State Symbols and National Identity Construction in Kazakhstan

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Although separate concepts, nation, national identity and nationalism are closely related; it is not possible to discuss one without considering the others. However, the intention in this article is not to discuss at length the theories of nationalism but rather to discuss the construction of the Kazakh nation and Kazakh national identity via the construction of national/state symbols.[1] I believe that the study of state symbols is underdeveloped within the wider field of nations and nationalisms. The main aim of this article is to analyze the utilization of the past in the construction of the present. It is argued that the past is instrumentalized or reconstructed in such a way as to respond to the requirements of the present, and it is also argued that an attentive interpretation of state symbols may give clues about the type of nationalism adopted in the nation-building project. In other words, an analysis of state symbols allows us to gain insight into the debates, tensions and consensuses of any society. It is through the state symbols that one can understand which past is being selected as a resource in the construction of a nation and its national identity. Anthony Smith proposes a broad definition of national (state) symbols, which include not only flags, anthems or capital cities but also popular heroes, fairy tales, legal procedures, educational practices, etc. (Smith 1991: 77). The analysis of each of these elements exceeds the limits of this article, which will cover only the official state symbols and the language policy as it is argued that history and language form the basis of modern national identity in Kazakhstan. Thus, the interpretation of history in state symbols (the flag, the emblem and the anthem) will be studied in conjunction with the state language policies.[2]

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1 The differentiation between national symbols and state symbols is necessary for a proper understanding of post-Soviet societies. This is due to different perceptions of the terms *national* and *nationality* in the Soviet and post-Soviet contexts because the term national has an ethnic connotation and does not refer to a relationship with the state as is the case in western societies (for further information see Shanin 1986). The term *state symbol* will be used here to refer to official symbols. Although different nationalities may have different symbols, state symbols need to be accepted by the people for the success of the state and nation building project. As argued by Michael Geisler, national (state) symbols perform an important function as catalysts for the formation and maintenance of national identity. But they also play a crucial role in fusing the nation with the state (Geisler 2005: XV).

2 This article is based on field research carried out in Kazakhstan in August 2002, and June and October 2004. During the fieldwork, 90 in-depth interviews were carried out with Kazakhs, Russians and people from other nationalities of Kazakhstan in Almaty, Astana, Atirau and nearby villages. Ten expert interviews were conducted in Almaty and Astana.

The Significance of State Symbols

There is no society or state without symbols, which are necessary for the establishment of social cohesion. However, symbols are not fixed. As important forces for social solidarity and transformation, they change over time. As Emile Durkheim mentions, there has been a fundamental change in the nature of social solidarity with modernization. However, the need for social solidarity and collective consciousness continues. It would not be wrong to argue that today's national symbols are modernized versions of the totems. In other words, flags, national anthems and other symbols perform the same function in modern societies as the totems performed in the past (Durkheim 1965; Smith W. 2001: 521-522).

Considering the continuing need for a collective consciousness, it is clear that every new state or every new political regime of an existing state needs symbols. Especially when a state becomes independent, new state symbols replace the old ones. But one should consider that the process of creating a new system of symbols for a nation is neither simple nor static. A national consensus over national symbols is essential for the stability of every nation state. These new symbols are important tools in the process of defining and creating a new nation, its national identity and values (Smith W. 2001:527-528). At the time of power change old symbols are typically ritually destroyed and new ones take their place. This is what happened in the post-Soviet republics following the collapse of the Soviet Union. The new symbols were most of the time selected from the past, aiming to fulfill the needs of the present. The destruction of the statues of Lenin in post-Soviet societies constitutes a perfect example. In the center of Almaty, the former capital city of Kazakhstan, the statue of Lenin was replaced by the Golden Man, an archeological find which traces Kazakh history on those lands back to the IV-III centuries BCE. Similarly, Lenin was replaced by Genghis Khan in Mongolia and by Tamerlane in Uzbekistan (Leoussi 2002: 221). Another example may be the renaming of the streets: Lenin became Dostuk; Karl Marx became Kunaev; Kirov became Bogenbai Batyr; Kommunistischesky became Ablai Khan in Almaty.

Post-Soviet republics are multi-ethnic states like most other nation-states. These republics were consciously made multi-ethnic as a result of the Soviet ethnic engineering policies, although the degree of multi-ethnicity differs from one republic to another. It is possible to argue that to be successful, the newly created state symbols should be based on a past or on references that are capable of integrating the majority of the population (Sham 1999: 649). In other words, the minorities of the society should not feel excluded and discriminated against. Being in line with the view that a/any nation is under continuous construction, and that nation building is a dynamic and interactive process, the willingness of the potential members of the nation to internalize state symbols will determine the longevity of the symbols and the survival of both the state and the nation.

In other words, state symbols should represent all members of the society. Their ability to mobilize all members of the nation and to create a collective consciousness and memory will determine the future of the nation and the state (Mayer 2005: 4-5). State symbols usually serve the cause of nationalism, but in order to create such symbols, the nation should be defined. In fact, the creation of symbols and the definition of nation is an interactive and never-ending process.

The Construction of a Nation

During his speech at the Sorbonne in 1882, Ernest Renan pointed out that the biggest error ever made was the confusion of race with nation (Renan 1882). From this date onward, this same confusion seems to have continued, and people are still mostly categorized according to their cultural and linguistic characteristics as if these were objective and unchanging givens, which contradicts the dominance of a subjective approach in theories of nationalism, ethnicity and identity. For the advocates of this subjective approach such as Renan, a nation is possible if the members possess the willingness (*la volonté*) for being members of that nation. It is the existence of such a willingness which makes the nation possible rather than the unity of race, language, religion, interest, geography or military needs. According to Renan, a nation is a large-scale solidarity constituted by the feeling of the sacrifices made in the past and those that one is ready to make in the future. A nation presupposes a past but it also expresses the desire to live together in the future. That is why Renan defines it as a *daily plebiscite*.

This way of defining the nation as a subjective construction is shared by Benedict Anderson and Anthony D. Smith. Anderson defines the nation as an *imagined political community* because its members do not know and will never know most of its other members. According to him, all communities are imagined, even maybe the most primordial villages of face-to-face contact (Anderson 1991: 6). According to Smith, a nation is possible if there exists/is a belief in certain elements such as an historic territory, common myths and historical memories, a common mass culture, common legal rights and duties for all members and a common economy (Smith 1991: 14). Smith gives special attention to the study of national/state symbols since they give concrete meanings and visibility to nationalism, an abstract construction in itself (Smith 1991:77).

The reconstruction of the past is essential, because without the potential to integrate the majority, the desire to live together will be weakened or it may even disappear. If we accept that the nation is a *daily plebiscite*, this means that it is never stable. Thus, the desire to live together will continue to exist depending to a certain extent on the performance of state symbols in constructing the national identity and perpetuating it successfully. The process of constructing a national identity can be defined as a dynamic process, a kind of bargain between the state

and its citizens. Thus, the mechanisms used by the state in constructing national identity will influence the willingness of its potential members. Conversely, the willingness or its lack will also influence state policies. All these definitions and arguments indicate that the boundaries of a nation are flexible, since membership in it is a subjective choice on the part of its potential members, who may belong to different ethnicities.

Independent Kazakhstan: the Construction of Kazakh National Identity and State Symbols

Every group of people needs a national character as pointed out by J.J. Rousseau. When this is lacking, they have to begin by developing one (1915). The dissolution of the Soviet Union had a significant impact on the national character of its member republics. Upon becoming an independent state, Kazakhstan, like the other former Soviet republics, needed to rethink its history, culture and identity in order to define its national character. As a result, Kazakhstan needed another history, different from the one written by Soviet historians. In other words, Kazakhs have started to reclaim their history from the Russians while building an independent Kazakhstan and creating a new Kazakh national identity. The process of constructing a Kazakh national identity entailed the need for the search for ethnic origins as in the case of other nationalisms. Following independence in 1991, Kazakhstan began to create the necessary symbols for the construction of a nation, and the reinterpretation of history played an important role in this process. But since a nation is inevitably always an *imagined community*, the reconstructed community and symbols have to be incorporated in the imagination of the people. In other words, the people of Kazakhstan had to internalize and accept the newly constructed national identity and the state symbols to ensure the success of the state-building process.

It is important to note that the ability of state symbols to represent various ethnic groups other than the titular group will shed light on the nature of the national identity construction project, which can be based on either ethnic or civic principles. However, the validity of the classical civic-ethnic dichotomy is questioned in this article, and it is argued that all nationalisms, including Kazakh nationalism, simultaneously contain both civic and ethnic elements.

For a better understanding of the process of national identity construction in Kazakhstan, it is necessary to pay attention to the legacy of the Soviet period. One important legacy, which has taken deep roots and still shapes the nature of post-Soviet politics is the ethnic social organization accompanied by an ethnic hierarchy. It would not be wrong to argue that currently ethnicity is still the most important political identity in the post-Soviet space and that this legacy continues to determine the structure of post-Soviet societies. In addition, the pre-existing Kazakh identity emerged as the basis for the core of the national

identity under construction as in the case of most other states. However, the pre-existing ethnic hierarchy which put the Russians at the very top was challenged following the dissolution of the Soviet Union, leading to the loss of status of Russians and the development of anti-Soviet and anti-Russian attitudes among Kazakhs.

The emblems and institutions of Soviet Kazakhstan were shaped - as in the case of other republics - in such a way as to underline the subordination of the republic to the Union. With the dissolution of the Soviet Union, these were replaced with a different set of symbols and institutions that clearly proclaimed the emergence of independent Kazakhstan; this included a national flag, an anthem, a constitution, the setting up of a central bank, defense forces, currency, passports and other formal attributes of statehood. The cultural references were not always drawn from Kazakh traditions, contrary to Akiner's argument (Akiner 1995: 60). They were sometimes inclusive and sometimes exclusive, but in both cases historical elements were selectively used. What is important to stress is that the replacement process was the result of negotiations over various alternatives among the state-building elite.

The Kazakh state symbols can be said to have an ethno-national character at first sight because some Kazakh folkloric materials are used. However, it is also necessary to pay equal attention to what is not selected as a symbol in addition to analyzing the selected ones. Furthermore, one should also point out that there are various types of cleavages in any given society and even members of the same ethnic group may have very different perceptions of the same symbols.[3] In that sense, the construction of symbols is a very complicated and difficult task requiring solid sociological data about the society in general and about the demands of the different layers of that society. It is clear that the flexibility of symbols and their openness to different interpretations will increase their strength.

The national flag, the national anthem and the national emblem are the three important symbols through which an independent country proclaims its identity and sovereignty (Firth 1973: 341). They reflect the state discourse. Kazakhstan also has three official state symbols, which are under the protection of the Constitution. These are the flag, the emblem and the anthem.

[3] The Menorah in Israel constitutes a very good example in the sense that while it was perceived as the symbol of power, bravery and the Jewish struggle for freedom by the ultranationalists, for Labour Zionists it was a link between past and present and represented the land. Although perceived differently, the Menorah was largely accepted as a symbol by the Jewish community. However, the religious content of the Menorah, which may be the oldest Jewish symbol representing the candelabrum that stood in the old temple in Jerusalem, excludes in a way the Arab minority and indicates that the Jewish state is primarily a state for Jews and not for all its citizens (Mayer 2005: 10-13).

The Flag

The use of flags existed well before the emergence of nation-states. However, its modern form and usage dates back to the 18th century, and its durability is impressive especially considering the decreasing significance of other symbols over time, such as certain ceremonies or religious symbols (W. Smith 2001: 522).

The flag is a social symbol, which represents the unity of a people. It reflects the history and the culture of a nation, and it is also the symbol of the independence of a newly created political unit. As the symbol of solidarity, national virtues and state power, the flag also characterizes nationalism (Firth, 1973: 328-367). It objectifies a nation's identity and concretizes the abstract notion of the nation by giving information about its history and its future (Motyl 2001: 164). The national flags of modern states are officially defined state symbols. The flag is also the symbol of the country at the international level. That is why the burning of the flag is considered as an attack on the country itself (Geisler 2005: 22). Thus, any desecration of that symbol is a crime and becomes a legal issue. The flag as a symbol representing a unified society should express consensus and thus, the respect towards this symbol will depend on the degree of its acceptance by the citizens of the state it represents. The abstract value of any flag in the eyes of the people is very significant for its internalization.

Following its independence in 1991, during the process of creating a communal memory, Kazakhstan adopted a new flag. In some publications this new flag is defined as the symbol of statehood drawn from Kazakh history and culture (Ol-

cott 2002: 59). The new flag of Kazakhstan features a sky blue background including a vertical band of Kazakh ornamental motif in gold on the left. A golden eagle is in the centre together with a gold sun whose rays are framed by two wings of the eagle.

The blue of the flag is said to represent the cloudless sky and unity, peace and prosperity, and the gold sun represents serenity and wealth (Otarbaeva 1998: 431). It is possible to see the utilization of the same blue as the background in the flag of the Kazakh Khanate between 1456 and 1822 and in the horizontal bar in the lower part of the Soviet flag of 1953. Gold in Soviet flags was exclusively used for the hammer and sickle. The colors blue and gold, representing the sky and the sun, have in fact universal significance, but also a symbolic link with the ancient Kazakh/Turkic cult of the sky god (Cooper 1978: 39-41; Akiner 1995: 61). But gold and blue may also represent the colors of the Virgin Mary as the Queen of Heaven because gold stands for heaven and blue for the Virgin Mary. The eagle is also a universal symbol representing all sky gods. It was not used in any of the Kazakh flags before; however, a double-headed eagle – the Romanov Eagle- was used as the symbol of Imperial Russia for more than 300 years.[4] Although not used in previous Kazakh flags, the golden eagle known as *Berkut*, is in a way a national symbol of the Kazakhs, referring to nomadic culture and to the Kazakh tradition of hunting.

It is possible to argue that the flag of Kazakhstan is designed in such a way as to possess the potential of being perceived differently by the different nationalities of Kazakhstan. The utilization of universal symbols gives us an important clue about the nature of the state-building project. The comments of a leading Kazakh orientalist Alishir Akishev[5] regarding the creation of the Kazakh national flag, justifies the above-mentioned view. Akishev says,

> I know the people who designed the flag of Kazakhstan. According to Turks and Kazakhs, the *Berkut* is the golden eagle, which brings happiness. It is the symbol of power, freedom and independence. This symbolizes the power of the people. While there were discussions about the design of the flag, one variant proposed included three circles representing the three Kazakh *juzes* [hordes]. This variant was not accepted because of the argument that Kazakhstan is a multi-ethnic state and the hordes only stand for Kazakhs. The present variant was accepted because the *Berkut* and the sun are simultaneously both Kazakh symbols and universal symbols having similar meanings for all other nationalities. Russians perceive the sun, the eagle and the blue similarly to the way Kazakhs do.

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4 Despite its name, the so-called Romanov Eagle had been adopted by the Russians long before the dynasty was founded in 1613. It is said that the origins of the tsarist double-headed eagle go back to Byzantium and that it represents the division of the late Roman Empire into its Western and Eastern components (Stites 2005: 101-102)

5 Interview with Professor Alisher Akishev from the Institute of Oriental Studies in Almaty, October 2004.

The views of a significant number of interviewees from non-Kazakh minorities of Kazakhstan also view the national flag as an inclusive state symbol. A young Russian student said,

> Blue is the symbol of freedom and peace. The rays of the sun symbolize the different nationalities of Kazakhstan. It shows that they live in peace. The color blue also represents the sky. This is a common perception. When I look at the flag, I can say that it includes me and I can say that it is our flag.

A young Uzbek university student said,

> The flag includes every Kazakh citizen. The sun, the eagle and the color blue are universal symbols. The flag belongs to everybody who lives in Kazakhstan. It is our flag.

These quotations indicate that as a state symbol the flag of Kazakhstan has the potential to be perceived differently by people from different nationalities living in Kazakhstan. My fieldwork data have revealed a certain willingness on the part of non-Kazakh citizens to perceive the flag as a set of symbols that incorporates them into the abstract notion of the Kazakh nation. It is also important to note that most interviewees stressed that the most important symbol is the flag, and they mostly declared that the flag is the most inclusive state symbol.

The Emblem

The national emblem of the Republic of Kazakhstan is a picture of a *shanyrak* (the upper opening of a *yurt* / *kiyiz üy*) against a blue background, from which *üyks* (rays) are being radiated like sun rays which frame the wings of mythical horses in gold. At the bottom of the emblem is the inscription *Kazakhstan,* also in gold.

The *shanyrak* is the functional keystone that holds the yurt (*kiyiz üy*) together.[6] It is considered sacred in Kazakh culture. It simultaneously symbolizes the hearth of the home and the wheel of the sun. It is said that the opening provides the possibility to read the stars and tell the time. Spiritually, it is conceptualized as an opening to the sky and the sky god (Kunanbay 2001: 91-93). The *shanyrak* also symbolizes the homeland of all Kazakh people (Otarbaeva 1998: 431).

The winged horses are borrowed from Kazakh mythology. More specifically, they are borrowed from the headdress of the Golden Man found in the *Issyk* mound. The Golden Man, an archeological find belonging to the *Saka* period,

[6] It is also important to stress that the *yurt* became an important symbol of Kazakh cultural identity starting in the 1970s. Although the *yurt* became obsolete during the Soviet period as a result of the forced sedentarization of the nomads by the Soviet regime, it symbolically reappeared (Akiner 1995: 53-54). Especially since independence it has been widely used in official ceremonies, in the private and public spheres and also for tourism purposes (i.e. shops). It is even possible to come across luxurious houses in the rich neighbourhoods of Almaty with a *yurt* in the garden.

became an important Kazakh national symbol as well as a tool for tracing Kazakh presence on those lands back to the 3rd-4th centuries B.C.[7] Alisher Akishev mentioned during our interview that different projects had been taken into consideration while designing the emblem, as was also the case with the flag; symbols referring to specifically Kazakh culture (e.g. symbols representing *Juzes,* the utilization of the star and crescent representing Islam) were eliminated in favor of more inclusive symbols.

At this point it is necessary to pay attention to the link between archaeology and nationalism because archaeological data are sometimes manipulated for nationalist purposes. This link is of course very much related to the political instrumentalization of archaeology during the process of national identity construction. In fact, the dissolution of the Soviet Union entailed not only the

7 In 1970 the *Issyk* mound in *Zhetisu* was excavated by a team of archaeologists headed by Kemal Akishev. As a result of these excavations, the remains of a *Saka* king were found with gold, silver, bronze, clay and wooden articles (Otarbaeva 1998: 421). According to estimates the person buried there was about 17-18 years old. He was clad in a rich embroidered uniform. On his head he wore a long headdress decorated with gold plates. Among these decorations there were two winged horses with goat horns.

emergence of new states but also the emergence of new territorial conflicts and claims. Consequently, archaeological data became a source for claiming territory or for legitimizing existing national boundaries (Kohl 2001: 25-28). In the case of Kazakhstan, archaeological finds are used to prove that Kazakhstan is the historical land of the Kazakh people. In a way, archaeological finds are mobilized to set and solidify the political borders of Kazakhstan. In an interview, a young Kazakh said about the national emblem:

> When you look at the emblem you feel as if you were gazing at the sky in the summer from inside a yurt (*kiyiz üy*). In my opinion this emblem transmits the message that it is a Kazakh home and that you are living in it.

An Uzbek expressed his opinion about the emblem as follows,

> The horse is an important animal for all Central Asian peoples and not only for Kazakhs. The settled Uzbeks also like horses, and they use them quite frequently as a symbol. However, the s*hanyrak* is specific to Kazakhs.

Some Kyrgyz interviewed considered the *shanyrak* as part of their culture, too. However, for some Russians the s*hanyrak* was a specifically Kazakh symbol. The interviews have indicated that although the emblem is a state symbol which makes a more pronounced reference to Kazakh culture than the other two state symbols, it is perceived differently by different nationalities living in Kazakhstan. While it is considered as a Kazakh home by the Kazakhs and some members of other nationalities, many others believe it refers to Kazakh lands.

One can argue that the *shanyrak* is a reference to Kazakh lands, especially considering the significance of this land for Kazakhs. The Kazakhs had to struggle with Russian and Ukrainian settlers over centuries for their pastures, which represented an essential resource for their nomadic society. The Russian land policy deprived Kazakhs of their lands (Karpat 2003: 131-139). Thus, the utilization of the symbol of the *yurt* can be said to be about setting the political boundaries of Kazakhstan rather than representing the nationalities living within those boundaries.

The Anthem

Every modern nation adopts a national anthem. The anthem is in a way the musical equivalent of the nation's flag. It is the official and symbolic song of the nation. The national anthem is a mechanism through which nations distinguish themselves from other nations and set the boundaries of their national identity. Respect shown to a national anthem depends on both the legitimacy of political power and its recognition at the international level. The power of the national anthem in capturing the largest number of people depends on its ability to include the symbols of all the members forming the nation as in the case of other state symbols. The national anthem is a symbol that contributes to the construc-

tion of a collective consciousness at each performance, and it symbolizes the nation in the eyes of other nations (Motyl 2001: 359-360).

National anthems create a sentiment of attachment, which activates communal identity and a feeling of solidarity; hearing the anthem can make people cry. As argued by Anderson,

> Take national anthems, for example, sung on national holidays. No matter how banal the words and mediocre the tunes, there is in this singing an experience of simultaneity. At precisely such moments, people wholly unknown to each other utter the same verses to the same melody. The image: unisonance... How selfless this unisonance feels! If we are aware that others are singing these songs precisely when and as we are, we have no idea who they may be, or even where, out of earshot, they are singing. Nothing connects us all but imagined sound (Anderson 1996: 145).

However, this sense of attachment to the state symbols does not happen immediately. The internalization of these symbols is possible through the willingness of the individuals to internalize them and through their constant repetition in schools, in the mass media, in public ceremonies. In other words, nations and states under construction have to transmit the new symbols to the young via the state school system and the state run media. The organization of this process of transmission should be planned by the state-building elite (Leoussi 2001: 209).

In Kazakhstan a new national anthem was adopted in 1992. New lyrics were written for the old music of the previous anthem. The anthem stresses on the one hand the need to preserve the mother tongue and the significance of the Kazakh land, and on the other hand, it underlines the importance of unity for the strength of the nation. The composition of the new lyrics indicates two things which are in fact interrelated: language revival, because the lyrics are in Kazakh, and the concretization of the new nation through the new lyrics. Akishev argued during the interview,

> At the beginning there was the idea of changing both the music and the lyrics. New music was composed, but it was not accepted by the people from the conservatory because it was perceived as a Kyrgyz piece. Finally, new words were written to the old melody as in the case of the Russian Federation.

The way the national anthem is perceived by other nationalities of Kazakhstan is also revealing. For example a young Russian said,

> It is very difficult to understand the words and memorize them. If you do not repeat the text, you may easily forget it.

An Uzbek said,

> I know the words of the anthem. These words are addressed to all nationalities. It includes all the nationalities of Kazakhstan and invites them to unity.

It can be said that non-Kazakh Turkic speaking nationalities, which are more familiar with the Kazakh language, perceive the national anthem differently than, for example, Russians and other Slavs who face language difficulties. It is possi-

ble to say that Russians identify themselves more easily with the emblem and the flag, which are visual symbols, compared to the anthem because they do not understand the lyrics. This takes us to the problem of language, an important symbol of national identity.

The Language Issue in Kazakhstan

It is well known that language is a powerful force that also shapes nationalism, and a factor that contributes to the development or strengthening of the national sentiment (Kohn 1945). Like in most nation-building projects, language in Kazakhstan is used as a tool in the creation of a national identity.[8] The gradual penetration of the Kazakh language into the public sphere in Kazakhstan after a long period of suppression during the Soviet era has a symbolic meaning. However, given the changing demographic structure of the country, the analysis of the language issue becomes very complicated and requires a differentiation between its symbolic dimension and its practical dimension.

To understand the issue of language in post-Soviet Kazakhstan, a brief analysis of Soviet language policies is essential. As part of the Soviet nationality policy, the development of non-Russian languages, and especially those of titular nationalities, was encouraged to create a stable multi-national state during the 1920s. However, in the 1930s, languages suffered from repressive Stalinist policies, and Russian as a second language became compulsory in all Soviet schools (Landau and Kellner-Heinkele 2001: 54).

The *de facto* promotion of Russian that started at the end of the 1930s should be evaluated carefully. The *de jure* equality of languages contradicted social reality since there was a practical need for a language of inter-ethnic communication on the one hand, and Russian was promoted in education and public life on the other. Thus, lack of knowledge of Russian entailed low social status and exclusion from high status jobs.[9] As a result of the Soviet language policies and the requirements of social practice, Russian was acquired as a first language by a significant number of non-Russian Soviet citizens, particularly in Kazakhstan. Therefore, Russians did not feel the need to learn Kazakh or any other titular language.[10] As correctly pointed out by Tishkov, the level of Russianization was much higher than reflected in census results due to the symbolic meaning non-

8 For a detailed analysis see Dave 1996.

9 For a recent study of the history of Soviet language policy see Smith 1998.

10 Language policy was not the only vehicle of the Russification of Kazakhstan. The preponderance of Russian was also facilitated by dramatic changes in the demographic composition. The mass immigration, both voluntary and involuntary, of mostly Slav speaking European settlers was paralleled by the dramatic decline of the Kazakh population, the consequence of multiple causes, such as collectivisation and the forced sedentarization of the nomads, persecution, famine and epidemics. On the demographic changes see e.g. Kolstoe 1995.

Russians accorded their mother tongue, since the majority of non-Russian Soviet citizens used to declare their mother tongue as their native language, even though the everyday spoken language was Russian (Tishkov 1997: 87).[11]

Following independence, the Kazakh language was ranked above Russian, and became one of the most important state symbols as well as one of the strongest instruments of Kazakhization (Karin and Cheboratev 2002: 100). Despite the strong symbolic importance accorded to the Kazakh language by the Kazakhs and state policies promoting Kazakh[12] (such as language laws, use of Kazakh language in education), there has been little progress in the revival of the national language. Russian still dominates the life of people in Kazakhstan, especially in the public sphere. This is of course mainly due to the ethno-demographic structure of Kazakhstan as pointed out above, but also to the success of the Soviet regime in Russianization. It has been noted that the language instrumentalized for mobilizing large numbers of people around a national ideal can be in fact any language, including the language of the people against whom people are mobilized. Trans-linguistic nationalism, which is observed in certain cases such as India or Ireland, has similarities with the post-Soviet countries in general and with the case of Kazakhstan in particular (Safran 1999: 83). In line with this, it is possible to argue that Kazakhs are mobilized using Russian as a vehicle.

Due to practical necessities and in order to prevent non-Russians from feeling discriminated against by the government's language policy, the official attitude is to introduce the Kazakh language through education over a long period of time rather than excluding people from public life and discriminating against the non-Kazakhs (Olcott 2002: 177-183).

During fieldwork, more than half of my Kazakh interview partners preferred to speak Russian despite the possibility to choose between the two languages (the interviewers were fluent in both languages). The symbolic significance that the interviewees accorded their mother tongue was quite strong. Only a few of them said that they speak solely Kazakh at home. An important number of them mentioned that both Russian and Kazakh are spoken at home. However, almost all stressed that Kazakh should be the only state language in Kazakhstan and that everyone who lives in Kazakhstan should learn Kazakh. A 40-year-old female Kazakh teacher from Atirau said,

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11 For a recent analysis of the first post-Soviet census in Kazakhstan see Dave 2004b.

12 Kazakhstan declared Kazakh the 'state language' in 1989. The 1993 Constitution confirmed this law, but it also declared Russian the 'language for international communication'. The 1995 Constitution attempted to equalize the status of Kazakh and Russian in Article 7, according to which:
The state language of the Republic of Kazakhstan shall be the Kazakh language.
In state institutions and local administrative bodies the Russian language shall be officially used on equal grounds along with the Kazakh language.
The state shall promote conditions for the study and development of the languages of the people of Kazakhstan. (For a survey of language laws in Kazakhstan see Fierman 1998.)

> There must be one state language in Kazakhstan and this language should be Kazakh. If two languages gain official status, other nationalities will not need to learn Kazakh. This land is the land of Kazakhs, and I personally think that those who live here should speak Kazakh.

Another 21-year-old male Kazakh student said,

> To my mind, there must be one state language in Kazakhstan. However, at this point, this is impossible because conflicts may emerge among nationalities. It is impossible at the moment because we should not spread the feeling of discrimination and exclusion among non-Kazakh nationalities. But I clearly believe that our state has to have one state language and this should be Kazakh.

Another interviewee, a 53-year-old female Kazakh history teacher from Atirau, argued,

> I think that Kazakhstan is the state of Kazakhs and its language should be Kazakh. However, the independence of our Kazakhstan is new. Although we have a very large territory, only around 15 million people are living here and only 8 million out of the 15 are Kazakhs. The rest is composed of various nationalities. Therefore, for now, it is very difficult to change the state language into Kazakh overnight. Russian has taken root and that is why it is still the second language of our republic.

I argue that these quotations indicate a certain reaction by Kazakhs to the 1995 Constitution, which equated the status of Russian and Kazakh as opposed to the 1993 Constitution, and reflect the symbolic value the interviewees accord to the Kazakh language. However, a more realistic interpretation is offered by those Kazakh intellectuals who argue that the development process of Kazakh as a language and its dissemination will take time. The fieldwork has also shown the cleavage between Kazakhs from urban centres and rural areas. Urban Kazakhs were sometimes very negatively perceived by the newly urbanized Kazakh migrants as well as by rural Kazakhs, who believe in the necessity of the Kazakhification of the Russified urban Kazakhs. This explains in a way, the ambiguity of the official practices (Holm-Hansen 1999: 178-179).

Many issues related to language revival in Kazakhstan appear to be paradoxical at first sight. However by differentiating the symbolic function of the language from its communicative function, it is possible to eliminate the paradox. Government policy promoting the revival of the Kazakh language and the desire expressed by the interviewees concerning the future of Kazakh national identity, which is equated with the survival of the national language, refer to the symbolic function of language. The dominance of Russian in everyday life is interpreted as inevitable by almost all the interviewees because of the ethnic composition of the country and the successful integration of Russian into Kazakh society during the Soviet period.[13] This relates to the communicative function of the language.

[13] Although Kazakh interviewees tend to emphasize only the impact of the Soviet period, this integration process in fact goes back to the 18th century, during which Kazakh tribes accepted the protectorate of the Russian Empire. (Olcott 2002: 12; Olcott 1995: 31-53)

Following independence, the Kazakh state elite upgraded the Kazakh language and used it as a *boundary setter* in nation and state building to mobilize people around a national ideal and to strengthen the national identity, which had already been developed at least 'in form' during the Soviet regime. The fact that the Kazakh language is used as a boundary setter, which refers in fact to symbolic function, is not necessarily in contradiction with the utilization of Russian for daily interaction, which refers to communicative function; this is especially the case in an environment where the elite were educated in Russian schools and continue to perceive Russian as the symbol of enlightenment and of higher social prestige (Nauruzbayeva 2002: 2-3). Apparently one Kazakh intellectual argues that the Kazakh language is a phenomenon of the past, which is being used as a tool for the nation-building project. According to him, a Kazakh-speaking Kazakhstan will be isolated from the world (Holm-Hansen 1999: 183). Although his position does not dominate intellectual circles, the terminological problems and the need for Russian as well as English, in order to integrate in a globalised world, were expressed by most Kazakh intellectuals during the interviews.

Communities may experience a language shift in their history, and their native tongue may totally or partially lose its communicative function. This does not, however, necessitate loss of its symbolic meaning since the members of the group may continue to feel a strong attachment to their mother tongue (Edwards 1985: 110). Within that context, the fact that the mother tongue is not spoken in daily life does not constitute an obstacle for its utilization as a boundary setter in the reconstruction of national identity, and the utilization of both languages may continue while present policies of the dissemination of Kazakh are perpetuated.

My Russian interviewees have also expressed their views concerning the promotion of the Kazakh language in post-Soviet Kazakhstan. All the Russian informants interviewed were educated in Russian schools, and the large majority stressed that their schools offered Kazakh language classes. However, most of them said that, although they could understand some Kazakh, they could not speak it. Of the Russians interviewed only a very few said that they could speak Kazakh, and one of them was married to a Kazakh. According to fieldwork data, while the elderly said that it was too late for them to learn a new language, the middle-aged and young people expressed two different opinions regarding the increasing importance of the Kazakh language. Some of them, mostly young people, were planning to learn Kazakh because they thought that it was necessary for their future and their career, while others were clearly against the idea of learning Kazakh. Here are some of the views professed by Russian interviewees:

A 74 year-old Russian mechanical engineer from Almaty said,

> On the one hand it is said that Kazakhstan is a multi-ethnic society and on the other hand it is argued that the Kazakh language should be the sole language of Kazakhstan. I do not agree with this view because there are millions of Russians who live here.

A 65 year-old Russian male said,

> My grandchildren are learning Kazakh at school. In my opinion it is good for them. If the promotion of the Kazakh language continues this way, you will be obliged to learn Kazakh in order to be successful in your career. That is correct. But if you don't want to learn, it is your choice, you can go somewhere else. We are in Kazakhstan and it is normal that the language be Kazakh.

A 23-year-old Russian male from Astana said,

> I do not want to learn Kazakh. I don't think that it will be necessary in the future. I know many Kazakhs who do not know their own language. I do not think that the Kazakh language has a future.

Another Russian, a 28-year-old male from Almaty argued,

> I can understand Kazakh, but I cannot speak it fluently. However, I am planning to learn it because it will be quite important when looking for a job and for my future career.

An evaluation of the post-independence period reveals that, despite practical difficulties and the slow pace of its dissemination, the Kazakh language has become relatively more widespread, thanks to the promotion of its strong symbolic significance. Its increasing role in education can be considered as a further factor that will increase its dissemination in the future. Dave Bhavna has recently convincingly demonstrated that the present linguistic situation in modern Kazakhstan cannot simply be considered the result of language policies alone; rather, it has been shaped by the complex interaction between state and society. She argues further, that the present situation reflects the tacit non-interference of the state in the implementation of these policies, and that the Kazakh state has successfully depoliticised the language issue (Dave 2004a).

Conclusion

National identity and state-building projects can only be successful if they are based on strong historical elements capable of integrating the majority of the population. Selecting the proper elements from the past is the task of the ruling elite. The way the past is used in the construction of national identity and of state symbols will determine the degree of acceptance of the new state by the people. The ability of the ruling elite to create a consensus over the symbols and values of the new state, and their talent in reaching a national compromise regarding the definition of the nation and the construction of national identity are very important factors for the success, legitimacy and durability of the new nation-state (Sahm 1999: 649-50).

In Kazakhstan, while the official speeches, the constitution and some symbols are based on the idea of constructing a multi-cultural society, some symbols and certain policies give the message that Kazakhstan is the homeland of the Ka-

zakhs. This indicates that the Kazakh nation-building process contains both ethnic and civic elements. In other words, as correctly pointed out by Akiner (1995: 80), two trends are observed in Kazakh society: one is nationalist and the other is internationalist. However, this process of Kazakh national identity construction and state building is at a very early stage, and the inclusive "Kazakhstani identity" promoted by the president is becoming stronger.[14] To put it differently, the question of whether Kazakhstan is the homeland of Kazakhs or whether it belongs equally to all the nationalities of Kazakhstan is not answered yet. However, the increasing Kazakhization that started soon after the declaration of independence has lost its impetus. This immediate attempt at Kazakhization can be interpreted as a search for the public recognition of Kazakh identity, which had been subordinated to the Russian one for quite a long time.

It is also important to recognize that the Soviet legacy constitutes an advantage for the strengthening of the Kazakhstani identity, which started to take root in post-Soviet Kazakhstan a few years after the independence. This can clearly be seen in the evolution of the Constitution of Kazakhstan. For example, as opposed to the 1993 Constitution, the Constitution of 1995, no longer defines Kazakhstan as the state of the Kazakh nation. The preamble of the second Constitution begins as follows: "We, the people of Kazakhstan, united by a common historic fate, creating a state on the native Kazakh land." If this legacy is successfully combined with the historical significance of territory for Kazakh people, a new hybrid identity may emerge out of an inclusive ethnic nationalism and civic territorial nationalism. The existing state symbols and the pragmatic implementation of the language policy seem to support this hybrid model.

The field research has shown that the nature of identification with Kazakhstan and the perception of the national symbols by different nationalities vary. While some people may perceive Kazakhstan as their state, some others perceive it as their homeland. Furthermore, an important number of people perceive the state symbols as inclusive, but for different reasons. While some see the universal dimension of the state symbols, others evaluate them as bearers of the Kazakh culture. The inherent capacity of state symbols to be interpreted differently will increase their degree of inclusiveness, and it is no accident that the Kazakhstani state elite was careful about the construction of those symbols. However, since those state symbols are quite new, it is still early to evaluate their emotional impact and power. Their power will be related to the continuation of the people of

[14] As an example of the promotion of Kazakhstani identity, we can mention the palace constructed in Kazakhstan's capital city of Astana by the world-famous architect Lord Norman Foster. This is a "Palace of Peace," a glass pyramid. The building is completed recently and it is designed to serve as a symbol of inter-ethnic harmony in Kazakhstan. Nazarbayev hopes that this project raises Astana's international profile. It is designed to become a testimonial to Kazakhstani diversity, including a centre for all the ethnic groups and geographic regions of Kazakhstan, a Museum of Culture, the Astana University of Civilization, and a 1,500-seat opera house.

Kazakhstan's willingness to live together in the future. However, the perpetuation of this willingness does not only depend on the inclusiveness of state symbols. An important battle is also taking place in the informal practices of daily life. Thus, the degree of ethnic discrimination in daily life will also have an impact on the continuation of the desire to have a common future and to form a nation.

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