurrently calm the effects of the rising salinity and revitalize the fishing economy of the region. The cost of this proposal is upwards of 10 billion US dollars and it is only in the beginning stages of actualization. If this project is completed it will greatly benefit the northern section of the Aral Sea; however, the future of the southern section of the Aral Sea looks grim (Blinnikov 2011, Brummell 2011). Figure 3.

Semipalatinsk Test Site

The Semipalatinsk Test Site, also known as “The Polygon” because of its geometric shape, covered 18,000 square kilometers in northeast Kazakhstan near the city of Semipalatinsk (now called Semey) on the edge of the Irtysh River. The site was chosen by the head of the Soviet Atomic Bomb Project, Lavrenti Beria, who incorrectly described the area as uninhabited. The first atomic bomb, named First Lightning, was detonated at this site on August 29, 1949 with a yield of 22 kilotons. From 1949 to 1989, 456 nuclear explosions were carried out at STS with 116 of those being atmospheric, before the Partial Test Ban Treaty in 1963 caused the remaining 340 explosions to be moved to a series of underground tunnels and boreholes (Duff-Brown 2013).

One of the most famous detonations was the Chagan test of January 15, 1965 where, in an effort to explore peaceful uses of nuclear explosions, an explosion was conducted on the dry bed of the Chagan River resulting in a crater meant to dam the river during its peak springtime flow. This dam resulted in the formation of Lake Chagan, most commonly referred to as “Atomic Lake”. This lake is radioactive but has degraded to the point where people can now swim in it (Blinnikov 2011).

When the Soviet Union collapsed in 1989 the boreholes and underground tunnels were left unguarded as the Russian force monitoring the area abandoned STS. A secret, 17 year, cleanup of these structures were undertaken by Kazakhstani, Russian, and U.S. forces and completed in 2012 (Duff-Brown 2013). The length of the project was a consequence of the enormity of the test site (STS was larger than the state of New Jersey), the bureaucracies of three states working together, and the overall secrecy of the STS and cleanup efforts.

Because of the high level of radiation there has been a rise in the rates of cancer, birth defects, physical and mental retardation, and the number of neurological and psychiatric disorders in the people of this region. The number of stillbirths in the region rose from 6.1 for every 1,000 of the population in 1960, to 12.2 in 1988 (Olcott 2010). The land within and surrounding the STS are highly contaminated and are unsafe to use for crops or livestock. Before the cleanup was complete, contaminated copper was being looted from the underground tunnels and sold on the black market, spreading the contamination of this area to unknown reaches of the globe. Though the cleanup of the underground tunnels and bore holes is complete, the land, air, water, and people of

Semey and the surrounding areas will be affected for thousands of years (Brummell 2011). Figure 3.

Both the desiccation of the Aral Sea and the remnants of the Semipalatinsk Test Site are environmental catastrophes left over from the USSR. Kazakhstan has embraced environmental conservation and the 1995 constitution stipulates that “protecting the environment favorable for life and health shall be the goal of the state” (UNECE 2000, 9). The first post-Soviet environmental protection law passed by the government of Kazakhstan was the *Law on the Social Protection of Citizens Harmed by the Environmental Disaster near the Aral Sea*, passed in 1992. The second environmental protection law created by the new government was *Law on the Social Protection of Citizens Harmed by Nuclear Testing in the Semipalatinsk Nuclear Testing Polygon*, passed in 1993 (UNECE 2000). The massive cleanup effort of both these sites is not only for the benefit of the environment and people in the surrounding areas, but is also a way for Kazakhstan to assert their new identity over the landscape.

Historical Background to Multi-Ethnicity

Before the lands that now make up modern day Kazakhstan was annexed by the Russian empire in 1731, they were inhabited by the three Hordes of the Kazakh Khanate. The Great, Middle, and Little Hordes were tribal in nature and carried on the organization, politics and economic principles of the Mongolian Empire which ruled over this region in the 13th century. After annexation by the Russian Empire, Russia considered the lands of the Kazakh Khanate as part of Russian “Turkestan,” a vast region

encompassing what eventually became Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Tajikistan, Turkmenistan, and Uzbekistan (Laumulin 2009).

In order to stave off advancement by invading Dzungar forces from China in the 18th century, the Russian government set up Cossack military outposts along the northern and eastern borders of Turkestan. By 1867 these outposts were as far south as modern day Almaty, solidifying Russian presence in the region (Demko 1969). The movement of Cossack armies into Kazakhstan was the first settlement by non-ethnic Kazakhs into the Kazakh land. Initially understanding the Russian protection as only a temporary arrangement, members of all three Hordes eventually revolted against what they perceived as the permanent annexation of their homeland, but without success. From 1865 to 1896 the Russian government strengthened their hold on the Kazakhs and established political units which included new towns built solely to handle administrative affairs (Demko 1969). By 1900 there were 404 Cossack villages in the Kazakh Steppes, marking the beginning of the end of the Kazakh traditional way of nomadic life (Demko 1969).

Cossack villages and the trans-Aral railway built in 1906 directly blocked the heart of Kazakh nomadic routes. In the next six years more than 500,000 Russian farms were started under the direction of the Russian Interior Minister and the Kazakhs were faced with accepting a sedentary life (Demko 1969). Unrest materialized in 1916 when Kazakhs rebelled against the Russian Empire over the issue of conscription into the First World War. Kazakhs were being conscripted to fight against Turkey, who Kazakhs regarded as their Islamic kin. This revolt led to a collapse of the colonial power in Central Asia, a year before the Russian Revolution in 1917 (Laumulin 2009).

Union of Soviet Socialist Republics 1920-1991

The Kazakh people saw the last remnants of their traditional way of life completely lost with the influx of 3 million Russian settlers moving onto their land in the early 20th century. The Kazakhs were struggling to find a new identity and attempted to establish their own State in 1916. Briefly there was the establishment of the Alash Autonomy, a state aligned with the White Army that fought against the Bolsheviks, but the pull of socialism was too strong for the mostly radical thinking Kazakhs and the Kyrgyz Autonomous Soviet Socialist Republic (ASSR) was formed in 1920. When the differentiation between Kyrgyz and Kazakh was realized by the Soviet Union this ASSR was split in two, establishing separate Kazakh and Kyrgyz ASSR's in 1925. The Kazakh ASSR was made a full Soviet Socialist Republic, Kazakh SSR, in 1936 (Laumulin 2009).

When Stalin was in power from the mid-1920's to his death in 1953, the final traces of the nomadic culture of the Kazakhs were completely eliminated and the Kazakh SSR became an industrial and agricultural society. On the collectivization orders of Stalin in 1932, the confiscation of higher class peasant owned farms began in other parts of the Soviet Union, and these peasants were resettled in Siberia and Kazakhstan (Blinnikov 2011). During the collectivization effort, up to 1.7 million Kazakhs died of starvation, epidemics, and executions in the following years. This was almost 40 % of the Kazakh population at the time (Zardykhan 2004).

This was also the time of the creation of labor camps (GULAGs)¹. These were instituted by Stalin in order to have the manpower to work the newly industrialized

¹ GULAG is an acronym for Главное управление исправительно-трудовых лагерей и колоний meaning "Main Administration of Corrective Labor Camps and Labor Settlements" (Blinnikov 2011).

factories and mining operations in Kazakhstan and Siberia. Of the camps located in Kazakhstan, thousands of exiled workers who survived the camps chose to stay after their incarceration ended, adding to the ethnic diversity of the Kazakh SSR (Robbins 2010). Up to 40 percent of the Kazakh population died between 1926 and 1939 and another 200,000 fled to neighboring countries during that time. That, along with the influx of immigration from collectivization, left ethnic Kazakhs at less than 40 percent of the total population of Kazakh SSR in 1939 (Zardykhan 2002).

In 1953 Soviet leader Nikita Khrushchev initiated the “Virgin Lands” program to cultivate corn and grain in the traditional pasturelands of northern Kazakhstan and parts of western Siberia (Blinnikov 2011). Up to 2 million Russian and Ukrainian immigrants relocated to Kazakhstan during the 1950’s to farm these newly cultivated lands. The rush of non-ethnic Kazakhs dropped the percentage of ethnic Kazakhs in Kazakhstan to less than 30 percent by the mid 1950’s. Russians made up 43 percent of the total population of Kazakhstan with the other components a mixture of German, Ukrainian, and Uzbek ethnicities, along with a small scattering of other ethnicities. Subsequently, the higher birth rates of ethnic Kazakhs, and some return migration by ethnic Kazakhs living outside the country, the percentage of ethnic Kazakhs rose to 40 percent of the population by independence in 1991(Diener 2005). Figure 4.

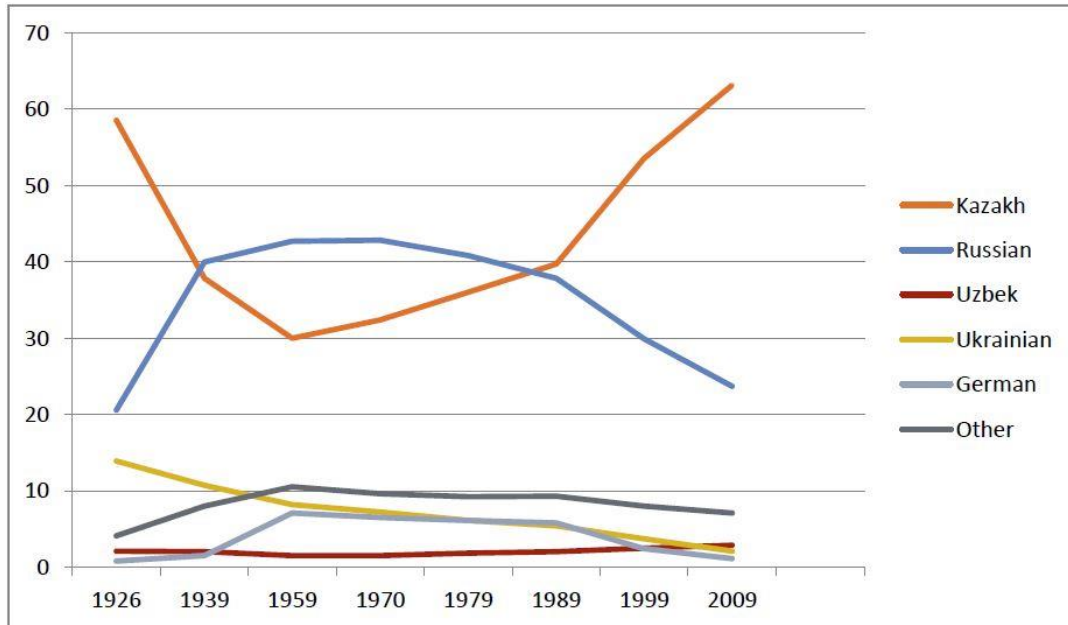


Figure 4: Changes in ethnic makeup of Kazakhstan 1926-2009. (Source: Zardykhan 2004)

In 1991 Kazakhstan became an independent country for the first time in its history. This freedom came with the difficult task of building a state that could reconcile the historical culture of ethnic Kazakhs with the modern day diverse makeup of the country. The government, under the direction of President Nursultan Nazarbayev, has made a very determined effort to establish a national identity that allows for the resurgence of the ethnic Kazakh culture, while embracing a multi-cultural and linguistically diverse population.

The Role of Language and Linguistic Policy in Shaping National Identity

During Soviet times the Kazakh language had been suppressed and was only allowed to be spoken in the home while Russian was the language spoken in all other aspects of life. By independence in 1991, as few as 30 percent of the population of Kazakhstan were able to speak, read, and write Kazakh, while over 95 percent of the country were able to read, write, and speak Russian (Abdrakhmanovich 2011). President Nazarbayev made it one of his primary goals to reintroduce the Kazakh language as an official language of the state and require that all Kazakhstanis learn it (Zardykhan 2004).

Many ethnic Russians considered the resurgence of the Kazakh language as a purposeful strategy to marginalize Russian speakers. Both Russians and Kazakhs “saw the control of linguistic space as critical to the defense of their culture” (Olcott 2010, 72). Language was recognized as the key to whether the country united as one identity, or was torn apart by ethnic rivalries. For this reason, when the constitution of the newly independent country was written, language policy was especially scrutinized.

The Soviet Union had promoted the formation of the supra-ethnic identity of the “Soviet People” and instated Russian as the *lingua franca* of the USSR. In most FSU countries, Russian was only used by party officials and the native language of the country was the standard operating language of the masses. However, in the case of Kazakhstan where ethnic Kazakhs had become the minority, Russian was the official and only acknowledged language of the state until Kazakhstan became independent in 1991.

The struggle to have the Kazakh language recognized and taught in public schools had been ongoing for decades, but it wasn’t until the Almaty Riots of December, 1986, that the government started enacting legislation that would protect the Kazakh language

(Spehr 2012). These riots were not about language use or laws, but were a response to General Secretary Mikhail Gorbachev's dismissal of the ethnic Kazakh, Dinmukhamed Konayev, as First Secretary of the Communist Party in Kazakhstan, replacing him with Gennady Kolbin, an outsider who was ethnically Chuvash² (Spehr 2012). The demonstrations were successful and resulted in the ethnic Kazakh, Nursultan Nazerbayev, appointed as First Secretary, and brought to light the inequalities experienced by Kazakhs in regards to language and the Russian dominance of the country.

Language Laws 1987-2000

Between 1987 and 1997 rapid changes in language policy occurred which mirrored the rapidly changing political environment of the time. The first document to address language was a resolution jointly adopted by the Kazakhstan Council of Ministers and the Kazakhstan Communist Party Central Committee in March of 1987: *On Improving the Study of the Kazakh Language*. Though it was approved simultaneously with a resolution titled *On Improving the Study of the Russian Language*, this was the first time the Kazakh language had been singled out as deserving consideration by the governing bodies (Fierman 1998). This document dealt exclusively with the matter of the availability of languages being taught in schools and was designed to improve the quality of those languages being taught. Though acknowledging that the Kazakh language instruction needed marked improvement, these documents were widely regarded as an attempt to assuage feelings of inequality by ethnic Kazakhs and the improvements outlined were primarily only implemented in Russian language schools (Fierman 2006).

² The Chuvash are a Turkic ethnic group from central Siberia.

The *Law on Languages* passed in September of 1989 is possibly the most important and popular law drafted during this time as it declared the Kazakh language one of the state languages of Kazakh SSR. The excitement surrounding this law was a result of a policy document drafted by the Communist Party of the Soviet Union (CPSU) a month prior that gave ‘union’ or ‘autonomous’ republics of the Soviet Union the authority to recognize as a state language, the language that belonged to the ethnic group giving the name to the union or autonomous republic (Fierman 1998). Another distinction regarding this law was the amount of public participation involved in crafting the document. Issues of language were discussed in public meetings and in the press, and opposing viewpoints were given equal attention.

In July, 1990 Kazakhstan passed the *State Program on the Development of the Kazakh Language and Other National Languages in the Kazakh SSR in the Period Up Until 2000*. This document was mostly dedicated to the logistics and financial matters that unexpectedly arose with the implementation of the previous policies. This policy was drafted during a very tumultuous political time in the Soviet Union, and though Kazakhstan was heading in the direction of independence, at this time it was still under the influence of Moscow. The language laws were written in such a way to downplay the influence language had over Kazakh identity in an attempt to appease the Soviet government and were for the most part ineffective (Fierman 1998).

The first *Constitution of Sovereign Kazakhstan*, drafted and revised in 1993, outlined the basic principles of democracy and was the first legislative step to legally confirm the independence of the country. The opening statement “We, the people of Kazakhstan...proceeding from firmness of the Kazakh statehood” and another clause that

defined statehood as an outcome of the “self-determination of the Kazakh nation” (Abdrakhmanovich 2011, 91) implied that Kazakhstan was a mono-ethnic state and reduced the position of other ethnicities within the republic.

The most important task of the constitution of 1993 was to finalize the laws on language. The text of the 1993 constitution read “In the Republic of Kazakhstan a state language is the Kazakh language. Russian is the language of international communication... [t]he Republic of Kazakhstan provides free functioning of Russian, along with the state language. The right of use of a native language is guaranteed to citizens” (Abdrakhmanovich 2011, 91). The right for all citizens to use their native language was a welcome addition to this constitution, however, there were still questions relating to the use of Russian. Though the term “free functioning” allowed Russian to be spoken anywhere without a negative consequence (some policy makers had wanted to criminalize the use of the Russian language), the ambiguity of a language for “international communication” was confusing. There were also questions about the use of Russian or Kazakh in higher education or for employment purposes. Ultimately this constitution did not adequately answer the language question and was abolished less than eighteen months after being drafted (Fierman 1998).

The *Constitution of the Republic of Kazakhstan* adopted in 1995 clarified some of the language questions and was personally drafted by the President of Kazakhstan, Nursultan Nazerbayev. The ethnic component of the new constitution was completely removed and the new constitution only contained general concepts about the statehood of the Kazakhstani people (Abdrakhmanovich 2011). The Kazakh language was adopted as both the state and official language while Russian was elevated to an official language for

public and state institutions and within those institutions Russian could be “officially used on equal grounds along with the Kazakh language” (Abdrakhmanovich 2011, 93).

A state program was implemented in 1999 with an outline of how to create the proper conditions for learning Kazakh and to increase the demand for using it. This program was devoted to the logistics and administrative measures required to implement these changes, and all political or ethnic references to the language issue were excluded (Dave 2003). In 2000, President Nazerbayev declared the language issue in Kazakhstan solved and reminded the people of Kazakhstan that it was the duty of every citizen to learn the state language and to pass that knowledge onto their children. He declared that learning Kazakh “was the most important factor in the consolidation of the people of Kazakhstan” (O iazykakh 1997, 24. Quoted and translated by Dave 2003).

The Effects of Language Policy

Language laws have meant to facilitate a resurgence of the Kazakh language, but in actuality have changed very little of how languages are used on a regular basis. Dave observed, from her fieldwork with urban-dwelling ethnic Kazakhs, that almost two-thirds to three-quarters of ethnic Kazakhs spoke almost exclusively in Russian, though claiming to understand the Kazakh language if necessary (Dave 2004). However, very few knew how to read or write in Kazakh. In addition to the lack of fluency in the Kazakh language, most urban dwellers would exchange greetings in Kazakh, and then switch to the more commonly used Russian language. It has also been more common in the major cities of Almaty, Astana, Shymkent, and Karagandy for the younger generation to use English, as well as Russian, as their language of everyday use (Olcott 2010).

The “Near Abroad”

The former dissident and writer Alexander Solzhenitsyn denounced the break-up of the Soviet Union and the independence of the new states, especially Kazakhstan. He questioned the legitimacy of the borders of the newly independent Kazakhstan as Russians would outnumber Kazakhs in five northern and eastern districts, and Russia would lose what they considered to be their provinces in South Siberia (Solzhenitsyn 1995). He decried the Russian government for abandoning the 25 million Russians that suddenly found themselves living outside the Russian Federation in former Soviet Republics, in areas he deemed the “near abroad”. His solution was a restructuring of the Russian borders to claim the areas most inhabited by ethnic Russians, especially northeastern Kazakhstan and western Ukraine. This concept was wholeheartedly embraced by Russian separatist groups in Kazakhstan and since independence the so-called “Russian Question” has “remained one of the most influential factors in most of the republic’s political affairs, both foreign and domestic” (Zardykhan 2004:69).

The first foreign minister of post-Soviet Russia, Andrey Kozyrev, claimed that his primary foreign-policy goal would be to protect Russians in the “near abroad” and “if necessary, Russia would use force to protect the rights of Russian in other states” (quoted by Zardykhan 2004:69). Boris Yeltsin, the first President of the Russian Federation, expressed the idea during the Almaty talks of 1992 that Russia had territorial rights in northern Kazakhstan. This led to a tense dialogue between him and Kazakh President Nursultan Nazerbayev, who assured Yeltsin that any attempt to reclaim Kazakh territory for Russia would be met with violent opposition. *The Treaty of Friendship, Cooperation, and Mutual Aid*, signed between Russia and Kazakhstan in May of 1992, confirmed the

integrity of the Kazakh borders but it was not until 1996 that Yeltsin formally renounced Russian territorial rights to northeastern Kazakhstan (Olcott 2010). Figure 5.

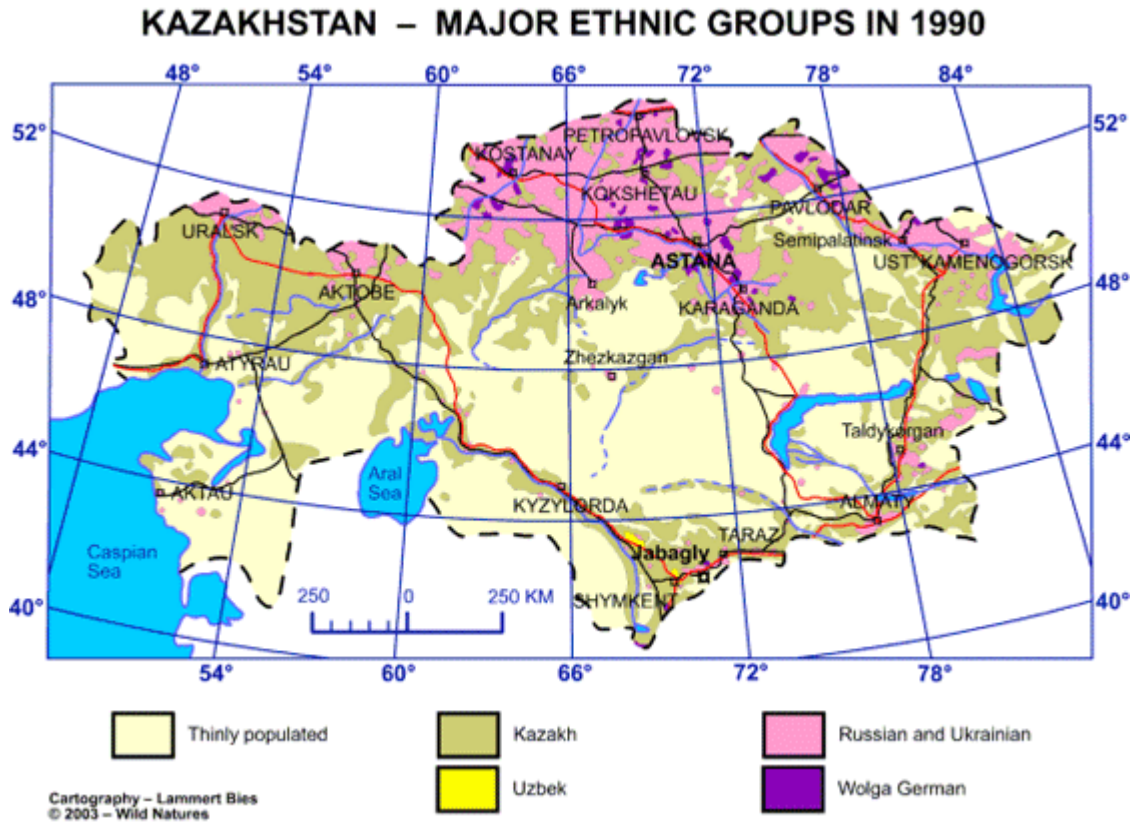


Figure 5: Minority Populations (Source: Kazakhstan Embassy to the Kingdom of Norway 2013).

Separatists in the North

With the ethnic Russian separatist movement gaining momentum in the north, seemingly with Russian governmental support, it appeared that ethnic violence or strife was inevitable for Kazakhstan. However, by making certain acute political decisions, President Nazarbayev avoided ethnic conflict (Abdrakhmanovich 2011). First, a clause was included in the 1995 constitution making it illegal to create autonomous districts

within Kazakhstan. Enforcement of this law came in 1999 when the government arrested 22 Cossack separatists in eastern Kazakhstan for their attempt to create the Russian Altay Autonomous Region near the city of Ust’Kamonogorsk (now called Oskerman). (Figure 1) Their leader, Viktor Kazimirchuk, was sentenced to 18 years in prison with 13 other members of the group sentenced to prison time varying from 4 to 17 years. This was a bold demonstration on behalf of the Kazakhstani officials as it ignored repeated requests from the Russian government to ease the sentences of the offenders. Russia also expressed that they do not support or recognize separatist movements in the Altay region (Zardykhan 2004, Peyrouse 2007).

The second political decision that assisted in extinguishing separatist feelings in the north was the decision to move the nation’s capital from its historic location of Almaty, in the southeastern corner of the country in a highly populated area close to the borders of China, Kyrgyzstan, and Uzbekistan, to the city of Akmola in a northern and remote district, also named Akmola. Akmola means “white boneyard” in the Kazakh language so the city was renamed Astana, which means “Capital”. The capital was officially moved in 1997 to a location that was mostly inhabited by ethnic Russians and Volga Germans. The President claims the move was due to the earthquake prone nature of Almaty and that the mountainous terrain of the region lacked space for population growth, however, it is the thoughts of many Kazakhstani and international scholars that this move was a decidedly pointed decision to utterly and irretrievably squash the separatist movement in the north (Olcott 2010, Peyrouse 2007, Schatz 2003, Zardykhan 2004).

Astana is located in an extremely harsh climate deep within the Kazakh steppes and is the second coldest capital city in the world after Ulaanbaatar, Mongolia. Despite its remoteness and inhabitability, Astana has become a vibrant and futuristic city built at a tremendous expense that has attracted thousands of people to the region (Yacher 2009). Most of the new architecture of Astana has symbolic meaning relating to the myths and memories of the Kazakh people. There is the monument to the three hordes of the Kazakh Khanate, the Khan Shatyr entertainment center in the shape of a traditional Kazakh yurt, the Baiterek Tower which represents the Kazakh myth of the Samruk Bird and the Tree of Life, and museums dedicated to President Nazarbayev, Ablai Khan (a Kazakh hero who united the three hordes in the 18th century), and Saken Seifullin, the Kazakh writer and political activist (Brummell 2011). This new capital city has virtually eliminated the Russian or Volga German inspired architecture and replaced it with an exclusively ethnically Kazakh cultural landscape. Whether the purpose of creating this new city was to entice non-Russians to settle in this area, or to avoid a catastrophic earthquake, moving the capital city coincided with the demise of the Russian separatist movement.

The third political decision that contributed to the end of the Russian separatist movement was the gerrymandering practices that created new districts within Kazakhstan. Combined, these practices created a Kazakhstan that had no districts where ethnic Russians were the majority. For instance the East Kazakhstan region that was 67% Russian in 1996 was merged with the Semipalatinsk region which was 54% Kazakh, to create a new region of East Kazakhstan that is now 55% Kazakh and 41% Russian (Dave 2003).

The fourth political decision was the strategic placement of the returning Kazakh diaspora. At independence in 1991 there were an estimated 4.5 million ethnic Kazakhs living outside of Kazakhstan mainly in China, Uzbekistan, Russia, Mongolia, Turkmenistan, Afghanistan, and Turkey. The government allotted an unspecified amount of money to provide housing and employment for these repatriated Kazakhs to entice them to immigrate to Kazakhstan. The Kazakh Diaspora was considered to be more nationalistic and linguistically and culturally pure than the resident Kazakhs who had experienced the “russification” of the Soviet Union (Diener 2006, Zardykhan 2004).

President Nazarbayev made an especially tenacious attempt to repatriate Kazakhs which included making an exception to his prohibition of carrying dual citizenship. This angered the Russian population of Kazakhstan as they had strenuously appealed for Nazarbayev to allow them to hold both Russian and Kazakhstani citizenship. The repatriated Kazakhs were all placed in regions where there was a heavy Russian majority which many saw as a pointed effort to “Kazakhize” the Russian populations of those regions (Diener 2006, Olcott 2010, Zardykhan 2004). According to some estimates, up to 500,000 repatriated Kazakhs moved to Kazakhstan between 1991 and 2001 (Zardykhan 2004). The placement of these returning Kazakhs in heavily Russian populated areas caused significant problems as the repatriated Kazakhs did not speak or understand Russian, nor did they speak the same Kazakh dialect as did the Kazakhs who had remained in Kazakhstan. They also adhered to the traditional Arabic script of the historical Kazakh language, and not the modern Cyrillic script that was implemented annexation by the Russian Empire (Dave 2003). They also showed significant distrust of Russians and the repatriated Kazakhs from Mongolia, especially, were used to a more

primitive way of living than the modern Kazakhs of Kazakhstan. Up to 20 percent of these repatriated Kazakhs chose to return to their native country after living in Kazakhstan for a few years (Schatz 2000).

Second Virgin Lands Campaign

In October 2000, Russian president Vladimir Putin visited Kazakhstan and spoke very candidly about the “Russian Question”. He advocated that the Russian population of Kazakhstan had three choices: a cultural autonomy that would encourage Russians to stay in Kazakhstan; a territorial unification of the northern Kazakhstani districts with Russia; or a massive emigration of ethnic Russians back to Russia. As the first two options were not feasible, he encouraged all Russian who wanted to break with Kazakhstan to return to Russia as part of a “second virgin lands campaign” (Peyrouse 2007). He stated that those who came to Kazakhstan under the first virgin lands campaign and their descendants would have priority in this program. He saw it as a way to populate the central areas of Russia, especially Siberia, and counterbalance the population decline of the Russian Federation. Many Russians were ecstatic about this possibility and were prepared to break with Kazakhstan and return to Russia on the “first convoy”, the name of the first round of settlers during the virgin land campaigns, and start a new life. The Republican Slavic Movement (LAD), the primary organization in Kazakhstan dedicated to protecting the rights of Russians within its borders, made this statement:

In the 50’s, Russia sent convoys of volunteers for the development of Kazakh virgin lands; today, for the national countryside development, Russia uses the first convoy of the former *tselinniki*, their children and grand-children. This project must become the first step in the realisation of the compatriots’ transfer, which is so necessary for Russia today (Peyrouse 2007:495).

The overwhelming enthusiasm of this repatriation program was soon quenched when the Russia Duma failed to approve funding for the “second virgin lands campaign”. This has led to some ethnic Russians in the “near abroad” to wonder whether Russia had forgotten its compatriots altogether. The failure of Russia to actualize an organized emigration program has left many Russians resigned to their fate of living in countries that are not their kin state. In the Almaty district, 61 year old Marina Sergeevna says she no longer cares about the political debate surrounding the fate of the Russian minority in Kazakhstan and sums up the opinions of many when she said “Those who had a place to go, left long ago, and those who stayed in the country will figure out their way” (Tazhibayeva 2009).

Demographic Change

At the time of independence in 1991, the population of Kazakhstan was equally ethnically Russian and ethnically Kazakh as both ethnicities made up 40 percent of the population (Peyrouse 2007). Ethnic Russians have a legitimate historical claim to territories in Northern Kazakhstan as they had been living in these territories for as long as the nomadic tribes of ethnic Kazakhs. Many Russians refer to this area as “South Siberia” and did not consider this region an authentic part of the new republic of Kazakhstan (Zardykhan 2004). Due to the treatment of the ethnically Russian population in the north of the country, as well as other factors discussed earlier in this paper, many ethnic Russians have chosen to emigrate.

Russians

Repatriated Kazakhs were allowed to keep dual citizenship between their former countries and Kazakhstan, though dual citizenship was prohibited for all others. Many ethnic Russians felt this was a deliberate act to squash any kind of allegiance towards Russia or the FSU and force ethnic Russians to align themselves solely with Kazakhstan and the ethnic Kazakh way of life (Olcott 2010, Zardykhan 2004). Ethnic Russians also considered the language policies which were enacted in the 1990's as discriminatory against minorities and a conscious effort to keep minorities from government employment or higher education. Though Russians made up more than 40 percent of the population at independence in 1991, with a population of over 6 million, their numbers had dwindled so drastically that by 2001 they only complemented 20 percent of the total population of Kazakhstan, with a population of 3.5 million (Dave 2003). A total of 1.5 million ethnic Russians emigrated between 1989 and 1999, making an average of 150,000 emigrating for every year of the 1990's (Peyrouse 2007).

Return migration by ethnic Kazakhs in other countries, and the higher birthrate of ethnic Kazakhs compared to ethnic Russians also contributed to this stark demographic change, however, it is the mass out migration that is considered the main factor to this ethnic disparity (Olcott 2010). By the year 2050, it is estimated that the ethnic composition of Kazakhstan will be more than 80 percent ethnic Kazakh and less than 10 percent ethnic Russian (Zardykhan 2004).

Volga Germans

The first permanent German settlers in Russian lands dates to the 18th century when Tsarina Catherine the Great invited Germanic people to populate and farm areas that had recently been conquered in wars against the Tatar and Ottoman Empires. During the Russian Revolution the “Autonomous Communes of Volga German Workers” was established and evolved into what was the first autonomous ethnic region of the Soviet Union in 1924, the Volga German Autonomous Republic (VGAR) (Diener 2006). Figure 6.

The outbreak of WWII led to the Volga Germans collectively being labeled as collaborators with Nazi Germany and the entirety of the German population in the western regions of the USSR, more than a million people, were deported to Kazakhstan and Siberia. The VGAR was liquidated and the lands repopulated by Russians (Brown 2005). The surviving members of the German population were constricted to “special settlements” where conditions were comparable to those of a GULAG (Diener 2006).

These population transfers increased the German population of Kazakhstan from approximately 92,000 in 1939, to 650,000 in 1959 (Brown 2005, Diener 2006). By 1989 there were more than 950,000 Volga Germans living in Kazakhstan and within 10 years of independence, more than 650,000 Volga Germans had emigrated to Germany. This was two thirds of the German population, bringing the percentage of Germans in Kazakhstan from over six percent of the population in 1991 to currently less than one percent (Diener 2009, Olcott 2010).

What is significant about this mass out migration is that the Volga Germans were separated from Germany by over 200 years and a severe language barrier. Known as the “*Russlandsdeutsche*” (Russian-Germans) to the natives of Germany, hardly any of the returning German population spoke German or had knowledge of the mainland German culture. These barriers led to most of the *Russlandsdeutsche* living in ghettos where there is a high level of criminality, drug abuse, and violence (Brown 2005). In response to this problem, the government of Germany has channeled significant funds to entice the Volga Germans to remain in Kazakhstan. They have established the *Deutsches Haus* which distributes free medicine, produce, and fuel for the winter while also providing free German lessons (Dave 2003). However, the Volga German population of Kazakhstan is shrinking as emigration remains high.



Figure 6: Historical homeland of Volga Germans and Koreans (Source Diener 2009).

Koreans

Ethnic Koreans, like the Volga Germans, have a similar history regarding their relationship with Kazakhstan. During the Russian Empirical expansion in the 19th century, the acquisition of the territories of *Preamur* and *Primor* in the Russian Far East (1858-1860), established a Korean population within Russian territory that has existed ever since (Diener 2006). Figure 6.

The period immediately leading up to and during the Russo-Japanese War (1904-1905) led to a fear of advancement from Japanese occupied Korea. It was mandated that all Koreans who had inhabited the *Preamur* and *Primor* before 1884 would be allowed to stay in that region, but any settlers after that time would be relocated to areas away from the borderlands. Accusations of espionage and rumors of a secret secessionist movement in the Far East had been rampant for many years but it wasn't until 1937 that a mass deportation of the Korean population of this region began (Diener 2006).

In 1937, over 92,000 Koreans were deported from the Soviet Far East and relocated to Kazakhstan. As with the German population who arrived four years later, these deportees were placed into areas of restricted living. However, the Korean population was more adept in moving to areas where they could pursue farming, while the German population overwhelmingly stayed where they were resettled, even after restrictions on movement were lifted. During WWII neither Germans nor Koreans were allowed to fight in the Soviet military, and while the German population was widely distrusted and openly discriminated against, the Korean population contributed immensely to the war effort through farming and creating machinery used by Soviet troops. Thousands of Korean earned the medal "For Honorable Labor During the Great Fatherland War" and this greatly contributed to a feeling of usefulness and integration

into Soviet society, feelings that were never realized for the German people (Diener 2006).

The Korean population was the most “russified” of all the minorities in Kazakhstan. Few Koreans under the age of 60 have Korean first names or any knowledge of the Korean language. Since 1991 South Korea, like Germany, has invested a large amount of money in their ethnic kin living in Kazakhstan in order to revive the Korean culture and language. Though originally settled in Kazakhstan as “punished people” Koreans have assimilated to the way of life in Kazakhstan and very few have chosen to emigrate (Dave 2003).

The current population of Koreans in Kazakhstan is almost 130,000 people though that number is slowly dwindling. This is not because of migration but because Koreans are the most likely of all the ethnic minorities to intermarry with ethnic Kazakhs. Progeny of these marriages are almost exclusively listed as “Kazakh” on any census form so an accurate count of Korean presence in Kazakhstan is difficult to attain (Diener 2006).

There is speculation that the ill treatment of the German population during and after WWII is the predominant cause of the German population leaving Kazakhstan, while acceptance of Koreans into everyday Kazakh life is what has encouraged them to stay (Diener 2009). While there may not be one specific reason for this disparity, the actions of the Korean minority in Kazakhstan demonstrates that minorities can be accepted as citizens of this new country regardless of whether they are ethnically Kazakh or not.

Kazakhstan has shifted from a diverse Kazakhstani state at independence to one that is becoming increasingly mono-ethnic (Olcott 2010). This is partly due to the higher birthrate of ethnic Kazakhs, but principally due to the mass emigration of minority ethnic groups after the collapse of the Soviet Union. This high rate of demographic change has been a challenge to the President as his nation building strategies have been based on the consideration that Kazakhstan is a multi-cultural and multi-ethnic state. On one hand, at 63 percent of the population, ethnic Kazakhs are now experiencing what President Nazarbayev celebrated as the “cultural reawakening of the titular ethnic Kazakh group” (Cummings 2006, 177) however, on the other hand, this cultural reawakening is happening at the expense of and without the support of the numerous minorities living in the country. Though the Korean population has shown that there can be some harmony between ethnic Kazakhs and minority populations, the overwhelming amount of out migration by other minority groups has challenged the nation building strategies of Kazakhstan.

Symbols of National Identity

President Nazarbayev has made a very determined effort to create a nation that is diverse and multi-ethnic without the ethnic strife that has plagued the other FSU Central Asian Republics. Despite the exodus of the Russian and German populations, Kazakhstan continues to be the most multi-ethnic country in the region with over 130 ethnicities and 30 different religions (Abdrakhmanovich 2011). Keeping the peace is tremendously difficult so the president has enacted multiple legislations and created organizations that protect the rights of its citizens to religious and ethnic freedom. The constitution of 1995

guarantees the freedom of religion for all Kazakhstani citizens and a clear separation of church and state. Discrimination based on nationality or ethnicity was also prohibited (Schatz 2000). Though the country is over 60 percent Muslim, Kazakhstan is not an Islamic republic nor will the President align with or join organizations based on religious or ethnic reasons. President Nazarbayev has declined membership with the Organization of the Islamic Conference and as a sign of his commitment to religious diversity, travelled both to the Vatican and to Mecca in 1994 (Cummings 2004).

The Flag of Kazakhstan

A nation-wide competition was held at independence to create a new design for the flag of Kazakhstan. Shaken Niyazbekov, a prominent Kazakhstani artist who is considered the founder of Kazakh design, won the competition over 600 other entries. The new state flag was officially adopted on June 2, 1992. The pattern on the left side of the flag is called “kozhkar-muiz,” or horn of the ram, a traditional ornamental design of the nomadic tribes which inhabited this land and is now the national pattern of Kazakhstan. The color blue represents the sky and water while the sun represents energy and life, and the grain shaped rays of the sun represent wealth and abundance. The Golden Steppe Eagle has been used on traditional flags of ethnic Kazakhs for centuries and also represents independence, freedom and Kazakhstan’s flight to the future (Rzhevsky 2013). Figure 7.



Figure 7: Flag of Kazakhstan (Source: Rzhevsky 2013).

Assembly of People of Kazakhstan

The Assembly of People of Kazakhstan (APK) was created on March 1, 1995 by President Nazarbayev. The Assembly was originally called the Assembly of the Nations of Kazakhstan, and is sometimes referred to by that name. It incorporates 820 different national-cultural centers from around the country and serves as a consultative-advisory body directly affiliated with the President of Kazakhstan. The main goal of the Assembly when founded was to “strengthen social stability and thereby to provide a basis for the fair solution of ethnic issues” (Palace of Peace and Accord 2013). In 2006 the APK was moved to the Palace of Peace and Reconciliation (also known as the Pyramid of Peace and Accord, see figure 6) newly built in Astana for the purpose of holding this assembly, as well as the Congress of Leaders of World and Traditional Religions.

In 2007 the role of the APK was increased to become a political institute as well as a public and cultural institution. Nine members of the Assembly, representing different ethnic groups within Kazakhstan, were appointed to the Lower House of Parliament and it is now required that all legislative bills that move through Parliament are reviewed by the APK before being passed (Abdrakhmanovich 2011).

The new goals of the Assembly of People of Kazakhstan are as follows:

- To promote the maintenance of interethnic concord and social stability.
- To work out proposals over state policy, making for the development of friendly relations between peoples residing on the Republic of Kazakhstan territory, to promote their cultural and spiritual revival and development on the basis of observance of principles of equality.
- Formation of the public political culture on civilized and democratic standards.
- To provide for consideration of multilateral ethnic interests within the national policy held by the State.
- To search for compromises to settle the social conflicts arising in the society.

The impact of the APK had been wide reaching with more than 100 ethnic schools and 170 Sunday language schools having been established by them, and the number of cultural centers nationwide has tripled. The APK has been a large influence in creating awareness and sensitivity to the various ethnic groups living in Kazakhstan (Assembly of the People of Kazakhstan 2013). Former UN Secretary General Kofi Annan praised Kazakhstan as “an example of ethnic harmony, stability, sustainable development for other states... thanks to the Assembly of the Nations of Kazakhstan, a variety of ethnic, cultural, and religious groups that make up a great nation and can

participate in making important decisions that affect their lives” (Abdrakhmanovich 2011).

Doctrine of National Unity

On May 1, 2010 the 10 year program of the Doctrine of National Unity (DNU) was accepted by the Assembly of People of Kazakhstan and President Nazarbayev. After 18 months of edits and rewrites the DNU is a policy that officially equates the nation with the state and calls for an all civic Kazakhstani state (Davenel 2012). Under the three DNU Principles: “One country, one destiny”, “Various origins, equal opportunities”, and “Development of a national spirit”, the Doctrine of National Unity emphasizes that all Kazakhstani citizens share a unique value system that includes accepting all Kazakhstani citizens regardless of race, ethnicity, or culture (Kazakhstan Embassy to the US 2013).

The DNU was met with some opposition mainly from ethnic Kazakh nationalist groups who oppose an all civic Kazakhstani identity and instead wish to have an ethnically based Kazakh identity for the people of Kazakhstan (Tazhibayeva 2009). Other critics claimed it was unnecessary as there is the Constitution to do the job. “I have always supported, however, the need to develop such a document. Constitution is a Law, but Doctrine is a Spirit. We need a spiritual consolidation of people of Kazakhstan around the principles that we all share and understand,” a prominent intellectual and linguist Murat Auezov has stated (Kazakhstan Embassy to the US 2013).

The primary goal of the Doctrine is to “define the priorities and mechanisms for ensuring national unity in Kazakhstan on the grounds of civil identity, patriotism, spiritual and cultural solidarity, stability and interethnic and inter-confessional harmony

in society” (Kazakhstan UN 2013). A secondary goal is to elevate the state language (Kazakh) to one that every citizen should know and regard it as “impetus for improving his/her personal competitiveness and participating actively in the public life” (Interfax Kazakhstan 2013). Along with a greater importance placed on knowing the Kazakh language, the Doctrine also calls for a trilingual state where Kazakh, Russian, and English will eventually be spoken by all citizens of Kazakhstan.

The Doctrine of National Unity is a blueprint for where Kazakhstan is headed in the future regarding its national identity. The doctrine emphasizes that Kazakhstan is a multicultural melting pot in which every citizen is first and foremost a Kazakhstani. President Nazarbayev claims that the DNU will achieve "consolidating political stability, unity, and accord" and will lead Kazakhstan into being a progressive nation that is a leader in interethnic harmony (Lillis 2010).

Concluding remarks

The goals of state building were to first “nurture patriotism for a civic, all Kazakhstani state identity”, then to “enable different ethnic groups to discover their own individual cultural identities”, followed lastly by “reserving a special place in this new state for the cultural reawakening of the titular ethnic Kazakh group” (Cummings 2006, 177). President Nazarbayev has steadily worked towards these goals since independence and there is evidence to support they have been met. President Nazarbayev has been using top-down nationalism to create a civic all-inclusive state identity by implementing policies like the Doctrine of National Unity and allowing the Russian and Kazakh

languages to be equal to each other. The creation of the APK is a means for different ethnic groups to have a way to discover their own cultural identities.

The third goal of “reserving a special place in this new state for the cultural reawakening of the titular ethnic Kazakh group” (Cummings 2006, 177) has also been accomplished but in a way contrary to the commitment made by President Nazarbayev to multi-culturalism and inter-ethnic accord. The treatment of the Russian minority has been criticized by “almost every popular Russian politician at least once” (Zardykhan 2004, 69) and the Russian population within Kazakhstan has responded to this treatment by emigrating in large numbers. The policies relating to language angered many non-Kazakh speakers as they felt it was a way for the President to “Kazakhize” the country. The majority of the Volga German population chose to emigrate and by the year 2050, the ethnic composition of Kazakhstan is estimated to be more than 80 percent ethnically Kazakh (Zardykhan 2004).

The creation of a multi-ethnic national identity in Kazakhstan suggests a new model for nations and political states to perceive themselves in the modern world. The government of Kazakhstan, led by President Nazarbayev, has implemented laws and doctrines in an effort to create inter-ethnic harmony and be an example to the world. However, this top-down system of nationalism has failed to account for the wishes of the people of Kazakhstan, all of whom were minorities at independence in 1991. This effort to change the way the citizens of Kazakhstan perceive themselves and other citizens no longer as 'Kazakhs', 'Russians', 'Soviets', or other ethnicities, but to identify solely as 'Kazakhstanis' has not succeeded. The mass emigration of non-ethnic Kazakhs, the legal exceptions made for repatriated Kazakhs, and the government led initiatives to change

the language used by the majority of the population has led to a state that is quickly becoming mono-ethnic.

The Kazakhstani government has successfully used the concepts of ethno-symbolism, post-modernist nationalism, and territoriality to achieve their state building goals. The new capital city of Astana incorporates the myths, memories, and symbols of the Kazakh *ethnie*, (one of the pillars of ethno-symbolism) in their architectural designs. The Bayterek tower, the most famous monument of the city, is reference to a Kazakh myth of the tree of life and the Samruk bird, who lays a golden egg in the tree every spring. The Khan Shatyr entertainment center is in the style of a traditional Kazakh yurt, and the Nur-Astana Mosque trumps all other religious facilities as it is the largest mosque in Central Asia (Brummell 2011). The city has removed any Soviet era, Russian, or Volga German inspired architecture and has replaced them with an ethnically Kazakh inspired motif. This region of Kazakhstan has been historically populated by ethnic Russians and Volga Germans, and the atmosphere of the new city has been felt as an affront to the pre-capital population of Astana, most of who has since left the city.

President Nazarbayev has boasted that the government led nation building strategies of Kazakhstan has resulted in no ethnic conflict, unlike the people led bottom-up nationalism policies in the other FSU Central Asian Republics. However, this avoidance of ethnic conflict has come with a price. Rather than stay and fight for the state the minorities of Kazakhstan wanted, most of them left the country. Those that did stay and attempted to create people-led nation building prospects were imprisoned as any type of cultural nationalism, federalism, or separatist sentiment is strictly forbidden (Zardykhan 2004). (Russian Altay Autonomous Region on page 35)

Since independence in 1991, Kazakhstan has been extremely economically successful and holds positions on a number of international organizations. The wealth of this new republic has influenced why it has been politically successful as the authoritarian rule of its president is largely supported by the population. He is extremely well liked as he is able to give the population healthcare, food, working infrastructure, a better education system, and a promising future (Olcott 2010). The constitution limits a president to two consecutive, five year terms, however, there is an exception made for the first president of Kazakhstan, Nursultan Nazarbayev, who in 2013 will have been in power for twenty two years. It is his vision that has shaped the national identity of post-Soviet Kazakhstan and at seventy eight years of age, one wonders what will become of his vision, and this republic, once a new leader comes to power.

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