



# The Transformation of Nationalism in Central and Eastern Europe

Ideas and Structures

edited by Karl Cordell & Konrad Jajecznik



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in Central and Eastern Europe**  
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University of Warsaw  
Faculty of Journalism and Political Science

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Für Tante Dore

*Karl Cordell*



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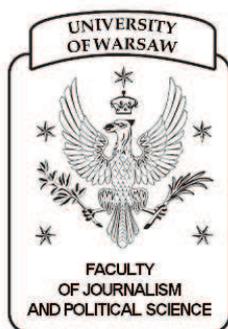
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## Contents

<b>Acknowledgments</b> .....	9
<b>Introduction</b> .....	11
<b>Karl Cordell</b>	
Germany and Poland: Strangers on a Train or Participants of a Common Destiny? .....	17
<b>Konrad Jajecznik</b>	
The Nationalist Movement in Poland: the Third Evolution Phase of Polish Nationalism after 1989? .....	35
<b>Peter Smuk</b>	
Combating Nationalist Hate Speech by Legal Means – European Standards and Selected Case Studies from Hungary .....	63
<b>Gergely Egedy</b>	
Nation-Building and Kin-Minorities: the Strategies of Hungarian Conservatism .....	79
<b>Ágnes Vass</b>	
Whose Citizens? The Development of Hungarian National Policy Towards Kin-Minorities after 1989 – With a Special Focus on Ethnic Hungarians Living in Slovakia .....	95
<b>Justyna Polanowska</b>	
The Swedish-Speaking Minority in Finland: Identity, Ethnolinguistic Vitality and Upcoming Challenges in the Preservation of Official Language Status .....	117

**Jiří Čeněk & Josef Smolík**

Nationalism and Its Manifestations in Sport: the Case of Football Hooliganism  
in the Czech Republic ..... 137

**Miroslav Mareš**

The Radicalisation of Slovak Separatism after the Fall of Communism  
and its Impact on Czech – Slovak Relations ..... 155

**Andrzej Wierzbicki**

The ‘New Russian Nationalism’ as a Challenge to Modernization in Russia ..... 171

**Katharina Buck**

Limitations to the Nationalising State: the Case of Kazakhstan ..... 189

**Notes on contributors** ..... 211

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*Katharina Buck*

## **Limitations to the Nationalising State: the Case of Kazakhstan**

### **1. Introduction**

The case of Kazakhstan has attracted and perplexed scholars of nationalism since the country's independence from the Soviet Union in 1991 (Buck 2013: 1–2, 7–8). Although a series of studies in the 1990s (Buck 2013: 3) suggested that Kazakhstan would have major problems creating a coherent citizenry from its multi-ethnic population and thus establishing state legitimacy, the country has not fallen apart, and is even often seen as a relative success story in the post-Soviet space.

With a territory five times the size of France, Kazakhstan was the second largest independent polity to emerge from the disintegration of the Soviet Union and remains the world's ninth largest country in terms of area. It extends from western Siberia in the North to the Central Asian Silk Road in the South. It borders China in the East and the Caspian Sea in the West, and a small portion of its land west of the Ural River is situated in eastern-most Europe.

Kazakhstan's vast expanses are inhabited by a population of around only 17 million people who make up an ethnic potpourri of more than one hundred stable ethnic identity categories. These categories are a legacy of Soviet ideology and administrative practice that defined and institutionalised diverse ethno-'nationalities'. Moreover the Kazakh Soviet Socialist Republic (Kazakh SSR, KSSR) was the only Soviet Republic where the 'titular' population was not an ethnic majority. According to the last Soviet census of 1989, less than 40 percent of the Kazakh Republic's population were 'titulars', meaning ethnic Kazakhs. The non-Kazakh Russophone segment, in turn, made up about 50 percent. Ethnic Russians, Ukrainians and Byelorussians together constituted 44 percent. When added to the Kazakh SSR's ethnic Germans and Poles, the Russophones represented an absolute majority in the Republic and 80 percent in its North and East (Khazanov 1995: 246; Peyrouse 2008: 107).

To clarify the terminology, the term Russophone describes a demographic segment that is not necessarily ethnically Russian, but maintains a lifestyle in which

the Russian language and traits of everyday culture associated with being Russian are dominant. The largest proportion of Kazakhstan's Russophones is ethnically Russian, followed by 'Russified' ethnic Ukrainians, Tatars and Germans; some Kazakhs also fall within this category.

Since independence, many of Kazakhstan's Russophones have chosen the exit option. Especially during the first decade of Kazakhstani sovereignty, they emigrated from Kazakhstan to what are commonly referred to as their 'historical homelands'; the majority of them to Russia or Germany. Between 1993 and 1994 alone, when net emigration peaked, Kazakhstan saw a mass exodus of more than half a million of its non-titular citizens. Although emigration has slowed down since, a total of 3.5 million people left the country between 1991 and 2009, causing an officially acknowledged brain drain (Nazarbayev 2008: 12–13; Nyussupova & Rodionova 2011: 81). In spite of this chiefly non-Kazakh mass emigration the non-Kazakh segment still makes up around 37 percent of the total population of Kazakhstan today.

An even higher percentage of Kazakhstan's population remains linguistically Russified to varying degrees. In the latest Kazakhstani census of 2009 (STAT 2010), 85 percent of all Kazakhstanis claim proficiency in Russian, and 95 percent say they understand the language. Only 62 percent, mostly ethnic Kazakhs, declare that they are proficient in Kazakh, which has been the official state language since 1989. About 26 percent confess to not knowing any Kazakh at all. Importantly, questions enquiring about preferred language use are avoided in Kazakhstani censuses. In addition, the figure for Kazakh language proficiency is likely to have been inflated due to another crucial Soviet legacy, namely the common understanding among Kazakhstanis that one particular language forms the indispensable core of any ethno-nation, and that this language is also almost automatically each ethno-national individual's 'mother tongue'. This reality has lately been more carefully examined by Kazakhstani scholars who now "admit that (...) answers about the question of mother tongue [in research interviews or surveys] cannot give the real picture of language knowledge" and instead tell us more about "the level of self-consciousness of the ethnic group" (Bokayev, Zharkynbekova, Nurseitova *et al.* 2012: 338). To clarify the terminology employed by me throughout this chapter, in accordance with public discourse in Kazakhstan I use the term 'Kazakhstani' to refer to the citizenry and institutions of the state of Kazakhstan. 'Kazakh', in contrast, signifies ethnic affiliation.

Throughout the 1990s the dominant discourse about Kazakhstan focused on latent ethnic instability, or, as Ingvar Svanberg put it, "the development of hate group behaviour" (1994: 113) within the newly-independent polity. Against the backdrop of the success of Samuel P. Huntington's 1993 *Clash of Civilizations?*

the country's two main demographic segments were often seen as representing two immutable ethno-cultural entities, rendering Kazakhstan a candidate for breakup. The Kazakhstani scholar Rustem Kadyrshanow described these two "civilisations" as comprising an ethnic Kazakh-dominated Turkic-Muslim bloc on the one hand, and an ethnic Russian-dominated Slavic-Christian bloc on the other (1996: 14). Differentiated not only by their 'mother tongues' (Kazakh versus Russian) and religions (Sunni Islam versus Orthodox Christianity), but also by geography (Kazakhs in the South versus Slavs in the North and East), economic inequalities (rural Kazakhs versus urban Slavs), and by a painful history of Russian 'colonisation' of Kazakhs, the two blocks were seen as irreconcilable and Huntington's criteria seemed over-fulfilled.

In 1992 *The Economist* suggested that Kazakhstan's demographic segments' "deep suspicion of each other" could "flare into hatred" (1992: 79), Dominic Lieven and John McGarry judged that "[n]ot much love [had been] lost between the two races" residing in "this bubbling volcano" (1993: 74), and Neil Melvin argued that Kazakhstan's Slavs defined themselves as separate from Kazakhs and, crucially, "as a part of Russia" (1995: 123). 'Ethnic' clashes elsewhere in the former Soviet Union, such as the recurring riot- and pogrom-type conflicts between Kyrgyz and Uzbeks in Kazakhstan's southern neighbour Kyrgyzstan, and the separatist conflicts in Abkhazia and South Ossetia, Transnistria, Chechnya and Nagorno-Karabakh, seemed to suggest that analogous fault lines in Kazakhstan could lead to similar 'ethnic' disruptions or, to define the terminology of an 'ethnic' conflict, to coercive forms of political confrontation in which at least one of the adversaries represents a type of group that mobilises along ethnic lines.

Yet despite these expectations, Kazakhstan has become a comparatively stable polity in the post-Soviet space that remains characterised by its multi-ethnic population. This populace has neither turned its homeland into the next "Yugoslavia", as Western analysts such as Zbigniew Brzezinski (1997: 125) and Eugene Rostow (1993: 16) suggested. Nor has Kazakhstan deteriorated into something "far worse than Yugoslavia", as the country's own and still incumbent political elite warned (Olcott 1995: 298; *The Economist* 1992: 79). Although regarded as an unlikely candidate for successful state-building and the preservation of interethnic harmony, Kazakhstan has developed viable political institutions and has not seen any large-scale interethnic clashes in its now nearly twenty-five years of independence.

Stability and successful state-building do not imply, however, that the country has also succeeded in the related challenge of 'nation-building' in the sense of instilling a state-framed national identity and a feeling of common destiny based on civic loyalty to the territorial homeland and its institutions, and some

reconciliation or subordination of ethnic affiliations (Brown 1999: 283). In short, the absence of overt ethnic conflict, Walker Connor suggests, does not necessarily entail the existence “of a single national consciousness that is shared by all segments of the population” (1972: 348). The creation of precisely this kind of consciousness, however, has featured prominently on the agenda of Kazakhstan’s authorities who have argued that both the development of a state-framed, overarching feeling of national unity and the effective prevention of interethnic discord associated with this development are prerequisites for state security and, in fact, survival (Strategy 2030 1997: 6).

In the year 2000, on the occasion of the country’s early decennial independence celebrations, Kazakhstan’s President Nursultan Nazarbaev<sup>1</sup> invoked Massimo d’Azeglio’s *bon mot*<sup>2</sup> declaring: “We created Kazakhstan, now the task is to create Kazakhstanis” (Seisenova 2005: 6). In 2002, in an attempt to move on from the oft-deplored post-Soviet ideological vacuum, the Kazakhstani ‘Supreme Scientific-Technological Commission’ defined as one of its key research priorities the “theory and practice of a nationwide idea as the foundation for the stable development of contemporary Kazakhstan” (Chebotarev 2008). In 2008, President Nazarbaev embarked on the last major civic identity project to date when commissioning select academics and the council of his consultative body, the Assembly of the People of Kazakhstan, to draft a ‘doctrine’ of civic national unity. These repeated attempts at giving meaning to ‘Kazakhstaniness’ reflect the reality that there is still not one clear, officially sanctioned and popularly accepted understanding of what Kazakhstaniness should be.

The apparent absence of the two key features which I have discussed, overt ethnic conflict and an established understanding of an overarching ‘Kazakhstani’ national identity, is a puzzling observation that forms the starting point of my contribution to this volume (*cf.* also Buck 2013). Crucially, with these dual absences, the case of Kazakhstan seems to contradict not only the Kazakhstani government, but also the Western literature that considered it important for the newly-fledged state to create one state-framed civic national identity in order to bridge ethnic divisions, stabilise and consolidate the polity, support state-building and prevent disintegration (Holm-Hansen 1999: 156; Kaplan & Herb 1999: 3; Kolstø 1998: 52; Olcott 2002: 51; Svanberg 1994: 122).

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<sup>1</sup> The President’s surname is also transliterated as ‘Nazarbayev’ and ‘Nasarbajew’ in the secondary sources.

<sup>2</sup> “*L’Italia è fatta. Restano da fare gli italiani*” often colloquially translated as “We have made Italy. Now we must make Italians” is a famous quote from Massimo d’Azeglio’s memoirs, published in 1866. D’Azeglio was an Italian statesman and Prime Minister of the Kingdom of Sardinia from 1849 to 1852.

As the Kazakhstani case challenges the twofold expectations as to why this country should have fallen apart, my contribution examines what has actually happened. It therefore analyses the state's endeavour to 'create Kazakhstanis'. This means that I ask what Kazakhstani nation-making has looked like, what it has sought to achieve and where it has failed. This chapter thus has two main foci. First, it examines the politics and policies of official nation-making in Kazakhstan. This focus implies a concentration on elite political actors, in particular government, which is an appropriate choice here as this contribution deals with a highly centralised political system, which is characterised by its president dominating over a power vertical. Second, this chapter pays attention to the limitations of the official programmes of nationalism. Looking for and at these limitations should not mislead us into thinking that Kazakhstan is a cauldron of ethnic conflict. Rather, my focus on Kazakhstani deviations from ideal-type 'nation-building' as described by David Brown (1999) and Connor (1972) serves to explore how, regardless of the officially stated desire to make a state-nation, this project is unfinished.

Moreover I suggest that the official programme of nation-making is imperfect and indeed riddled with inconsistencies and contradictions. In particular, I focus on the paradox of a dominant, ethnic-based Kazakh nationalism that wants to erase difference and a more multicultural, civic-based Kazakhstani nationalism that seeks to accommodate difference, but on its own terms, often by co-opting minority elites. Thus, the analysis of the Kazakhstani case is important, because it highlights the constraints and paradoxes of nation-making and demonstrates that states can sometimes be 'nationalising' in contradictory ways and seemingly indecisive or undecided. My analysis therefore also suggests that the scholarship on nationalism might have assigned not only too much power to states, but also too much decisiveness and, indeed, decidedness, over what the state hopes to ultimately achieve.

## 2. Dialectical Nationalising Now and Then

In order to understand this seeming indecision over what kind of nation Kazakhstani authorities hope to build, it is vital to first acknowledge that official national identity-making in Kazakhstan has in many ways remained, as Sally N. Cummings puts it, a Soviet-tinged "dual-track process" (2003: 144). Independent Kazakhstan has for example retained Soviet practices of institutionalising ethno-'nationalities' and continues to ascribe both a citizenship and a 'nationality' or 'ethnos', meaning a definite ethnic affiliation, to each of its citizens. In practice, this means that Kazakhstani censuses count both citizens and their ethno-'national' affiliations, and passports state both citizenship and nationality. Despite the fact that there

are legal ways to avoid including this categorisation on a passport, most Kazakhs continue to display their nationality in this manner. This tradition is rooted in practices pertaining to Soviet ‘internationalism’.

The Soviet Union succeeded an empire which, according to Lenin, the first political leader of the USSR, had been characterised by the suppression of non-Russian peoples (1939: 124). Having inherited and indeed recaptured these peoples, Lenin sought to change the previous approach to the ‘nationalities question’ and replace the practices of imperialism by ‘internationalism’, which implied the development of close ties among ‘freed’ peoples. Lenin claimed to thus satisfy the national aspirations of the suppressed. In theory, therefore, the USSR was founded as a voluntary association of nations, represented in member republics. Hence, the Soviet Union was the first ever federal state to base the boundaries of almost all of its political units on ethno-linguistic divisions, later defined as ethno-national, and thus on what were considered largely pristine, “anthropogeographic” criteria (Farrant 2006: 61).

The process of transforming the former governorates and protectorates of the Russian Empire into nationally defined Union Republics was labelled ‘national-territorial delimitation’ in Soviet historiography. Starting in 1924, this ‘national delimitation’ reorganised the political boundaries introducing a principle of social and political identity which was radically new for the majority of Kazakhs. The new structures drew on the exploratory work of tsarist ethnographers as well as on Soviet ethnography and ethnology.

The majority of Soviet scholars favoured primordial approaches to the analysis of ethnic identity and ‘ethnogenesis’ and stressed material factors over psychological ones. The existence of ethnos was, for these scholars, an objective reality, and both conscious and unconscious forms of ethnic attachment were regarded as possible and to display high levels of stability. Political borders drawn along ethnic lines were therefore regarded as particularly durable. While ethnic self-ascription was recognised as a factor in the formation of ethnic identity, it was largely treated as a feature in which several ‘objective’ properties of an ethnos were expressed. Historical changes were acknowledged but, as in classical Marxism, understood to be evolutionary in nature rather than a response to changing socio-political conditions.

According to Soviet ideology, nationalities (*natsional’nosti*), nations (*natsii*) and peoples (*narody*) were distinct subtypes of the ethnos. Their formation was not inevitable but depended on the development of the given ethnos. In line with the stages of linear human progress proposed by Marxist-Leninist scholarship, nationalities had to be studied over time. They were, in Marlène Laruelle’s words, understood as “participants in a process governed by rules and spanning a trajectory

that was common to all and was divided into stages” (2008: 173). Accordingly, the allocation of a ‘national’ Soviet Socialist Republic territory and the ensuing “affirmative action” (Martin 2001) in the form of a state-sponsored national evolution signified that the ethnos in question was officially endorsed. It is precisely this Soviet-approved high socio-political value that has rendered ethno-national identities so durable.

In strictly dialectical terms, the majority of Soviet ethnographers and ethnologists believed that the ethno-cultural ‘flourishing [*rassvet*]’ of nationality characteristics would go hand in hand with their ‘drawing together [*sblizhenie*]’, leading eventually to the complete withering away of nationalities after the imposition of Russian language and Soviet culture and the ‘merger [*sliyanie*]’ of a ‘Soviet people’. This merger would imply a leap forward on the evolutionary timeline towards socialism. However, by the 1930s, the system of ethnic ascription, including the indication of ethnic affiliation on passports since 1932, had become so entrenched that any dissolution of ethno-nationality and the reaching of a next, ‘advanced’ stage was unthinkable (Miller 2008: 61). The timetable for merger was pushed into an indefinite future.

This dialectic or dualism in the understanding of ‘national development’ and the resulting collision of ethnic and civic or statist imperatives still resonates in Kazakhstan today. Kazakh political and educational stakeholders as well as ordinary people frequently argue that they are currently willingly part of a ‘*narod Kazakhstana*’, a ‘people of Kazakhstan’. But they do not want to consider themselves part of a ‘nation of Kazakhstan’. The creation, or re-creation, of such a state-framed (‘merged’) ‘Kazakhstani nation’, according to them, should only be attempted once the ‘Kazakh nation’ has fully developed (‘flourished’). However, there is usually no clear perspective as to when this development will be completed. Hence, I suggest that key aspects in the apparent contradictions and vagueness inherent in today’s officially-sanctioned narratives of nationalism are undigested leftovers from the Soviet period, leading the incumbent political elite to dualist rhetoric and actions, many of which have been identified in the literature.

As Rogers Brubaker accurately observes, Kazakhstani political leaders

have self-consciously used the language of civic nationhood to present their [state] to domestic and especially international audiences as [a paragon] of civic inclusiveness and tolerance, as [a state] of and for all [its] citizens, rather than as [a state] of and for a single ethnocultural group (2004: 134).

However, this civic project has not been the only national project and ‘narrative’ in independent Kazakhstan. Indeed, “the ideal of a supra-ethnic Kazakhstani

identity”, as Jørn Holm-Hansen puts it, has co-existed “with an idea that all inhabitants should find their ethnic roots and live according to them” (1997: 20). This means that the existence of ethnic distinctions amongst Kazakhstan’s populace has been constantly re-emphasised and effectively re-constructed by the country’s political elites; a process Pål Kolstø describes as a “multiple re-ethnification” (2004: 176) of society.

Kazakhstani nation-building has been characterised by these two seemingly antagonistic projects that both have their roots in the ideology and practices of the Soviet period: a conspicuous celebration of ‘inter-national’, that is interethnic, diversity and, importantly, harmony – and a discourse and legislation that seek to turn all citizens of the country into proud representatives of one people of Kazakhstan. Whether this people is, should or will be a ‘nation’ of Kazakhstan, and whether it does, should or will consist of ‘Kazakhstanis’ or ‘Kazakhs’, and what exactly these terminologies entail, is highly controversial. The regime’s vague and under-defined idea has been to craft an officially multi-ethnic, that is multi-ethno-cultural and/or multi-ethno-lingual, Kazakhstani people who acquire a public culture based on a Kazakh ‘core’.

Dualism, controversy and also vagueness are reflected in Kazakhstan’s constitution. It avoids mention of the ‘nation’ altogether and instead resorts to the concept of the ‘people of Kazakhstan [*narod Kazakhstana*]’. Bhavna Davé and Peter Sinnott perceptively remark that the term is reminiscent of its ideological precursor, the “Soviet people” (2002: 7). Kazakhstan’s constitution thus lays the foundations for a substantial continuation of Soviet conceptualisations and practices and for the adherence to a frame which Edward Schatz calls “internationalism with an ethnic face” (2000: 73). This signifies interethnic ‘friendship’ between distinct nationalities that (will) become the one people of Kazakhstan by assembling and uniting around the Kazakh core. According to the constitution’s preamble, this people of Kazakhstan is:

united by a common historical fate, creating a state on the indigenous Kazakh land, considering [themselves] a peace-loving and civil society, dedicated to the ideals of freedom, equality and concord (Constitution 2007).

In plain terms, this preamble declares that the Kazakhstanis are a civic community who live on lands that belong to the ethnic Kazakhs. This implies that the question of whether Kazakhstan is now, once and for all, the country of the ethnic Kazakhs, or whether it could have a future as the country of all civic Kazakhstanis, irrespective of ethnicity, is not settled.

A key problem is that along with the ethnic and linguistic makeup outlined above, the Soviet Union bequeathed to independent Kazakhstan a titular-dominated state apparatus and political elite and the popular belief amongst many titulars that of Kazakhstan's resident nationalities, only the Kazakhs 'owned' the Soviet republic-turned-state, in spite of constitutional provisions guaranteeing equality<sup>3</sup>. A common practice of referring to any non-Kazakh ethnic minority as a 'diaspora' reflects this ideological heritage. The diaspora tag is applied irrespective of the 'nationality's' relations to any theoretical or actual 'homeland' outside Kazakhstan. It connotes a less legitimate claim to a territorial base in Kazakhstan than the label 'minority'. I argue that this rhetoric symbolically relegates the successfully re-ethnicised non-titulars from the ranks of the 'core' and 'state-forming' Kazakhs to a subordinate category of Kazakhstani citizens.

Taken together, these conditions have not been expected to contribute to a nation-building process that results in the creation of a 'civic' national framework. Scholars have argued that Brubaker's concept of the "nationalizing state" provides an apt theoretical tool for the analysis of a kind of nation-building and politics of nationalism within which the dominant elites imagine their respective polities as ethnically-defined "nation-states, as the states of and for particular nations" (1996b: 411). The nationalising state implements an elite-led, top-down form of compensatory political action that addresses the allegedly incomplete, imperfect nationhood of the ethnically-defined titulars within their own polity (Brubaker 1996b: 411; Davé 2007: 140 *et seq.*; Holm-Hansen 1997: 22–23; Kolstø 1996: 129–130).

Davé identifies two distinct forms of ethnic nationalism in contemporary Kazakhstan that are both promoted by the ethno-nationalising ideology and practices as identified by Brubaker (Davé 2007: 168). First, there is an instrumental nationalism that benefits the old-established Kazakh *nomenklatura* and upwardly mobile 'New Kazakhs'. Ethno-nationalist mythology justifies a practice that Nozar Alaolmolki calls the "ethnocratization" (2001: 61) of power in the political and administrative apparatuses. Since independence, Soviet-inherited elites have taken care to favour disproportionately, but not exclusively, ethnic Kazakhs in nomination and election processes. These practices do not correspond to official policies, but are no secret either. The Kazakhstani scholar Zharmukhamed Zardykhhan describes them as:

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<sup>3</sup> Article 14, Paragraph 2 rules out "any discrimination for reasons of origin, social [*sic*], property status, occupation, sex, race, nationality, language, attitude towards religion" (Constitution 2007).

[favouring] socially, politically and economically the long-suppressed ethnic Kazakhs. The measures include promoting the revival and development of the Kazakh language and Kazakh traditional values, encouraging the immigration of ethnic Kazakhs from abroad, giving tacit support, at least unofficially, to the emigration of non-Kazakhs, and building a state institutional structure consisting mostly of Kazakhs (Zardykhon 2004: 72).

As Kolstø perceptively put it early after independence; “the political clout of the Kazakhs is clearly running ahead of their demographic weight” (1998: 61). While the over-representation of Kazakhs in the political and administrative apparatuses has its roots in Soviet times and the Soviet policies of ‘indigenisation [*korenizatsiya*]’, it has gathered momentum since President Nazarbaev’s accession to power (Kadyrshanov 1996: 17; Oka 2009: 14; Peyrouse 2007: 485). This ‘Kazakhisation’ of structures means that the face of Kazakhstan’s executive branch of government and legislative bodies is now Kazakh.

Second and more generally, the term ‘Kazakhisation’ also encompasses similar tendencies in the cultural, educational, historiographic and economic spheres and the health sector, where since independence Kazakhs have continued to improve their relative standing in comparison with non-Kazakhs. These developments inspire and fuel the second distinct form of nationalism which Davé identifies. She describes this as a day-to-day ‘assertion of Kazakhness’ (Davé 2007: 169), an expression of ethnic Kazakh entitlement and anti-Russian or anti-minority rhetoric in a range of social settings. It is important to note that both these processes and expressions of Kazakh nationalism as identified by Davé thus focus on nationalising the “territory” instead of the “people” (Brubaker 1996a: 88), meaning that they seek to change personnel rather than to culturally assimilate Kazakhs and non-Kazakhs, which has upset for example the ‘national-patriots’; a small but vociferous, rather loosely organised collective of intellectuals and political activists, most of them not immediate members of President Nazarbaev’s ruling circle, who advocate a stronger role in the country for what they see as ‘Kazakh’ ethno-culture, most importantly the Kazakh language<sup>4</sup>.

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<sup>4</sup> An indication of the numeric strength of publicly recognised national-patriots was given in October 2007, when 73 representatives of the Kazakh-speaking intelligentsia signed an open letter to the president, asserting that Kazakhstan’s national identity should be ethno-culturally Kazakh. They wrote again in November 2009, this time involving 124 signatories. Rendered politically ineffectual from the mid-1990s to the early 2000s, the national-patriots have still come to be popularly regarded as the guardians of Kazakh ethno-culture. Moreover they have become more vociferous and influential from the middle of the first decade of the 2000s onwards.

Similar to the literature reviewed above, my own observations also suggest that Kazakhstan is indeed to some extent 'nationalising'. It is true that, for example, the state-sponsored and more generally state-supported historiography of contemporary Kazakhstan attempts to institutionalise and thus consolidate a nation with a first and foremost Kazakh face. Aided by the centralising, unifying state power of independent Kazakhstan, the country's dominant historiography, its Andersonian "museum" (1991), reifies a Kazakh ethno-nation as 'the' nation of Kazakhstan and argues that the Kazakhstanis are building a state on the basis of a centuries-long tradition of Kazakh statehood, beginning with the Kazakh Khanate in the fifteenth century.

However, I argue that Kazakhstan is not 'nationalising' as consistently in other spheres. The country's official programmes of nationalism are more manifold than that, and more contradictory. A clue for this analysis is in Brubaker's remark at the end of his chapter on the "nationalizing" new states in Europe and the post-Soviet space, that the question is not "whether the new states will be nationalizing, but how they will be nationalizing – and how nationalizing they will be" (1996a: 106). As I have highlighted, I suggest that Kazakhstan is 'nationalising' in at least a dual manner, and less consistently, decisively and indeed decidedly than the literature seems to assume. In what follows, I therefore discuss a prime instrument for 'making' a somewhat alternative nation of Kazakhstan, or, to use Benedict Anderson's (1991) terminology, for taking an alternative Kazakhstani national "census", thus also shedding light on the centrality of performance in this context.

### 3. 'Assembling' All Kazakhstanis?

A key instrument and mechanism for taking a non-exclusively ethnic Kazakh, alternative Andersonian 'census' of Kazakhstan has been identified in the aforementioned Assembly of the People of Kazakhstan and its organisational substructure. Established by presidential decree in 1995, this assembly forms a consultative body to the president, usually understood to be based on a 'traditional' form of 'council of elders' and modelled on a Kyrgyzstani equivalent which it has long outshone in terms of size, manifestations of institutional identity and public presence.

The assembly now comprises around four hundred Kazakhstani delegates. Its annual full plenary meeting includes the about fifty numerically strongest Kazakhstani *ethnies*, and all but the Kazakh and especially the Russian ones are significantly overrepresented. Delegates are appointed by the president from a pool of activists and 'cultural workers' in Kazakhstan's manifold 'national cultural centres' and 'ethno-cultural associations'. These various centres and associations

co-operate with the assembly, and thus also with the presidential administration via the assembly's organisational structure and substructure of regional bureaus and centres. While the 'diaspora' organisations do not operate according to a principle of representativeness, it is worth pointing out that many of the centres and associations that are now part of the assembly structure existed before 1995 and were indeed founded during the last days of the USSR, which again reveals how Kazakhstan's elites have adopted, adapted and continued Soviet 'internationalist' practices.

Known until 2007 as the 'Assembly of the [many] Peoples of Kazakhstan', the change of name reflects President Nazarbaev's reinvigorated efforts to consolidate the polity by means of a narrative of harmonious unity in interethnic diversity. This, however, is not the only narrative of nation-making spun in the context of the assembly's activities. Analysis of the role of the assembly is an excellent way to identify further central, yet often inconsistent, lines in official nation-making. While the official function of the assembly is to promote interethnic harmony in Kazakhstan, my analysis identifies two further, non-official key functions. I argue that the assembly functions in order to divide Kazakhstan's Russophone population into more manageable, smaller *ethnies*, and that it co-opts 'diaspora' elites into the Nazarbaev circle, thus indirectly supporting the president's claim to leadership.

Like Kazakhstan, many other newly-independent states engaged in projects of nation-building initiate highly visible ceremonies that are hoped to contribute to the creation or strengthening of imagined communities that include all or part of their respective citizenries. The idea seems to be Durkheimian, in that a skilful combination of ceremonial elements will attract, or at least somehow lead to, the mass participation of assembled groups, which in turn will install in the members of these groups a feeling of commonality and cohesion (Elgenius 2011: 396). In Kazakhstan, ceremonial and thus performative aspects are central to official projects of nationalism.

Kazakhstan celebrates its multi-ethnicity on a number of public holidays, but one of the most important days of the year in this respect is May Day. The holiday was re-dedicated by presidential decree in 1995 as the 'Day of the Unity of the People of Kazakhstan' and, according to officials, it will eventually become one of the most important public holidays for 'the people' of the country. I suggest, however, that the public celebrations of this day have so far honoured the many 'peoples' rather than the 'people' of Kazakhstan, exhibiting these peoples' allegedly distinct, 'revived' ethno-cultures, furthermore suggesting that multiple different identificatory options are offered by the Kazakhstani government to its citizens, with not all of them being compatible or available to every Kazakhstani.

In 2010, for example, May Day festivities in Astana involved representatives of the Armenian, Chechen and Moldovan ethno-cultural centres, who were “dancing and singing the [ancient – KB] history of their peoples” to honour the “unity, peace and harmony of the peoples of Kazakhstan”, according to the public announcements by the organisers on the day. Similarly, official celebrations of Kazakhstan’s main secular public holidays such as ‘Constitution Day’ and Independence Day usually feature performances of interethnic harmony in the form of colourful parades involving members of non-titular ethno-cultural centres sporting their ‘traditional’ national costumes alongside the obligatory dancers and *batyrs* (‘warriors’) in ‘traditional’ Kazakh attire. Closely involved in the organisation of these parades and performances of interethnic harmony and indeed instructed, mandated and monitored by the presidential administration are the ethno-cultural centres as elements of the assembly and its organisational substructure.

Their activities constantly re-affirm the relevance of ethnic distinctions and ensure that Kazakhstanis do not perceive of themselves as a culturally amorphous or uniform mass, but as members of distinct ethno-cultural categories that are relevant in their everyday lives. The mechanism was explained to me by the head of office and chief secretary of an *oblast*<sup>5</sup> branch of the assembly. At the time of our interview, they were preparing the public celebrations of the oblast’s ‘Day of the Ethnos’, and according to the secretary, a Kazakh, on this holiday:

each ethnos exhibits their culture. The Slavs want to go together, the Germans (they are a big group), they have their creative collectives. You can sit there and watch them sing and dance and listen to them for days. There are more Germans than Romanians, and yes, also Koreans; they are very active<sup>6</sup>.

And do Kazakhs participate on that day, too, I asked?

Our assembly, although we [also] work with Kazakhs, works [foremost] with the ethnies who reside with us. It is our task to assemble all other peoples, ethnoses, around the state-forming nation, the Kazakhs<sup>7</sup>.

<sup>5</sup> A Kazakhstani *oblast* (Russian *oblast*’, Kazakh *oblysy*) is the administrative division below state level and similar to a province or region. The next subdivision is a *rayon* (Russian *raion*, Kazakh *audan*).

<sup>6</sup> Author’s interview as part of ethnographic fieldwork in Astana in February 2010.

<sup>7</sup> *Ibid* [“Nasha Assambleya, khotya my i s kazakhami rabotaem, rabotaet s etnosami, kotorye u nas prozhivayut. Eto nasha zadacha, vokrug gosudarstvobrazuyushchei natsii, kazakhov, sobrat’ vse drugie narody, etnosy”].

These statements illustrate a common understanding concerning the official role of 'the Kazakhs' in relation to the assembled non-titulars and include the notion that Kazakhs are the 'state-forming nation'. While non-Kazakhs are also constructed as communities and 'groups' in this 'assembly discourse', they are 'only' 'ethnoses' or 'peoples' in accordance with the Soviet terminology for stages of national development which I have outlined above. Celebrating multi-ethnicity hence means that these 'ethnoses' and 'peoples' symbolically assemble around a Kazakh national core.

Hence the Russophone demographic is divided, and the resulting, more manageable non-Kazakh 'ethnoses' rallied around a re-constructed Kazakh core. Importantly, this Kazakh core is not congruent with the Kazakh-speaking segment of the population. Instead, the fragmentation and re-assemblage of the Russophone 'bloc' also serve to construct and consolidate an overarching ethnic Kazakh core that consists of both Kazakh-speaking and Russophone Kazakhs. The fragmentation is both symbolical and 'tangible', and the key instrument by means of which both the fragmentation and re-assemblage of the Russophone 'bloc' have been carried out has been the assembly with its organisational substructure. In addition to a mainly symbolical fragmentation of the Russophone segment for the purpose of parades on national holidays, there is also a more 'tangible' fragmentation that is effected by equally palpable incentives which the assembly disposes of. Most importantly, the assembly used to set quotas for nationalities at certain Kazakhstani universities. There is thus a direct material benefit in identifying with one's 'ethnos' and ethno-cultural association – and in some cases even in identifying with an altogether different one than previously – and to some extent ignoring a potential identification with a Russophone 'bloc'.

Many non-titular, and especially non-Russian, elites have exploited the opportunities the assembly system offers. As Holm-Hansen argues, a majority of the projects of post-Soviet nation-building have not generally focused on creating loyalties above ethnic divisions, but have instead sought to establish fidelity by means of ethnicity (1997: 7). I suggest that this precise mechanism can be observed when studying Kazakhstan's assembly structure which has created, to use Holm-Hansen's terminology, positions of "ethno-cultural middlemen" that are attractive for both social and economic reasons.

Non-titular elites demonstrate support for the incumbent regime and president – and, ideally, bring in money and contacts from their respective 'historical homelands'. In turn they enjoy a friendly political climate towards their corresponding 'diaspora' or at least 'its' organisation. A typical event at which non-titular support for the Nazarbaev regime was performed was the festive reopening of the 'House of Friendship' of the (regional) Assembly of Almaty in March 2011.

The ceremony took place days before the presidential elections and was attended by the president. Well-known Almaty 'diaspora' figures canvassed for Nazarbaev by praising his fostering of interethnic peace and accord, thus demonstrating their acceptance of their predominantly 'functional belonging' to Kazakhstan.

Ghassan Hage's concept of "governmental belonging" (1996: 468) helps explain the acceptance of a hierarchy of belonging as displayed by these diaspora elites. For Hage, a full, 'governmental belonging' of an individual to a state starts with a feeling of being legitimately entitled to a governmental or managerial 'concern' for this state. This means feeling entitled to make 'governmental-type statements': to have a view about the state's policies and political future and to legitimately express this view. As I have argued, in Kazakhstan, the 'museums' predominantly suggest that it is primarily the titulars, who 'naturally' possess full 'national capital' and thus this 'governmental belonging'. However, via the assembly structure, I propose, non-titulars can 'accumulate' officially-acknowledged forms of 'national capital'. Because they have to actively accumulate this capital, their belonging depends on acceptance by the titulars.

Political opportunity structure approaches such as the one developed by Ruud Koopmans (2004) help shed further light on this phenomenon. According to Koopmans, national integration regimes, here defined by state authorities, can be seen as political opportunity structures that encourage, restrict and channel degrees and types of non-titular political involvement. This means that political environments make opportunities available as well as they set constraints. Authorities can offer some discursive legitimacy to pre-defined forms of claims-making, while creating negative stimuli for others (Koopmans 2004: 451). The more claims-making is encouraged and the less it is restrained, the fuller non-titulars can participate in public debates and exercise full rights in the country.

The example of Almaty 'diaspora' figures canvassing for Nazarbaev by praising his fostering of interethnic peace highlights that they have internalised the government's rhetoric on Nazarbaev's 'protection' of minorities and accept their principally ceremonial political role in visibly performing interethnic harmony, instead of, for example, criticising discrimination, in exchange for certain benefits of co-optation. Almaty's diaspora elites, I suggest, demonstrated that they accept the fact that they gain much of the legitimacy of their belonging to Kazakhstan and its elite structures by being useful to the functioning of the state as a whole. They showed, I argue, using Hage's criteria, that they have "integrated into their self-definition the dominants' mode of classification" (1996: 470), in that they depend on the national core's predilection for a markedly multi-ethnic harmony.

Taken together, my observations allow me to draw the following conclusions about this second type of official nation-making via an Andersonian multi-ethnic,

colourful and pictorial census-taking in Kazakhstan. I suggest that the rather under-defined idea of civic harmonisation via celebrations of multi-ethnicity in and through the assembly structure can indeed foster interethnic exchange and friendship, starting at a personal level. The assembly's "new public holidays, ceremonies, heroes [and] symbols", which Eric Hobsbawm (1983: 263) argues are necessary for a successful re-construction of existing social identities, seem to resonate meaningfully with quite a few, especially young, members of the assembly. Limitations to this 'accomplishment', however, are important to note. There is, for example, a minimal spill-over effect as so far few of the uniting myths that are created among some of those participating in the assembly structure have reached, attracted and meaningfully involved Kazakhs, especially the large Kazakh majority, in ways that look sustainable. Outside the immediate assembly context the celebrations and performances of interethnic accord seem to bring about neither a deconstruction nor a subordination of the concept of ethno-nationality to a state-framed identity.

My findings suggest that although only little is known in the general public about the actual work and purpose of the assembly, the highly visible assembly-related public celebrations act to continuously reemphasise the existence and significance of ethnic distinctions and to thus gradually re-ethnicise the population as a whole. While a majority of my Kazakh and Kazakhstani interlocutors cared little about the manifold ethno-cultural 'revivals' which the assembly structure and ethno-cultural centres are officially designed to foster, the impact of the 'assembly discourse' on these people generally seemed to be a perception that primordial ethnic categories actively exist, and that the state needs to work with them and channel the impact which the nature of ethnicity can have on stability. One of the key reasons for this perception is that the highly visible assembly ceremonies do not only advance unifying myths of a common homeland, but they continuously recreate boundaries, difference and hierarchies within the Kazakhstani populace: While 'real' politics is for an overwhelmingly Kazakh elite, and for those non-Kazakhs who accept the rules and restrictions to their degree of involvement set by this elite, ceremonial singing and dancing as a performance of unity in diversity is for non-Kazakh 'diaspora' members of the assembly. The understanding of many of my interlocutors outside elite circles also seemed to be that there are many different and 'given' ethno-nationalities living on Kazakh soil and in an essentially Kazakh state, a perception which reflects the different 'censuses' described.

The Soviet-inherited and now officially reproduced myths and narratives of 'inter-national' friendship, celebrated in the assembly and at the events of its affiliated bureaus and centres, have portrayed Kazakhstan's 'nationalities' as harmoniously sharing territory and certain public memories. The regime has thus to some extent successfully constituted harmonious social practices by means

of discursively downplaying potential 'chosen traumata' and hostilities and by drawing extensively on the Soviet-inherited imagery of multi-ethnic harmony. Highly visible celebrations, and thus performances, of interethnic harmony have characterised this approach.

However, these tactics have also reproduced ethno-national distinctions and boundaries in many aspects of social life and, more importantly, affirmed the role of the Kazakhs as 'hosts' in the territory. Probably the most significant ramification of these tactics has been a frequently observed understanding that the Kazakhstani people, although constitutionally enjoying equal rights, have different degrees of 'national capital' and depend on the hospitality of a Kazakh core that in turn forms an 'original' or 'first' nation of Kazakhstan. While for Kazakhs the identification with Kazakhstan is dominantly constructed as being 'given' and 'natural', for non-Kazakhs the identification with Kazakhstan is primarily with the rules of the state and their 'functions' within these. By shaping the discursive and institutional framework in which claims can be made, the state is co-opting some willing minority elites but on its own terms, thus undermining civic equality and therefore ultimately hindering a 'national' consolidation of equals.

### **Conclusion: 'Making Kazakhstani' – Mechanisms, Successes, Limitations**

The brief overview of Kazakhstani nation-making provided in this chapter of the volume suggests that the dominant nation-making project in Kazakhstan that is funded by the state makes ample reference to dominant ethnic Kazakh, and not 'Kazakhstani', myths and symbols. These 'Kazakh' myths and symbols were readily available at independence thanks to Soviet policies and practices. The historiography and Andersonian 'museums' of Kazakhstan, in sum, are therefore dominated by an ethnic-based Kazakh nationalism that wants to erase difference and make Kazakhstan nationally Kazakh.

At the same time, however, the analysis also brought to light the deep-rooted 'internationalist' orientation of many important stakeholders, reflected in the performances of interethnic harmony in the context of the assembly structure, which convey a 'Kazakhstani', multi-ethnic image of a potential state-nation. 'Assembly nationalism' is thus a more multi-cultural, civic-based type of Kazakhstani nationalism that seeks to accommodate difference. It seeks, however, to accommodate difference on its own terms. Minority elites have been co-opted through the material incentives which participation in assembly activities offers them. In turn, they accept a limitation to their degree of 'belonging' to the state. The state of Kazakhstan has thus been found to shape the institutional and discursive frameworks in which claims can be made, limiting and precluding 'Kazakhstani-making'.

In sum, Kazakhstan has not been found to fully confirm with the Brubakerian model of a nationalising state described above. While it can indeed be argued, as Annette Rohr does, that a Soviet-inherited belief system has fostered the view that the “titular nation” is “the natural patrimony” of Kazakhstan (Smith, Law, Wilson *et al.* 1998: 139), and that this view has manifested in local historiography, the access (if limited) for non-Kazakhs to the echelons of power and more generally their ‘functional’ belonging to the state means that the nationalising paradigm fails to grasp the full picture of nation- and nations-making in Kazakhstan. In contrast to the claims of Yilmaz Bingol, it is not the case that nationalism in Kazakhstan is only “ethnic, genealogical and exclusive” (2004: 55). While Kazakhs have been favoured in a number of official and unofficial programmes and processes, the signs of a Kazakh ethno-national programme are not unambiguous.

Crucially, ‘Kazakhisation’ in the form of an ethnic-based Kazakh nationalism that wants to erase difference is not the only official nationalising programme. Although it is the strongest project, I have also identified a more multi-cultural, civic-based Kazakhstani nationalism that seeks to accommodate difference. Although the ‘Kazakh’ programme is the more dominant of the two, it is not yet clear how the regime intends to ultimately bring these programmes together. This suggests, first, that nation-making in Kazakhstan is unfinished, riddled with inconsistencies, and, second, that it is not clear what the state hopes and can realistically achieve in terms of creating Kazakhstanis.

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# The Transformation of Nationalism in Central and Eastern Europe

Over a quarter of a century has passed since the initiation of political transition in Central and Eastern Europe. During the nineteenth and twentieth centuries the area was a veritable kaleidoscope of peoples, with the politics of nationalism being both virulent and dominant in this part of the continent. One of the most significant components of the contemporary transformation process is nationalist revitalisation throughout the continent, not least in the countries covered in this volume. The result of this experience and more importantly the memory of this experience, is that it has become commonplace to assert that in post-communist Europe, questions surrounding the idea of nation and state and minority protection are more germane to everyday discourse than are similar questions in Western Europe. The lessons drawn from the case studies presented in the volume are intended to provide valuable lessons for those engaged in the study of nationalism in the central and eastern part of the continent.

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