

INSTITUT D'ÉTUDES POLITIQUES DE STRASBOURG UNIVERSITÉ DE STRASBOURG

Language nationalism and globalization: from distrust to integration?
The case of Kazakh-language nationalism



A Kazakh flag waving, with Nur-Sultan's futuristic buildings in the background.
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Abstract

Since its independence in 1991, Kazakhstan has endeavored to maintain good relations with its powerful neighbours, Russia and China, all the while diversifying its alliances and partnerships in the scope of its multi-vector policy. This all takes place in a globalized context, where space between peoples is reduced. At the same time, Russian and Soviet rule have eroded the use of the Kazakh language prompting authorities to implement measures to promote its use as the official, national language of the Kazakhstani state. The promotion of the Kazakh language can be considered an example of language nationalism, and is undertaken by all spheres of Kazakh society. This essay seeks to analyze the interaction between Kazakh-language nationalism and Kazakhstan's foreign policy. It argues that Kazakh-language nationalism can be divided into three types, according to its view on globalization and external affairs: a 'defensive type', which seeks to protect the Kazakh nation and language against the averse effects of the outside world, a 'globalization-wielding' type, which carefully uses globalization to pursue the goal of promoting the Kazakh language, and a 'globalized' type, which wholly and willfully engages with international and globalized flows.

Résumé

Depuis son indépendance en 1991, le Kazakhstan n'a eu de cesse de maintenir des bonnes relations avec ses puissants voisins, la Russie et la Chine, tout en diversifiant ses alliances et partenariats dans le cadre de sa politique multivectorielle ; le tout dans un contexte mondialisé. Dans un même temps, alors que l'usage du kazakh a souffert de décennies de russification, le gouvernement de Nur-Sultan a œuvré en faveur de la promotion du kazakh comme langue nationale et officielle de la jeune République du Kazakhstan. Cette promotion d'une langue parfois au détriment des autres peut être considérée comme un exemple de nationalisme linguistique, et est entreprise par toutes les sphères de la société kazakhe. Ce mémoire entend analyser l'interaction complexe entre nationalisme linguistique kazakh et la politique extérieure du Kazakhstan. Il estime que le nationalisme linguistique kazakh peut être divisé en trois types principaux, en fonction de son rapport à la mondialisation et à l'international : un type « défensif », cherchant à protéger la langue et nation kazakhes des dangers de l'international, un type « maniant » les flux mondialisés en faveur de la promotion du kazakh, et un type « mondialisé », interagissant pleinement avec la mondialisation et l'international, qu'il voit comme une aubaine pour la subsistance du kazakh.

Contents	
Summary	9
Introduction	11
Methodology	14
Chapter 1: Recent history of Kazakhstan, the Kazakh language and the Kazakh(stani) nation	16
Section 1.1: Soviet times and the ‘creation’ of Soviet nationalities	16
<i>1.1.1 One socialist republic, one nationality?</i>	16
<i>1.1.2 The standardization of Kazakh and its consequences</i>	19
Section 1.2 The diminution of Kazakh’s place in Soviet Kazakhstan’s society	21
<i>1.2.1 Soviet ‘cultural colonialism’</i>	21
<i>1.2.2 From early attempts at language reclamation to institutionalized nationalism (1960s-1991)</i>	25
Section 1.3 Post-independence state of Kazakhstan: language nationalism in a secondary power	28
<i>1.3.1 Review of an independent Kazakhstan’s language nationalism</i>	29
<i>1.3.2 Kazakhstan’s 21st century geopolitics as a secondary power</i>	32
Chapter 2: The promotion of the Kazakh language as an example of classical, defensive nationalism	36
Section 2.1 Kazakh as a key element of Kazakhstan’s international sovereignty	36
<i>2.1.1 An introduction to Kazakhstan’s multi-vector foreign policy</i>	36
<i>2.1.2 The Kazakh language as a warrant of Kazakhstan’s cultural and political distinctiveness</i>	40
<i>2.1.3 Language nationalism, nation-building and neoconservatism in Kazakhstan</i>	43
Section 2.2 Language nationalism as cement of pre-existing international solidarities	46
<i>2.2.1 Language revival and the return of the Pan-Turk ideology</i>	46
<i>2.2.2 The Kazakh language within 21st century Eurasian ideology</i>	50
<i>2.2.3 Pan-Turkism and Eurasianism as vectors of competing language nationalisms</i>	53
Section 2.3 Limitations to Kazakhstan’s ‘classical’ language nationalism in the wider scope of international relations	56
<i>2.3.1 Contestations of Kazakh sovereignty by an increasingly worrisome Russia</i>	57
<i>2.3.2 A Russophobic policy? The contrariety of nationalist circles in Russia</i>	59
<i>2.3.3 Kazakhstan’s government response to xenophobic incidents in the scope of the country’s international balancing strategy</i>	62
Chapter 3: Language nationalism as a key to harnessing globalization and international forces	66
Section 3.1: Wielding globalized migratory flux to benefit the Kazakh language: the <i>Oralman</i> policy	66
<i>3.1.1 Introducing Kazakhstan’s repatriation policy</i>	67
<i>3.1.2 Linguistic justifications and ideological precedents of the repatriation policy</i>	70
<i>3.1.3 When language nationalism instrumentalizes globalized flow of people: Kazakhstan’s repatriation policy as an instrument of language policy</i>	72
Section 3.2: Kazakhstan’s transition to the Latin script as a gateway to the globalized world	75
<i>3.2.1 Nazarbayev’s vision of modernity: a glimpse into the relation between nationalism and modernity</i>	76
<i>3.2.2 Kazakh in the Latin script, a modern language fit for globalization</i>	78
<i>3.2.3 One Latin script as the promise of language communion of ethnic Kazakhs across the world</i>	81
Section 3.3: The delicate endeavor of trans-border language nationalism	84
<i>3.3.1 Logistic and socioeconomic difficulties of the <i>Oralman</i> policy</i>	85
<i>3.3.2 Between a rock and hard place: the case of Xinjiang’s Kazakhs</i>	87

Chapter 4: When language nationalism embraces globalization: the case of contemporary Kazakh-language pop culture	93
Section 4.1: Q-Pop as a vector of soft power in favor of the Kazakh language	94
<i>4.1.1 Short introduction to Kazakh pop's rise to prominence</i>	94
<i>4.1.2 Q-Pop artists as international ambassadors of the Kazakh language</i>	96
<i>4.1.3 Q-Pop and the Kazakh language as a bottom-up, 'post-classical' tools of nation (re)branding</i>	99
Section 4.2: Kazakh-language nationalism in today's new media landscape	103
<i>4.2.1 The growing usage of social networks in Kazakh</i>	103
<i>4.2.2 Twitter and Instagram as digitalized launching pads for Kazakh-language soft power: the example of Twitter's digital artists</i>	106
<i>4.2.3 Neoromantic aspects of digital Kazakh-language nationalism</i>	110
Section 4.3 Bottom up Kazakh language dissidence on social networks: a polysemic, globalized and yet to be studied phenomenon	113
<i>4.3.1 The example of the 2022 Russian invasion as seen from Kazakh language social networks</i>	113
<i>4.3.2 Online Kazakh language nationalism and 'global civil society'</i>	117
<i>4.3.3 A phenomenon limited in a way similar to top-down, classical nationalism</i>	120
Conclusion	124
References	128

Introduction

Former Kazakh president Nursultan Nazarbayev famously said, regarding Kazakhstan's language policy, « let a Kazakh speak with another Kazakh in Kazakh¹ ». This quote is reflective of the Central Asian country's efforts to promote the Kazakh language at a national scale.

Kazakhstan is the largest of the six Central Asian Republics, the other five being Turkmenistan, Uzbekistan, Tajikistan, Kyrgyzstan and Tajikistan. Populated by 19.126 million Kazakhstanis², the Republic is home to many ethnic groups. Among them, the Kazakhs are both the most numerous (63%³) and ancient population, whose presence in the area dates back to the late Middle Ages⁴. They are the titular nation of Kazakhstan, and Kazakhstani and Kazakh identity have become increasingly congruent in the last decades. Coming second in terms of proportion are the Russians, who account for 23.7% of the population⁵, and are mainly descended from Soviet-time migratory waves spanning the 1930s, the 1940s, the 1950s and the 1960s. Said Soviet times also left the Kazakh language severely weakened.

Historically, Kazakhs as an ethnic group arose in the 15th and 16th centuries following the end of the Mongolian Empire, after Uzbeks (the former name of the Kazakh ethnicity) discontent with the rule of khan Abu al-Khayr decided to settle the area in the 15th century⁶. Afterwards, they were able to maintain a nomadic empire which spanned the better part of the Eurasian steppe between the Caspian Sea and the Irtys River⁷. Since these times, the Kazakhs have traditionally been divided in three hordes (*jüz*): the Lesser Horde in Western Kazakhstan, the Middle Horde in

¹ Isaeva, Aliya & Zhumabaevna, Anar. « N.A. Nazarbayev and Peculiar Features of Ethnic Language Processes in Kazakhstan », *Middle-East Journal of Scientific Research*, 17 (11), 2013, p.1615.

² Kussainova, Meiramgul & Keskin, Olga. « Kazakhstan's population rose by 1.3% in 2021 » [Население Казахстана в 2021 году возросло на 1,3%], *Anadolu Agency*, February, 2nd 2022. [Retrieved on May, 10th, 2022]

³ Data from the *Explore Astana* website. Retrieved at: <https://www.astana-kazakhstan.net/kazakhstan/demographics/#:~:text=Ethnic%20groups&text=Ethnic%20Kazakhs%20are%2063.1%25%20of,Azerbaijanis%20C%20Poles%20and%20Lithuanians>. [Retrieved on May, 10th, 2022]

⁴ Allworth, Edward. « Kazakhstan — History », *Britannica*. Retrieved at: <https://www.britannica.com/place/Kazakhstan/Cultural-life#ref214566>. [Retrieved on May, 10th, 2022].

⁵ *Explora Astana*, op. cit.

⁶ Allworth, op. cit.

⁷ *Ibid.*

North-Central Kazakhstan and the Great Horde in the South and Southwest. The 17th and 18th century saw conflict with the neighboring Dzungars (a Mongolic-speaking confederation) reach heights which prompted Kazakh hordes to fall under Russian protectorate in 1731 for the Lesser, 1740 for the Middle and 1742 for the Great. Said hordes would lose their authority in the 19th century, at which time Russian culture and political increasingly permeated the region.

With the advent, in 1917, of the Russian revolutions, the Alash autonomy (Alash Orda) sought to provide the Kazakhs with an autonomous government, but was squashed by the Bolsheviks in 1920. The 1920s and 1930s would see several dramatic changes operate: forced sedentarization of the hitherto nomad Kazakhs, historic famines in the 1930s, standardization of the Kazakh language, delimitation and ‘definition’ of both the Kazakh S.S.R. and the Kazakh ‘ethnicity’... The already diminished Kazakh population would then be further marginalized by the arrival of composite waves of Russian-speaking settlers after the Second World War, and the rise of Russian as the *de facto* prestige and official language from the 1940s to Kazakhstan’s independence in 1991. Globally, the U.S.S.R. significantly weakened the use of the Kazakh language.

The country gained its independence from the U.S.S.R. in 1991, with the Kazakh language as the national language of the newly formed Kazakh state. Two presidents ruled Kazakhstan since its formation: Nursultan Nazarbayev from 1991 to 2019, and Kassym Jomart Tokayev since 2019. Both presidents, but especially the former in his 28 years in office, have made it a point to promote the Kazakh language. The latter, while gaining prestige and being official, still lags behind Russian in terms of actual usage; as of the 2010s, Russian remains the most widely spoken language in the Republic⁸. Supported by a number of policies and popular support, this endeavor can be considered an example of language nationalism.

Nationalism, as Gellner (1981) defines it, is the belief that the nation, which can be broadly defined as the political expression of an ethnic formation which shares a language, a culture, a sense of common belonging and destiny, is to be congruent with the state⁹. By language nationalism, we can understand the promotion of one language as the national language, congruent with a nation and state¹⁰, and possibly at the expense of all other languages. As Tamir, quoted by nationalism researcher Natalie Sabanadzé, explains, nationalism seeks « to assure the existence and flourishing

⁸ Suleimenova, Eleonora. « The State of Language in Kazakhstan », *American Councils*, August, 11th 2015. [Retrieved on May, 10th, 2022]

⁹ Gellner, Ernest. *Nations and nationalism*, Cornell University Press, 1983, pp.88-89.

¹⁰ *Ibid.*

of a particular community, to preserve its culture, tradition, and language¹¹. » This essay will thus cover attempts to promote the Kazakh language as the country's national language — by both Kazakh officials and citizens — sometimes at the expense of Russian. Said promotion is of highly diverse nature ranges from the demonstrative use of the language on social networks and everyday life to far reaching legislation. As Kazakh-language nationalism is composite, we shall refer to its proponents as either « Kazakh-language nationalists » or « national-patriots », the latter term being the more commonly used in Kazakhstan.

Standard definitions of nationalism have, at times, considered nationalistic forces as necessarily defiant towards the outside world. More recently, globalization — the process whereby flows of culture, goods, people and ideas become increasingly interconnected and interdependent — is often seen as a menace for national particularisms. Furthermore, as independent Kazakhstan is notorious for being located between two superpowers — Russia and China — with which it wishes to maintain good relations, any nationalistic endeavor is to be undertaken carefully. Indeed, national-patriots have viewed both Russia and China as potential threats to the Kazakh nation; any vocal statement of the sort putting Kazakhstan's relation with these countries at risk. Two points of interest thus appear in regard to Kazakh-language nationalism: interactions with the outside world and globalization. In contrast to these observations, extensive literature on the relation between nationalism and international relations have stressed the endurance of nationalism as an « ideology well suited to an increasingly interactive world in which innovations have effects that are rapid and disconcerting¹² ». This essay will thus rely on the literature which argues that nationalism is *not* necessarily opposed to international and globalized dynamics in order to cover the promotion of the Kazakh language as both a means to achieve certain international goals, and an end met by interacting with the outside world. Said promotion operates with a variety of standpoints regarding the outside world, which this essay shall attempt to outline.

This reflexion seeks to present a different approach from existing works by distinguishing three kinds of Kazakh-language nationalism according to their relation to 21st century international relations in the scope of globalization. Our research question shall thus be the following: *How does*

¹¹ Sabanadzé, Natalie. « Globalization and nationalism: the relationship revisited », *Globalization and nationalism*, Central European University Press, 2010, p.174.

¹² Hutchinson, John. « Globalisation and nation formation in the *longue durée* », *Nationalism and globalisation: conflicting or complementary?* ed. Halikiopoulou & Vasiliopoulou, 2011, p.91.

Kazakh-language nationalism view international relations and 21st century globalization? Which effect do these different kinds of language nationalism have on Kazakhstan's foreign relations?

After outlining the recent history of the Kazakh language, nation and state (chapter 1), we argue that contemporary Kazakh-language nationalism alternately sees globalization and foreign relations as: a) fearsome and threatening phenomena from which the Kazakh nation and language are to be protected (chapter 2), b) tools that, if wielded aptly, can benefit the Kazakh language and nation's interests (chapter 3), or c) an unprecedented opportunity in which it wishes to integrate wholly (chapter 4). The specific effects each kind of Kazakh-language nationalism generates internationally, ranging from highly beneficial to highly detrimental to Kazakhstan's foreign policy, shall be the object of special attention throughout this essay.

Methodology

This essay relies on existing works on the relation between nationalism, international affairs and globalization. My reflexion finds its foundation in the assertion, made by many authors such as Appadurai (1996), Hutchinson (2011), Sabanadzé (2010) or Mihelj (2019) that nationalism and globalization are not opposed forces. On the contrary, they benefit one another¹³. Sabanadzé (2010) and Mihelj (2019) highlight that the concept of nationalism is often misunderstood and restricted to its most violent and politicized forms, and underscore the existence of a nationalism which lies in mundane acts of everyday life¹⁴. In explaining Kazakh-language nationalism, this essay will delve in concepts such as nation-building and nation-branding, two related notions which have been extensively covered by authors such as Marlène Laruelle and Sabina Mihelj. They shall be defined when first introduced.

My intent is to rely on such works to provide a tripartite approach to Kazakh-language nationalism. This relies on the examination of existing literature on nationalism, which seems to suggest the existence of a paradox within contemporary nationalism — the latter being increasingly globalized in nature, while literature on Central Asia appears to mainly focus on defensive language nationalism. Dividing Kazakh-language nationalism in three tentative categories, 'defensive', 'globalization-wielding' and 'globalized' pursues the goal of analyzing nationalism in Central Asia

¹³ Sabanadzé, op. cit., p.170.

¹⁴ Mihelj, Sabina & Giménez-Martinez, César. « Digital nationalism: Understanding the role of digital media in the rise of 'new' nationalism », *Nations and Nationalism*, no.27, 2021, p.334.

in all its diversity — and complexity. This hypothesis not only draws on political science, but on sociolinguistics and anthropology as well.

Overall, sources were mainly in the English, Russian, French and German languages (in descending order). My practice of all four languages permitted me to gain a significant amount of time, as translating source material was not necessary. However, the Kazakh language remained out of reach, save for a few fixed expressions. Academic articles and newspaper articles proved to be the most fruitful and available source for most aspects mobilized in this essay, along with books and book chapters, which mainly covered conceptual aspects of the nationalist question. Interestingly, videos found on the web provided productive examples in the scope of my argument.

In the scope of this essay, six interviews were conducted following a qualitative methodology, as large-scale, quantitative research could not be conducted in the short amount of time in which this essay was written. One real-time interview was conducted with a renowned Kazakh rapper, while five online interviews were conducted with Kazakh-language digital artists on Instagram and Twitter. The latter five interviews were not conducted in real time, but proved fruitful nonetheless. Surprisingly, the only real-time interview proved both difficult and not as productive as I anticipated.

On a stylistic note, this essay was written according to French-language exigencies (save for this section). It thus uses the *author's we* (*nous de modestie*), a practice deemed standard in French-language academic works.

Chapter 1: Recent history of Kazakhstan, the Kazakh language and the Kazakh(stani) nation

Kazakhstan's recent history can be understood as starting with the rise of the Soviet Union and the subsequent policies undertaken by Soviet leaders Joseph Stalin (1921-1953) and his successors, chiefly Nikita Khrushchev (1953-1964) and Leonid Brezhnev (1964-1982). Created in 1920, the Kirghiz Autonomous Socialist Soviet Republic was renamed Kazakh A.S.S.R. in 1925, thus becoming the republic of the Kazakh *narod*. In 1936, it became a fully fledged Kazakh Soviet Socialist Republic. It made the Kazakhs its titular *narod*, of which the Kazakh language was the mother tongue. This chapter will go over the ideological and pragmatic considerations behind the creation of Soviet Socialist Republics in Central Asia, as well as the effects on the Soviet Union's congruent 'nationalities policy' had on the Kazakh language, well into the 1980s. A final section shall attempt to summarize the landscape of language nationalism in an independent Kazakhstani nation, and the general geopolitics of the country. This chapter merely intends to outline the main aspects of Kazakhstani geopolitics, as further chapters will further delve into said aspects. Globally, the main question this chapter aims at answering is the following: *How did Soviet policies affect the Kazakh language and Kazakh-language nationalism?*

1.1 Soviet times and the 'creation' of Soviet nationalities

The 1920s saw the implementation of various policies aimed at constructing national identities congruent with socialist republics whose borders and shape were being decided¹⁵. With the intent of consolidating Soviet hold in the yet to be fully integrated lands of Central Asia¹⁶, Soviet language and nationalities policy created a dramatic power imbalance between the Russian language and the indigenous Kazakh language, as it did with other Central Asian languages. While taking its toll on Kazakh language proficiency, it also generated a set of circumstances favorable to the emergence of Kazakh language nationalism.

1.1.1 One socialist republic, one nationality?

¹⁵ Roy, Olivier. *L'Asie centrale contemporaine*, Que sais-je, 2001, p.28.

¹⁶ *Ibid*, p.23.

Starting in 1924 under the impulse of newly appointed secretary general of the Soviet Union Joseph Stalin, the ‘Great Demarcation of Central Asia’ aimed at dividing Central Asia into national entities¹⁷, whose demographic, political and linguistic nature would be coherent in regard to the rest of the U.S.S.R.. This division relied heavily on the Russian conception of *ethnic group*. In Soviet ethnological circles, an *ethnic group* (*narod*¹⁸) was a human community understood as transcending the mere ethnicity, as it is endowed with its own institutions, philosophy and traditions and, above all, distinctive language¹⁹.

At the time, Central Asia was characterized by its ethnolinguistic diversity, hosting a variety of human groups whose identities were notoriously fluid and not necessarily split along linguistic or religious lines, but differentiated rather according to lifestyle (sedentary or nomad). As in the rest of the U.S.S.R., Central Asian citizens of the Soviet Union oftentimes failed to provide answers deemed coherent by Soviet officials when filling out censuses, especially when it came to the languages they viewed as their mother language as the very concept of mother language was foreign and often misunderstood²⁰. Central Asia was furthermore multilingual in essence, with individuals often speaking several languages fluently²¹. Said multilingualism was reinforced by the existence of Chagatay (a Karluk Turkic language) and Persian (an Indo-European language) which served as literary *lingue franche* in the region. Thus, a person residing in Samarkhand was likely to be fluent in both Tajik and Turki (nowadays called Uzbek), as well as have a decent command of Chagatay and Persian, or even Arabic, had they been provided with sufficient religious and literary education. In addition to language, one must note the importance of Islam in its various forms (usually more scholarly in the urban *madrassas*²², and usually leaning towards Sufism in the steppes) as a factor of transnational solidarity and belonging²³.

¹⁷ Pujol, Catherine. *Le Kazakhstan*, Que sais-je, 2000, p.61.

¹⁸ In Russian cyrillic народ.

¹⁹ Roy, op. cit., pp.27-28.

²⁰ Silver D., Brian. « The Ethnic and Language Dimensions in Russian and Soviet Censuses », *Research Guide to the Russian and Soviet Censuses*, Cornell University Press, 1986, p.88.

²¹ Bahry, Stephen. « Language Ecology: Understanding Central Asian Multilingualism », *Language change in Central Asia*, ed. Ahn & Smagulova, 2016, p.17.

²² A *madrassa* is a term denoting any educational institution in the Muslim world. These *madrassa* were commonplace along the Silk Road.

²³ Shahrani, Nazif. “From tribe to Umma”, *Central Asian Survey*, 1984, pp.27-38.

Major Ethnic Groups in Central Asia

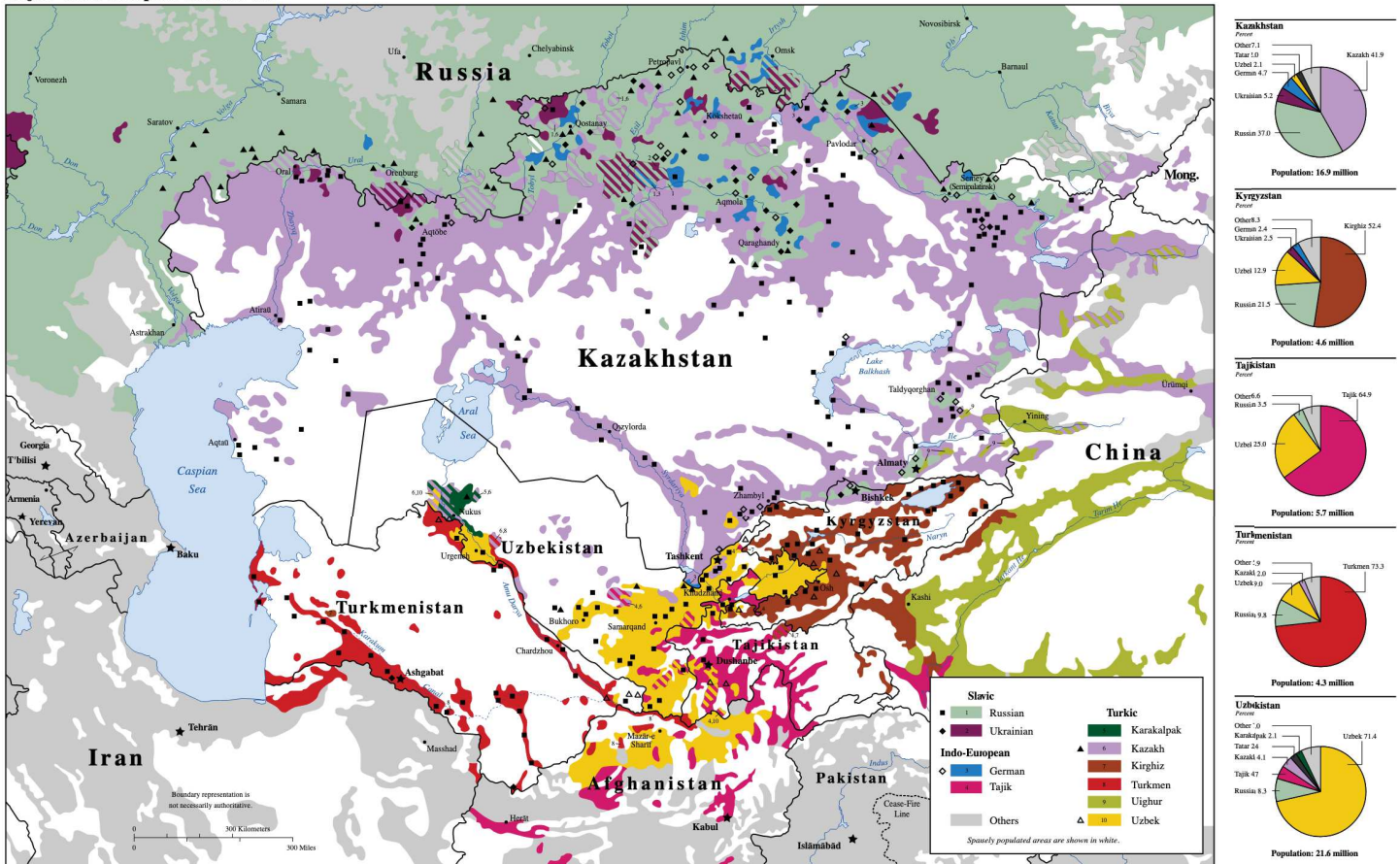


Figure 1: Language map of Central Asia, reflecting the complexity of language distribution in the area.

Source: Wikimedia Commons²⁴.

As French politologist Olivier Roy points out, out of this seemingly multiethnic social structure, Soviet authorities intended to carve entities resembling European nation states²⁵, which by all metrics were deemed more easily governable. This would entail the transition for a variety of *ethnicities* whose limits were deemed blurry to sound and readable *narody* which were to be congruent with a Soviet socialist republic specially made for them. The underlying design was to break apart the aforementioned pre-existing transnational solidarities by compartmentalizing the newly imagined *narody* (turned fully fledged *national'nosti*²⁶) from one another²⁷. In this regard,

²⁴ Wikimedia Commons. Retrieved at: https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Central_Asia_Ethnic_en.svg. [Retrieved on March, 31st, 2022]

²⁵ Nazif, op. cit.

²⁶ In Russian cyrillic национальность, or *nationality*.

²⁷ Roy, op. cit., p.29.

and as language was the first base of distinction between *narody*, language policy was a key instrument of said division, whereby Soviet linguists would engineer standards by exacerbating dialectal differences, whether them be phonological or grammatical, and render them standard²⁸. This would effectively cut off the Kazakh language from other, very closely related, Kipchak varieties²⁹ such as Kyrgyz and Karakalpak.

The next part of this chapter will review the standardization through which the Kazakh language went through, and its significance in understanding contemporary Kazakhstan's sociolinguistic dynamics.

1.1.2 The standardization of Kazakh and its consequences

After the 1926 Baku Congress, whereby Soviet experts gathered to discuss a potential language reform of the Turkic languages of the U.S.S.R., the Persian-Arabic script was abandoned in favor of the Latin script for the writing of Kazakh³⁰. In 1940, said Latin script was dropped in favor of the Cyrillic script that has been used to this day in Kazakhstan. The Kazakh version of the Cyrillic scripts adds nine new letters to the original Cyrillic script, all the while retaining Russian letters transcribing sounds absent in the Kazakh language : в (v), ч (ch), ш (shch), ь (soft sound), ъ (hard sound) or ё (yo). These last four graphemes are used to denote the typically Slavic lenition phenomenon³¹. This rather abrupt transition calls for many remarks, as its sociolinguistic effects were profound and far reaching in the Kazakh S.S.R.. In this regard, four main observations are to be made.

First of all, and as mentioned above, the transition to the Cyrillic script formalized the many dialectal differences which had been exacerbated by the standardization of Kazakh phonology and grammar³². Secondly, and in a perhaps more dramatic manner, the transition to Cyrillic effectively

²⁸ *Ibid*, p.30.

²⁹ The Turkic languages are divided into several branches, of which three are spoken in Central Asia: Oghuz languages (Turkmen), Karluk languages (Uzbek and Uyghur) and Kipchak languages (Kazakh, Kyrgyz, Karakalpak)...

³⁰ Poujol, op. cit., p.64.

³¹ Lenition denotes a phonological phenomenon whereby a consonant becomes palatalized before certain vowels. While present in Kazakh in an allophonic manner, it is not phonemic.

³² Roy, op. cit., p.30.

cut off an entire generation of Kazakh speaking youth from their language's written corpus, which had hitherto been written in the Persian-Arabic abjad and the Latin alphabet (from 1926 to 1940)³³, as they were unable to read any of its works. Previous literary production had furthermore been halted by the purging of many Kazakh-language authors, such as Saken Seifullin, Ilias Jansugurov and Beimbet Mailin³⁴ in 1938. As a consequence, written Kazakh could no longer act as a vector of pre-Soviet Kazakh identity. The resulting situation was the following: the written corpus of the Kazakh language was in clear numerical and qualitative inferiority to that of the Russian language. This meager Kazakh-language corpus consisted, furthermore, of approved works in sync with Soviet ideology, thus working as vectors of Soviet identity³⁵. Third, the transition was accompanied by a campaign of mass alphabetization, which saw the literacy rate of ethnic Kazakhs soar from 22.8% in 1926 to 76.3% in 1939³⁶, with an illiteracy rate as low as 3.1% in 1959³⁷. As a result, an entire generation of educated Kazakhs were familiar only with the Cyrillic script. Finally, the literal transposing of Russian letters into the Kazakh Cyrillic alphabet meant that Russian loanwords suffered no transformation when borrowed into Kazakh, thus allowing Russian language technical loanwords (usually related to politics, technology, etc...) to pervade a very permeable Kazakh language. This favored bilingualism in a balance askew in favor of Russian, as Kazakhophones became well acquainted with a language they viewed as necessary when it came to politics and technical work.

The already weakened standardized Kazakh language was to be hit even harder in the years to come, as the Second World War dawned and Kazakhstan underwent the massive arrival of allophones (individuals whose mother tongue is neither Russian nor Kazakh), further asserting Russian's place as the lingua franca of the Kazakh S.S.R..

³³ *Ibid*, p.35.

³⁴ Chuvín, Pierre et al. *Histoire de l'Asie centrale contemporaine*, Fayard, 2008, p.137.

³⁵ Roy, op. cit., p.37.

³⁶ Poujol, op. cit., p.64.

³⁷ Valikhanova, С. « Преодоление массовой неграмотности населения и развитие народного образования. [Overcoming mass illiteracy in the population and the development of public education], *Qazaqstan Tarihy*, no.1(29), January-March 2022. [Retrieved on March, 1st, 2022].

1.2 The diminution of Kazakh's place in Soviet Kazakhstan's society

While Soviet language policy was an important part of the Kazakh's language decline within the Kazakh S.S.R., Soviet migratory and agrarian policies contributed a great deal in making the Russian language the *de facto* lingua franca of the republic, far outshining Kazakh. Faced with a quite dire situations, Kazakh language nationalists made timid attempts at making their voice heard.

1.2.1 Soviet 'cultural colonialism'

From the 1940s onward, Kazakhstan saw the arrival of several migratory waves hailing from different parts of the Soviet Union. Whether they be deportees or settlers, new arrivals contributed to the formation of a solid, well established Russophone language group. With the Kazakh ethnic group already severely weakened by the 1930s famine and forced sedentarization, said Russophone group quickly became a majority in the Republic. Combined with disfavorable demographic trends within the Kazakh ethnicity, they contributed to making Russian the everyday lingua franca of the republic.

A. Postwar migrations and the formation of the Russophone social group

The Second World War was the catalyst of many of the early migrations underwent by the Kazakh S.S.R..

As French historian Catherine Poujol explains, the Second World War triggered the displacement of many Russian language cultural institutions from the Russian S.S.R. to Kazakhstan. For instance, Russian film studios *Mosfilm* resettled to Alma Ata in 1940, favoring the emergence of a Russian language Kazakhstani film industry³⁸. In addition to institutions, the conflict was accompanied by the mass arrival of some 430 000 Soviet citizens, mainly from the Western regions of the Union: Russians, Ukrainians and Ashkenazi Jews. A wave of some 300 000 deported Volga Germans was also resettled to Kazakhstan, as were many Caucasian ethnicities accused of collaborating with the Axis³⁹. In the wake of a devastating Second World War and faced

³⁸ Poujol, op. cit.

³⁹ *Ibid*, p.67.

by a dire in crop production increase, newly appointed Soviet leader Nikita Khrushchev called for the 'Virgin Lands⁴⁰' policy. This set of policies' purpose was to settle the Eurasian steppe *en masse* in order to having it put 'to use' and cultivated. In 1953, no less than 544 000 hectares of land were to be dedicated to wheat production⁴¹. This called for the mass settlement of Russian farmers, some 2 millions of them having settled in Kazakhstan by the 1960s⁴². As a result of these migrations, Kazakhs and Kazakhophones rapidly became a minority in their own S.S.R.: in 1962, a mere 29% of the Kazakh S.S.R. was of Kazakh ethnicity, with percentages as low as 20% in areas of Northern and Northeastern Kazakhstan (Petropavlosk, Tselinograd⁴³ and Kustanay), which were overwhelmingly Russian-speaking⁴⁴. The following figure illustrates the wide area affected by the Virgin Lands policies in Western Siberia and Central Asia. One notices that Kazakhstan saw some 255 000 square kilometers of its territory (column G) mobilized in the scope of the campaign, more than any other S.S.R..

⁴⁰ As Olcott (1988, p.237) notes, this term tokenizes the century-long use of said lands by Kazakh herders and shepherds, thus resembling classical colonial policies such as those undertaken in North America.

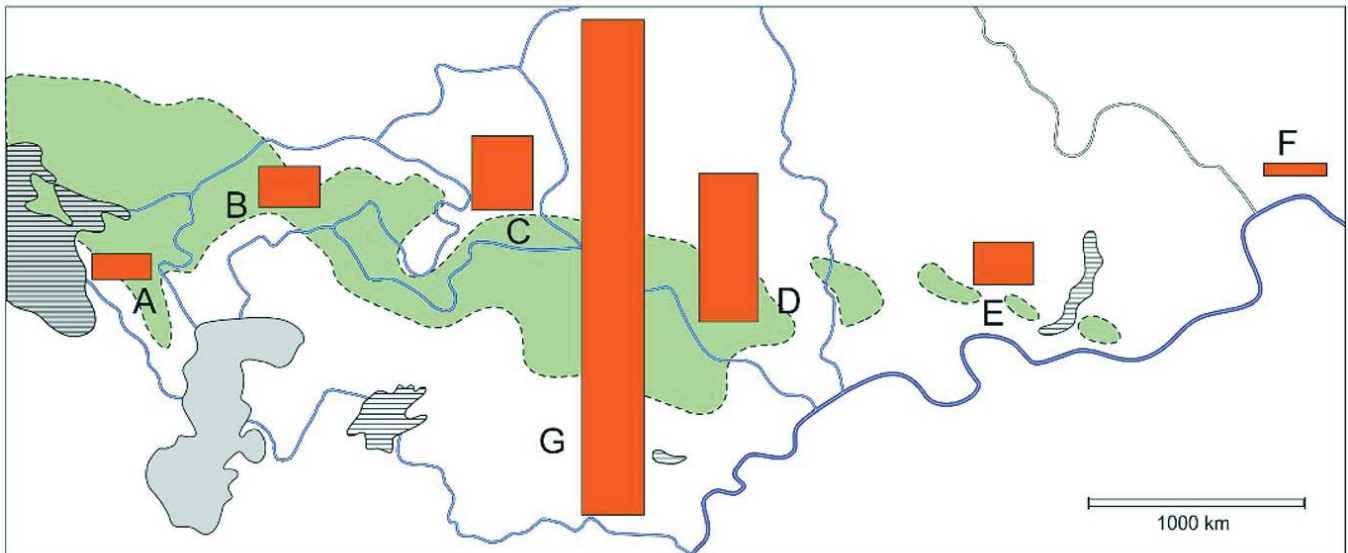
⁴¹ Mills, Richard M. « The Formation of the Virgin Lands Policy. » *Slavic Review* 29, no. 1, 1970, p.60.

⁴² Chuvín et al., op. cit., p.154.

⁴³ Present day Petropavl and Nursultan (Astana).

⁴⁴ Chuvín et al., op. cit.

Extent and areas of the Virgin Lands Campaign during the first 3 years (1954 to 1956)



- A North Caucasus region
 - B Volga region (15.000 km²)
 - C Urals region (45.000 km²)
 - D Western Siberia region (62.000 km²)
 - E Eastern Siberia region (42.000 km²)
 - F Far East region
 - G Republic Kazakhstan (255.000 km²)
- Steppes and Forest Steppes

Source: Based on data in „Narodnoe chozjajstvo SSSR v.1956 godu“ Moskva 1957

Figure 2. ‘Extent and areas of the Virgin Lands Campaign during the first 3 years (1954 to 1956)’. Source : Frühauf, M. « The Virgin Lands Campaign (1954–1963) Until the Breakdown of the Former Soviet Union (FSU): With Special Focus on Western Siberia », *KULUNDA: Climate Smart Agriculture*, 2019, pp.101-118.

Uppsala University researcher Matthew Blackburn argues that today’s Russophone minority in Kazakhstan was formed at this time, through the interaction of settlers (either voluntary or forced) from various ethnic groups, whose only common anchorage was the Russian language⁴⁵. They came to refer themselves as *russkii*⁴⁶, a term reflective of common socioeconomic and sociolinguistic belonging and shared civilizing mission, rather than merely ethnic⁴⁷.

B. *Ethnic Kazakh demographic trends*

⁴⁵ Blackburn, Matthew. “Discourses of Russian-speaking youth in Nazarbayev’s Kazakhstan: Soviet legacies and responses to nation building”, *Central Asian Survey*, 38:2, 2019, p. 219.

⁴⁶ In Russian cyrillic русский (Russian).

⁴⁷ Blackburn, op. cit.

Demographic trends intern to the Kazakh ethnicity are an explanatory factor of the language's decrease in Soviet years. In the 1930s, a devastating famine killed entire swaths of the Kazakh population, significantly weakening Kazakh communities and marking them with lasting trauma. After the Second World War, as Kazakhs emigrated to cities in search of better job and educational opportunities, they were faced with the need to learn, and oftentimes adopt Russian as their everyday language of communication. Indeed, the urban population had been overwhelmingly Russian-speaking since postwar migratory policies. Aided by lenient Soviet policies, Russian-language schools were both the most numerous and the most efficient vectors of social promotion in the Kazakh S.S.R. (while Kazakh medium schools decreased dramatically)⁴⁸, drawing many Kazakhs to attend. As a result, a numerically and economically significant Russian-speaking Kazakh population arose at this time. This in turn generated a rather strong dichotomy among the Kazakhs, between those who had managed to preserve their language and tradition (the *Nagyz Qazaq* or *Taza Qazaq*⁴⁹) and those who had been assimilated (the *Mankurt*⁵⁰ or *Shala Qazaq*⁵¹).

C. Russian as the prestige language of Soviet Kazakhstan

All in all, these migratory and demographic trends contributed to making Russian the prestige lingua franca of the Kazakh S.S.R..

Indeed, Russian became the lingua franca of the Kazakh S.S.R.. A lingua franca, also called vernacular language, is the language used in normal, day-to-day communication within a speech community. As mentioned above, the interaction between several different language groups that had either migrated or been deported to Kazakhstan had to use Russian, the only language they shared, as a means of interethnic communication. In addition to being its lingua franca, the Russian language became the prestige language of the S.S.R.. As emeritus English professor Richard Nordquist explains : « In sociolinguistics, prestige is the degree of esteem and social value attached by members of a speech community to a certain language, dialect or feature of a certain language

⁴⁸ Poujol, op. cit., pp.74-75.

⁴⁹ The 'true Kazakhs'. Translation by Stéphane de TAPIA.

⁵⁰ A term theorized by popular Kyrgyz author Chingiz Aitmatov in his 1980 novel *The Day Lasts More Than a Hundred Years*.

⁵¹ The 'lost Kazakhs' (Dadabaeyva, 2010).

variety⁵² ». In other words, « The language of powerful social groups usually carries linguistic prestige; and social prestige is often granted to speakers of prestige languages [...]»⁵³ ». We argue that within the Kazakh S.S.R., Russian is a textbook example of a prestige language, as it was viewed as the language of modernity, social promotion and openness to a wider, desirable Soviet world⁵⁴.

As this section demonstrates, both the rural exodus underwent by ethnic Kazakhs and Soviet migratory and educational policies contributed to marginalizing the Kazakh language to rural areas. This would in turn earn the Kazakh language a reputation of being the language of the uneducated, as we shall see in a later (1.3.1) section.

1.2.2 From early attempts at language reclamation to institutionalized nationalism (1960s-1991)

Quoted by Olcott (1988), author J.W. Cleary stated, in the 1960s, that : « In the light of the long term demographic, linguistic and economic trends looked at here, the only conclusion open to the researcher is that the centralized bureaucratic system and its values prevail over the forces of Kazakh nationalism. Natives still enjoy a privileged position in the sharing of power, but one may expect to see continued erosion on this position at all levels.⁵⁵ » As Olcott goes to explain, this prediction has been disproven afterwards. Indeed, Kazakh language nationalism, while timid at first, went to become a political force of the *perestroika*-era Kazakhstan. This section aims at reviewing the first instances of institutionalized Kazakh language nationalism.

A. Pre-Perestroika years (1960s-1986)

⁵² Nordquist, Richard. "Definition and Examples of Linguistic Prestige", *Glossary of Grammatical and Rhetorical Terms*, June, 25th 2020. Retrieved at: <https://www.thoughtco.com/linguistic-prestige-1691533> [Retrieved on March, 29th 2022].

⁵³ *Ibid.*

⁵⁴ Blackburn, op. cit., p.224.

⁵⁵ Olcott, op. cit., p.246.

Congruent with an increased implication of ethnic Kazakhs in the governing of the S.S.R., subsequent to continued Soviet *korenizatsija*⁵⁶. As defined by French historian Vincent Fourniau, *korenizatsija* (or indigenization) denotes « [a] complex process [...] whereby a majority of socially prestigious jobs concerning the managing of S.S.R.'s, in particular in the cultural sphere, were held by members of the titular nationality of the S.S.R.⁵⁷ » This resulted in a largely 'indigenous' Soviet discourse, as well as a lecture and production of Kazakh history using the nation-state as a framework of reference and agency⁵⁸. In other words, the history of the Kazakhs as a nation was largely told through the lens of the Western nation-state (as an interiorized framework of reference) by ethnic Kazakhs. Furthermore, encouraged by Kazakh S.S.R.'s leader (1964-1986) Dinmukhammed Kunayev's efforts, literary movements started to advocate in favor of the preservation and promotion of the Kazakh language, as early as the 1960s⁵⁹. We can speculate that such movements may have been influenced by nation-state-based discourse on Kazakh and Central Asian as promoted by ethnic Kazakh officials. One of the most prominent literary movement in favor of the Kazakh language was Zhas Tulpar, whose members were mainly Kazakh intellectuals belonging to literary circles. As usually the case within the U.S.S.R., Zhas Tulpar was regularly accused of being of 'bourgeois nationalist' nature⁶⁰, and cannot have been considered a credible political force. The transition of Kazakh language nationalism from an underground movement to an open political movement can be traced to the *perestroika*, whose sociodemographic context offered many opportunities for Kazakh language nationalists to influence decision making.

B. The Perestroika and Kazakh language nationalism (1986-1991)

The *perestroika*, a term denoting both the Soviet movement and the associated policies aiming at progressively incorporating elements of electoral pluralism, is considered to have begun in 1986. Among other significant changes, the *perestroika* was accompanied by the legalization of

⁵⁶ In Russian Cyrillic коренизация, which translates to 'indigenization'. The Korenizatsiya policies aimed at increasing 'native' participation in the different non-Russian republics of the U.S.S.R.

⁵⁷ Fourniau, Vincent. « Si proches, si lointaines : l'Asie centrale et la Chine », *Relations internationales*, vol. 145, no. 1, 2011, p.23.

⁵⁸ *Ibid.*

⁵⁹ Laruelle, Marlène. « Language and ethnicity: the landscape of Kazakh nationalism », *Central Peripheries*, UCL Press, 2021, pp.172-173.

⁶⁰ *Ibid*, p.173.

political formations and movements that had hitherto been either censored or at times downright repressed. The context which saw the arrival of the *perestroika* in the Kazakh S.S.R. was that of social and ethnic tension, mainly centered around linguistic and socioeconomic issues: part of the Kazakh ethnicity resented Russian domination over industrial sector and its benefits, as well as the discrimination the Kazakh ethnicity faced, both economically and culturally⁶¹. In December 1986, political violence erupted after Soviet leader Gorbachev's dismissal of the hitherto rather popular Dinmukhammed Kunaev (an ethnic Kazakh) as leader of the Kazakh S.S.R. by Gennady Kolbin. Gathered in Alma Ata, students demonstrators were heard chanting 'Kazakhstan to Kazakhs⁶²'. The Central Committee of the communist party of the U.S.S.R. attributed the riots to 'Kazakh nationalism⁶³. While repressed, what would come to be known as the Zheltoqsan movement⁶⁴ would leave an enduring mark on the formation of institutionalized Kazakh nationalism.

The official response to the Zheltoqsan movement was that of relative openness, albeit timid. In 1987, an act 'On improving the study of the Kazakh language' was passed⁶⁵. At the same time, new informal, yet influential⁶⁶ movements centered on the language issue, enabled by the *perestroika*. Those most relevant to our research are the Mother Tongue Society (*Ana Tili Qogami*), the Kazakh State Language Movement (*Memlekettik Til*), as well as are 'generalist' nationalist formations such as the Jeltoqsan Party (founded in 1988) or the Alash Orda Fund⁶⁷. They, especially the former two, advocated for the use of Kazakh as the S.S.R.'s 'state language', and actively promoted its use in every sphere of daily life. As Dadabaeva and Adibaeyva (2010) point out, the late 1980s and early 1990s saw the Kazakh government attempting to address ethnic tensions, at a time where Kazakh activists were more visible and influential than ever⁶⁸. Kazakh nationalists sustained discussions on past hardships, marginalization and discrimination, pushing for 'remedial'

⁶¹ *Ibid*, p.180

⁶² Poujol, op. cit., p.76.

⁶³ *Ibid*.

⁶⁴ In Kazakh, 'the December movement'.

⁶⁵ Dadabaeva, Gulnara & Adibayeva, Aigul. « Post-Soviet Kazakhstan, nationalism and language issues », *The Soviet and Post-Soviet Review*, no.37, 2010, p.129.

⁶⁶ Poujol, op. cit.

⁶⁷ Laruelle, op. cit., p.173.

⁶⁸ Dadabaeva & Adibayeva, op. cit.

action and compensation from the government, especially in the area of language policy⁶⁹. In the absence of a clear strategy in the wake of the 1986 violence, and eager to keep the S.S.R. stable, the increasingly Kazakh-dominated Kazakh government began to show interest in undertaking nation building endeavors centered on the titular nation of the S.S.R., the Kazakhs⁷⁰. As ethnic Kazakh birth rates were among the highest within the S.S.R.⁷¹, and as the resurgence of Kazakh language nationalism suggested, the Kazakh language could certainly be revived, whence the rapid convergence towards a nationalism advocating solely in favor of the Kazakh language, at the possible expense of every other language⁷². The late *perestroika* saw the registration as legal parties of many of the aforementioned movements; such is the case of the Alash National Freedom Party and the Azat Republic Party of Kazakhstan (both registered in 1990). Other Kazakh language movements undertook official activities in the form of newspapers, such as Qazaq Tili⁷³.

With the dissolution of the U.S.S.R, Kazakhstan declared its independence on the 16th of December 1991. This transition made nation building and the promotion of the Kazakh language the priority of an independent and sovereign state, that did not exist *de jure* in the wider scope of the U.S.S.R.. As Dadabaeva and Adibayeva explain, language nationalism was a vehicle to « prevent the negative consequences of independence⁷⁴ », shielding the newly independent Kazakhstan from internal instability. Nursultan Nazarbayev's, the S.S.R.'s leader from 1990 to 1991, rise to the role of president of independent Kazakhstan further integrated Kazakh-language nationalism into the country's official policy.

1.3 Post-independence state of Kazakhstan: language nationalism in a secondary power

While the above section explains the origins of Kazakh-language nationalism in today's independent Kazakhstan, this section aims at reviewing the state of present day Kazakh-language

⁶⁹ *Ibid*, p.131.

⁷⁰ Dadabaeva & Adibayeva, op. cit. pp.137-139.

⁷¹ Olcott, op cit., pp.276-277.

⁷² Dadabaeva & Adibayeva, op. cit., pp.139.

⁷³ Poujol, op. cit., p.173.

⁷⁴ Dadabaeva & Adibyeva, op. cit. p.137.

nationalism, both top-down and bottom-up. As section 1.3.1 shall explain, the promotion of the Kazakh language has been an integral part of governmental policies since 1991. Section 1.3.1 also stresses the enduring sociolinguistic tensions and divides which exist in present-day Kazakhstan, the latter helping to explain the country's sustained efforts to promote the Kazakh language. A second section shall focus on Kazakhstan's post-independence geopolitical status.

1.3.1 Review of an independent Kazakhstan's language nationalism and foreign policy

As explicated earlier, language nationalism can refer to any practice or endeavor which aims at placing the interests of the national language first, and before any other language. The purpose of the following section is to outline the portrait of Kazakhstan's language nationalism and nation building landscapes since 1991.

A. Nation building and language policy

Nur-Sultan's language policy is embedded in a wider nation building endeavor. In this essay, we understand nation building as official or unofficial efforts to promote, consolidate and perpetuate national identity. Nation building can also refer to the process by which a nation defines itself. As Armenian researcher Narek Mrktchyan explains in his 2014 essay, nation building efforts in former Soviet countries can be understood as a means to consolidate power⁷⁵, especially when dealing with a notoriously diverse and divided ethnolinguistic landscape⁷⁶ such as Kazakhstan's. Together with efforts to promote Kazakh high culture, literature⁷⁷ and History, language policy is a cornerstone of the Central Asian nation's nation building and the definition of 'Kazakhness' (ie. What it means to be Kazakh). As Russian remains, due to Soviet language policies, the most widely spoken and understood language as well as Kazakhstan's *de facto* lingua franca⁷⁸, Kazakhstan's official

⁷⁵ Mrktchyan, Narek. "The notion of 'kazakhness' behind the symbolic nation-building of Kazakhstan", *Political Science Journal*, 9(1-2), 2014, p.18.

⁷⁶ Abiyeva, Kargylash. "Les enjeux linguistiques et la construction de l'identité nationale au Kazakhstan", *Revue Russe*, no.36, 2011, p.157.

⁷⁷ Mrktchyan, op. cit., p.20.

⁷⁸ Suleimenova, op. cit.

language policy aims at promoting the Kazakh language as the official, prestige *lingua franca* of the nation. This may be done at the expense of the Russian language.

As defined in 1987 by linguist Joshua Fishman, language policy is the « authoritative allocation of all resources to the attainment of language status and corpus goals, whether in connection with new functions that are aspired to or in connection with old functions that need to be discharged more adequately⁷⁹ ». Kazakh-French researcher Karlygash Abiyeva rightfully states that the key intent of Kazakhstan's language policy is to make Kazakh a language with social function⁸⁰. In other words, the national language is currently undergoing a process through which, it is hoped, it will gain prestige (status policies) and use as a *lingua franca* (by revigorating its corpus) *in lieu* of Russian (as we may see later on). Said process, which we may call *khazakhization*⁸¹, is mainly achieved through intensive legislation, that spans every aspect of social life from education to media.

The core of Kazakhstan's nationalist language policy was consolidated in the early 1990s, and mainly concerns the official status of the language.

- Article 7 of the 1995 Constitution of Kazakhstan states that Kazakh is the official language of Kazakhstan, a status further confirmed by article 4 of the 1997 language law, which states that Kazakh is to be used in the state's public dealings, administrative institutions and the judiciary. It adds it is every citizen's duty to learn the Kazakh language, which is stated to be the most important factor of Kazakhstan's national consolidation. Finally, the Kazakhstani government is to develop the official language as much as possible, as well as its international standing⁸². A number of constitutional laws and rulings furthermore state that court proceedings as well as public service are to be provided in the official language (1997 language law), or the language of choosing of the interested person⁸³. Said legislation is furthered by state programs such as the National Program for the Development and Functioning of Languages for 2011-2019 (launched

⁷⁹ Nordquist, op. cit.

⁸⁰ Abiyeva, op. cit., p.162.

⁸¹ In other words, the process by which society increasingly adopts the Kazakh language as its normal means of communication.

⁸² Leclerc, Jacques. « Kazakhstan — La politique linguistique », *Aménagements linguistiques dans le monde*, Université de Laval. Retrieved at:<https://www.axl.cefan.ulaval.ca/asia/kazakhstan-3Politik-Ing.htm>. [Retrieved on April, 3rd, 2022]

⁸³ *Ibid.*

in 2011), which pursues three goals: the mastery of the state (official) language (with an envisioned 90% of the population fluent in Kazakh by 2019), the popularization and expansion of the state language and the raising level of linguistic culture of Kazakhstan⁸⁴. A more recent example is the State Program for the Implementation of the Language Policy of the Republic of Kazakhstan for 2020-2025, which wishes to modernize the Kazakh language with the Latin script and « strengthen the role of Kazakh as a language of interethnic communication⁸⁵ ».

Further legislation concerns the areas of culture, media and entertainment, as well as education.

- Concerning media and entertainment, the 2012 amendment of the 1997 language law states that the weekly volume of TV and radio content in non official language shall not exceed content in the official language, thus giving preeminence to the Kazakh language. The 2011 media law also restricts the total amount of foreign (non-state) language content on TV and radio⁸⁶. Similar legislation exists for the written press. These laws aim at promoting and yielding a Kazakh-language only media environment. As a result, there is an increasing number of Kazakh-only TV channels and newspapers : *El Arna*, *Emegendi Qazaqstan* ('Sovereign Kazakhstan') or *Qazaqstan*, which help popularize and define 'Kazakhness' (TV programs on Kazakh history, culture and issues...). As Abiyeva states, « TV remains an important means of identity building⁸⁷. »
- Educational goals are mainly pursued through state programs such as the State Program on Development of Education 2011-2020, which plans on « increasing the share of qualified teachers to 55% ». This echoes the rapid growth of Kazakh language education, and the subsequent need of keeping quality standards as high as possible⁸⁸ while promoting the Kazakhization of the school system.

Upon inspecting Kazakhstan's language laws, one notices the ambiguous place given to the Russian language, the latter being almost mentioned alongside the official language in areas such as

⁸⁴ Bekmurzaev, Nurbek. *Language policies of the Central Asian states*, CABAR.Asia, 2019, p.8.

⁸⁵ *Ibid*.

⁸⁶ Abiyeva, Karlygash. « L'aménagement linguistique dans le Kazakhstan post-soviétique: quel usage du kazakh dans les médias sociaux et sur internet ? », *Revue d'études comparatives Est-Ouest*, no.46, 2015, p.163-164.

⁸⁷ *Ibid*, p.179.

⁸⁸ Kulzhanova, Ainur. « Language policy of Kazakhstan: an analysis », Central European University [Master's thesis], 2012, p.21.

the judiciary, signage or public service. This status, which carefully avoids any excluding wording, will be further analyzed in a later chapter (see p.).

B. Complexity of Kazakhstan's language nationalism

While the Kazakh government is a top-down driving force in Kazakh language nationalism, structuring it and being for the most part its flag bearer, other impactful actors are to be named in the promotion of the Kazakh language. French researcher Marlène Laruelle outlines four main groups of Kazakh language nationalists (or patriots): the first are the historical parties of the perestroika (mentioned in section 1.2.2). Second, and more prominently nowadays, are the cultural entrepreneurs and intellectual figures in favor of Kazakhization that have become the most active actors of Kazakh language nationalism⁸⁹ through movements such as the Alash Orda Fund or the Kazakh State Language Movement (Memlekettik Til) and publications such as *Qazaq Tili*. A third area of activism lies in politically active collectives advocating for Kazakhization, chiefly *Ult Tagdyry* and *Ruhaniyat*⁹⁰. These political formations' relationship to the Kazakh government are ambiguous and shifting, yielding varying results when it comes to advocacy. Finally, and more interestingly to our research, Laruelle outlines a fourth group: social media activists, typically young users. These play a significant role in Kazakh language nationalism (as we may see in Chapter IV), and are arguably the backbone of the country's bottom-up language nationalism.

These three latter groups are polysemic and heterogeneous, and hold a plurality of political views and standpoints, ranging from neo-conservatism to liberalism, with neo-conservatism not being restricted solely to political formations such as *Ult Tagdyry* and liberalism not being restricted to young social media users.

1.3.2 Kazakhstan's 21st century geopolitics as a secondary power

Post-independence Kazakhstan is widely considered to be a secondary power. A secondary power is defined as a « state with moderate regional influence and moderate international

⁸⁹ Laruelle, op. cit., pp.171-172.

⁹⁰ *Ibid.*

recognition⁹¹. » Kazakhstan is wedged between two major world powers: Russia and China, and is highly dependent on both states economy-wise and in terms of security. An important observation, which will guide part of our reflexion, is the Kazakhstani pursuit of partnerships and alliances beyond Russia and China. This section merely introduces key aspects of Kazakhstan's foreign relations, as further analysis constitutes the core of our essay.

Kazakhstan's relationship with Russia is that of relative post-imperial dependency and partnership, as Russia holds significant influence over Kazakhstan's economy, security and culture. Along with rest of Central Asia, Kazakhstan is traditionally regarded as being part of Moscow's 'Near-Abroad', or post-Soviet states within Russia's sphere of influence. As such, Moscow has sought to maintain its influence over Kazakhstan through regional integration, tight economic ties and continued cultural influence thanks to the widespread use of the Russian language⁹², a legacy of the aforementioned Soviet times. Nur-Sultan has thus been involved in several regional initiatives with Russia, usually enthusiastically so: the Commonwealth of Independent States (C.I.S.), the Eurasian Economic Union (the E.E.U.) and the Organization of Collective Security (O.C.S.) being prime examples, as the latter played a significant role in the 2022 riots⁹³. The two states have consistently referred to each other as each other's « greatest ally⁹⁴ », Kazakhstan usually siding with (or at worst being neutral towards) Russian positions internationally. As we may see later, this statement conceals a more complex reality, and is likely to be challenged by the recent 2022 Russian invasion of the Ukraine.

The second most important partner of independent Kazakhstan is undoubtedly China, with which it maintains strong economic ties. It is part of China's One Belt-One Road initiative, an ambitious terrestrial and maritime commercial linkage between China, Central Asia and Europe. For instance, as of 2009, Chinese companies controlled up to 20% of Kazakhstan's oil and gas

⁹¹ Vanderhill et al. « Between the bear and the dragon: multivectorism in Kazakhstan as a model strategy for secondary powers » *International Affairs*, no.96:4, 2020, p.975.

⁹² Vanderhill et al., op. cit.

⁹³ Leblanc, Claude. « Pourquoi Pékin laisse Moscou gérer la situation au Kazakhstan », *L'Opinion*, January, 10th 2022. [Retrieved on April, 5th 2022].

⁹⁴ Umarov, Temur. « Can Russia and China Edge the United States Out of Kazakhstan? », *Carnegie*, August, 3rd 2021. [Retrieved on April, 5th 2022].

production⁹⁵, while grander projects have been under the spotlight, most famously the Khorgos International Center for Boundary Cooperation, a free zone aiming at bolstering Kazakh-Chinese trade, right at the border between the two states. As researcher Alexander Gubaev details in his 2014 article for the *Journal of Contemporary East Asian Studies*, China's growing influence in Kazakhstan is viewed with distrust on the Russian side, and many authors have analyzed Central Asia⁹⁶, and especially Kazakhstan as being a battlefield of geopolitical influence between China and Russia. While common initiatives gathering Kazakhstan, China and Russia have taken place, chiefly the aforementioned O.C.S (which was formally established in 2001), tripartite cooperation is somewhat scarce, owing to the conflicting ambitions of China and Russia⁹⁷ in the area.

Along with Russia and China, Kazakhstan sustains a number of cultural, economic and political ties to other states, as part of its multivector strategy. A significant part of Kazakhstan's trade goes through and is conducted with the E.U., and has been on a steady increasing path since the mid-2000s, when the Transit Routes for the Caucasus and Central Asia (T.R.A.C.E.A.)⁹⁸ program was launched. Kazakh-E.U. relations are also political, Nur-Sultan being an enthusiastic participant in the Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe (O.S.C.E.), which saw the chairmanship of Kazakhstan in 2010. Finally, Kazakhstan, given its endowment in natural resources, is of special interest to the E.U. in the scope of its energy strategy, and a number of initiatives have been underway since 2006⁹⁹. Another set of partners especially relevant to our research, and which constitutes an important part of it, are the Turkic states, whose cultural and linguistic affinities *vis-à-vis* Kazakhstan have enhanced solidarity in various domains: education, media, economic ties and integration initiatives.

An observation critical to our research is the apparent tension between Kazakhstan's geopolitical situation — economic, political and cultural influence from two major powers which it

⁹⁵ Gubaev, Alexander. « Crouching Bear Hidden Dragon: "One Belt One Road" and Chinese-Russian Jostling for Power in Central Asia », *The Journal of Contemporary China Studies*, vol.5, no.2, 2016, p.66.

⁹⁶ *Ibid*, pp.62-65.

⁹⁷ *Ibid*.

⁹⁸ Erler, Gernot. « The EU and Kazakhstan », *The Republic of Kazakhstan and the European Union: results and possibilities for cooperation*, 2007, pp.53-54.

⁹⁹ Piebalgs, Andris. « EU-Kazakhstan relations », *The Republic of Kazakhstan and the European Union: results and possibilities for cooperation*, 2007, pp.43-44.

borders, and its exclusive promotion of the Kazakh language, which is part of a broader endeavor of nation building. It is indeed a road to be trodden carefully.

The main outline of Kazakh language nationalism and international relations now introduced, the following chapters of our research will delve into and attempt to tie Kazakh language nationalism or patriotism to key aspects of Kazakhstan's foreign policy and aspirations: multivectorialism, transnational dynamics and soft power. Drawing from international relations theory and studies on nationalism, this reflexion hopes to open a wider discussion on Kazakh language nationalism and its interaction with globalization: *How does 21st century language nationalism react to the forces of globalization and the constraints of 21st century international relations? How does the pursuit of the promotion of the Kazakh language impact Kazakhstan's international dealings, given the delicate balance it has to uphold between the two majors powers between which it is wedged? Does the effect Kazakh-language nationalism has on international dealings vary according to its attitude towards globalization and the outside?*

Chapter 2 : The promotion of the Kazakh language as an example of classical, defensive nationalism

This chapter analyzes Kazakh language nationalism as a phenomenon of classical nationalism, the belief that the nation is to be congruent with the state, and that its interests, language and culture are to be given priority above all others. Going back to Ernest Gellner definition, nationalism as a doctrine « [C]an be supported by some good arguments, such as the desirability of preserving cultural diversity, of a pluralistic international political system, and of the diminution of internal strain within states.¹⁰⁰ » Such nationalistic doctrine would imply two things in the scope of a state's foreign affairs: first, the nation is to be shielded from the homogenizing pressures of globalization, and the dangers of international affairs, whether they be rival nationalistic endeavors, or merely external attacks to the nation's integrity. Second, support is to be found in natural and or historical solidarities which do not contradict nationalistic narratives. This chapter argues that the promotion of the Kazakh language can be analyzed as a phenomenon of classical nationalism, since both its revival and uses in Kazakhstan's foreign policy seem to converge towards an anxious perception of external pressures.

2.1 Kazakh as a key element of Kazakhstan's international sovereignty

Kazakh language nationalism plays a critical role in Kazakhstan's foreign affairs, as it is arguably the strongest discursive pillar in its quest of international sovereignty and recognition. After defining and outlining Kazakhstan's famously ambivalent multi-vector foreign policy, this section argues that Kazakh serves a critical role in asserting Kazakhstan's distinctiveness *vis-à-vis* other states. This assertion, mainly driven by the central government, joins a more globalized neoconservative current in international relations. Our understanding of international relations will mostly rely on realist and constructivist principles.

2.1.1 An introduction to Kazakhstan's multi-vector foreign policy

As defined by Vanderhill et al., multi-vector policy can be defined by a policy that « develops foreign relations through a framework based on a pragmatic, non-ideological

¹⁰⁰ Gellner, op. cit., p.2.

foundation.¹⁰¹ » More broadly, it can refer to the endeavor undertaken by a sovereign state to develop many vectors of foreign relations, thus weaving ties to a number of states, organizations or integration structures as diverse as possible, as to maximize its international flexibility. Vanderhill et al. argue in their 2020 article that Kazakhstan is a prime example of multi-vector policy in the scope of international relations, and go on to link its international policy as that of ‘omni-enmeshment¹⁰²’. Omni-enmeshment denotes an international policy whereby a secondary power entangles great powers into regional integration, multilateral cooperation and economic partnerships, making their actions more predictable and less likely to be antagonistic as a result of increased predictability. British academic John Hutchinson, whose thinking is of special relevance to this essay, rightfully states when referring to 21st century nationalism that « In the contemporary world, national elites must cooperate within an unstable environment that involves balancing global and regional networks.¹⁰³ »

In this configuration, Kazakhstan seeks to balance out Chinese, but especially Russian influence over its international sovereignty. As previously stated, the power Russia holds over its southern neighbor is manifold, and come in the form of economic dependence dynamics, cultural influence, deep regional and military ties. Economically, Kazakhstan disproportionately depends on Russia to export its natural gas westwards, as more than 80% of Kazakhstan’s oil exports run through Caspian pipelines to the Russian port of the Novorossiysk on the Black Sea¹⁰⁴. More dramatically, Kazakhstan’s currency, the Tenge, is utterly subjected to the whims of the Ruble: the 2022 economic sanctions directed at Russia in the wake of the Ukraine war have made the ruble and its value plummet, and the tenge with them¹⁰⁵. Regionally and militarily, Russia has demonstrated its ability to implement military action on Kazakhstani territory, mainly in the scope of the O.C.S.; the 2022 ‘peacekeeping’ intervention in the wake of the January 2022 riots being the most recent example thereof. Regionally, Kazakhstan is part of both the E.E.U. and the Commonwealth of Independent States, which are oftentimes viewed as the embodiment of Russia’s so-called ‘near

¹⁰¹ Vanderhill et al. op. cit., pp.976-977.

¹⁰² *Ibid.*

¹⁰³ Hutchinson. op. cit., p.97.

¹⁰⁴ Alimova, Elnur. « Kazakhstan - next after Ukraine? Analysis of Moscow’s expansionist policy [Казakhstan - следующий после Украины? Анализируя экспансионистскую политику Москвы] », *Azattyk*, March 26th 2022.

¹⁰⁵ Vlast KZ, « Dollar exchange rate rises to 472,8 tenge [Курс доллара на бирже вырос до 472,8 тенге] », April 1st 2022. [Retrieved on April, 8th, 2022].

abroad'. Most importantly to our research, Russia wields significant leverage culturally through the Russian language, Russia based and Russia language media. First, as Russian remains an important *lingua franca* in modern Kazakhstan, part of Kazakhstan's viewership is naturally drawn to Russian language media, whether it be Kazakhstan or Russia based¹⁰⁶. Second, Russia holds significant leverage in the form of linguistic ties. As Russian researcher Oleg Borisovich Molodov states, Russia « [P]ossesses an unconditional edge on other states [in Central Asia], since Central Asian states, such as Kazakhstan and Kyrgyzstan, are part of post-Soviet integration processes¹⁰⁷ », thus enabling « [T]he spread of the Russian language there and the preservation Soviet inherited family, friendly and professional ties.¹⁰⁸ » Whether Russian acts upon this edge and influence is a matter of great anxiety for Kazakh language nationalists, and a parameter constantly reassessed by the Kazakhstani government in its foreign policy.

As a result of this dependence, Kazakhstan has undertaken a thorough work of diversification in regard to its foreign partnerships. Economically, the aforementioned Kazakhstan-China economic partnerships have prospered in the last twenty years, and can be understood as being a balancing strategy by Nur-Sultan towards Russian economic influence. Kazakhstan's enthusiastic participation in the One Belt One Road (O.B.O.R.) initiative is thus a way of broadening the country's economic prospects. Both multi-vectoring and omni-enmeshment can serve as credible frameworks in understanding Kazakhstan's interest towards China: it helps the country steer free of its dependence to Russia's influence, all the while using the Russian-Chinese rivalry to make the best of its partnership with both countries¹⁰⁹. This has, however, resulted in an increased Chinese hold on the Kazakh economy (as previously mentioned). Furthermore, as cooperation between China and Russia deepen, so does their combined influence on Kazakhstan. This can be illustrated by the *One Belt One Union* (一帶一盟, *yī dài yī méng*¹¹⁰) idea yielded by the Valdai Report. A combination of the E.E.U. and the O.B.O.R. initiative, it highlighted the non-

¹⁰⁶ Abiyeva, op. cit.

¹⁰⁷ Molodov, Oleg. « Russian language as an instrument of « soft power » in the countries of Central Asia » [Русский язык как инструмент "мягкой силы" в странах центральной Азии], *Diskurs Pi*, no.1(26), p.94

¹⁰⁸ *Ibid.*

¹⁰⁹ Vanderhill et al, op. cit., p.976.

¹¹⁰ From the Chinese terms 带 (*dài*): belt and 盟 (*méng*): alliance, union.

exclusive aspect of both endeavors and advocated for coordinated Russian-Chinese action in Central Asia¹¹¹.

Another key aspect of Kazakhstan's foreign policy is its orientation towards the West and other economies. Here too, multi-vectoring is at play given the rather —and arguably, ideology-free aspect of Kazakhstan-E.U. relations. The idea of a « well balanced regional and bilateral approach in [E.U.-Kazakhstan] relations¹¹² » is indeed stated in the 2007 'Republic of Kazakhstan and the European Union: results and possibilities for cooperation' report. Since 2006, the E.U. has been the first trading and investment partner of Kazakhstan, and a key partner in helping Kazakhstan achieve some of its decade-long ambitions such as the integration of the World Trade Organization¹¹³. Kazakhstan's envisioned role as a stable energy provider and a core player in Central Asia's security landscape¹¹⁴ has led it to seek a diversity of trading partners, such as Arab states with which cultural ties seem to have followed, Saudi Arabia being an enthusiastic participant in the 2006 Congress of World and Traditional Religions held in Nur-Sultan¹¹⁵. Kazakhstan has also cultivated an image of neutrality, which has led to numerous instances of states resorting to Kazakhstani arbitration. One such example is the hosting of the India-Pakistan Davis Cup in Nur-Sultan, both India and Pakistan disagreeing on which country got to host the games¹¹⁶. Neutral Kazakhstan has also demonstrated its will to be a driving force behind regional proposals¹¹⁷.

This section shows that Kazakhstan's delicate situation between two major powers, China and Russia, drive its will to seek out diverse and non-ideological partnerships. In this regard, Nazarbayev's Kazakhstan has endeavored to become a neutral and independent player in international relations. The next section will attempt to tie Kazakh-language nationalism to the observations made above: can it serve Kazakhstan's multi-vector policy?

¹¹¹ Gabuev, op. cit. pp.69-72.

¹¹² Zhigalov, Konstantin. « EU-Central Asia-Kazakhstan: Keeping a well-balanced regional and bilateral approach », *The Republic of Kazakhstan and the European Union: results and possibilities for cooperation*, 2007, p. 58.

¹¹³ Ferrero Waldner, op. cit., p.32.

¹¹⁴ Zhigalov, op. cit., pp.64-65.

¹¹⁵ Ibid, p.65.

¹¹⁶ Gotev, Georgi. « We don't build walls in the steppe », *Multivector Diplomacy*, Euractiv, 2019, pp.12-13.

¹¹⁷ Ibid.

2.1.2 The Kazakh language as a warrant of Kazakhstan's cultural and political distinctiveness

As Kazakhstan is eager to steer free of Russian influence in its international dealings, the promotion of Kazakh as the country's national language is of premier importance. Indeed, it aids Kazakhstan assert itself as an independent, sovereign, and culturally distinct state, which in turns enables its multi-vector policy to come into force. This section seeks to analyze the role of the Kazakh language in Kazakhstan's nation building (which it projects outwards), through the prism of nationalism studies and the constructivist school of international relations theory.

As Cambridge University researcher Jaako Heiskanen points out, « [N]ations [are] sociopolitical “projects” that must be continually (re)produced through discursive practices: nations are not things *in* the world, but perspectives *on* the world¹¹⁸ », while the mere concept of nation « [I]nvoles a boundary with other nations.¹¹⁹ » This argument aligns with that of the constructivism view of international relations, which argues that sovereign states, as main players of international affairs, are to be analyzed as sociological agents whose interactions and relations to one another shape their international experience. In other words, states construct themselves in relation to other states. International relations professor Stephanie Lawson provides an adequate summary of the constructivist argument: « Not all identities require a negative contradiction, but they are invariably relational, depending on the existence of other quite separate identities to achieve contrast and therefore affirm a sense of self as belonging to a unique entity.¹²⁰ » Keeping this in mind, Kazakhstan's nation building is to be understood as a twofold phenomenon: one directed at the Kazakhs themselves, and another meant to be shown to the world. In both cases, the intent is to display an image of independence, sovereignty, and of cultural and linguistic distinctiveness. In this regard, Kazakh language nationalism plays a key role.

Kazakh nation building in the scope of international relations takes may take internal or external forms, both seeking to assert cultural distinctiveness and sovereignty. Most of the nation

¹¹⁸ Heiskanen, Jaakko. « Spectra of Sovereignty: Nationalism and International Relations », *International Political Sociology*, no.13, 2019, p.323.

¹¹⁹ *Ibid*, p.324.

¹²⁰ Lawson, Stephanie. « Nationalism and culture in a globalising world », *Nationalism and Globalisation*, ed. Halikiopoulou & Vasilopoulou, 2011, p.181.

building endeavors mentioned in this section are essentially top-down, official policies. Legislation provides a preliminary framework of nation building and the role Kazakh language nationalism plays in it. Article 4 of the 1997 language law states that the Kazakh government is to « [D]evelop, as much as possible, the official language of the Republic of Kazakhstan, [and] **consolidate its international standing**¹²¹. » This article provides an excellent framework in order to tie the conjunction of Kazakh nation building and Kazakh language nationalism in international relations: Kazakhness, as a concept and a state of being, is indissolubly congruent with the Kazakh language.

An important aspect of Kazakh nation building relies on the Kazakhization of toponyms¹²². Since 1991, several cities of international relevance have changed names: Karaganda (Қарағанды) has become Qarağandı (Қарағанды), Alma Ata (Алма Ата) has become Almatı/Almaty (Алматы), Petropavlosk (Петропавлоск) has become Petropavl (Петропавл), and, perhaps more tellingly, Leninsk (Ленинск) has become Baiqońır (Байқоңыр), and so forth. Street names have also undergone significant changes, whereby Soviet references have largely been replaced with specifically Kazakh references drawing mainly on Kazakh history, literature and political history¹²³. We can reasonably speculate that international events hosted in the very Turkic sounding *Almaty*, *Qarağandı* or *Baiqońır* may not be seen as strictly taking place within the post-Soviet political and cultural zone, but in an independent and self-sufficient Kazakhstan. This statement, albeit somewhat hypothetical, is to be pondered with the sheer amount of international summits, exhibitions and fairs held annually in Kazakhstan. One such, relatively recent example, is that of the 5th Nazarbayev Intellectual Schools International-Research-to-Practice Conference (see Annex 3), whose attendees were mainly East Asian, and which displayed a Kazakh-language title towering above smaller Russian and English titles.

¹²¹ In Russian « [В]семерно развивать государственный язык в Республике Казахстан, укреплять его международный авторитет ». Article 4, *Zakon o yazykakh v Respublike Kazakhstan*, 1997.

¹²² Article 19, *Zakon o yazykakh v Respublike Kazakhstan*, 1997.

¹²³ Leclerc, op. cit.



Annex 3 : Marsh, David. « 5th Nazarbayev Intellectual Schools International-Research-to-Practice Conference, Astana, Kazakhstan », *David Marsh Website*, Nov. 16 2018.

Part of Kazakh nation building also lies in historiography. The Kazakh language assists Kazakhstan in asserting a history either complementary, or distinct to that of Russia, which in turns sends out a message of distinctiveness and independence. An example of this set of historically interpretative endeavors lies in the 550th anniversary of the Kazakh Khanate (September 11th 2015), which saw lavish celebrations of the founding of the Kazakh Khanate in 1456 and a set of performances reminiscent of the opening ceremony of the 2008 Beijing Olympic Games, for the whole world to see¹²⁴. This event is of great interest to our research as it directly contradicts Russian historiography, which places the beginnings of the Kazakh nation in Soviet times (see Chapter 1). It posits the Kazakh nation as an intermediary between East and West, and the main heir to the

¹²⁴ Orazgaliyeva, Malika. « Astana Celebrates 550th Anniversary of Kazakh Khanate, Holds CCTS Summit », *The Astana Times*, September 15th 2015.

Mongol Empire. Here again, the notion of Kazakhstan serving as a neutral middle ground resurfaces, and is undoubtedly of service to Kazakhstan's contemporary multi-vector policy. This particular aspect is part of a greater historiographical battle between Russia and Kazakhstan which will be further explored in section 1.3.1.. This discursive demonstration strongly relies on the use of the Kazakh language: from the official title of the event to the overwhelming majority (if not all) of the performances, everything takes place in the Kazakh language. As scholars from « Azerbaijan, Belarus, Bulgaria, China, France, Germany, Great Britain, India, Israel, Italy, Kyrgyzstan, Mongolia, Russia, Spain, Switzerland, Tajikistan, Turkey, Ukraine, the United States, and Uzbekistan¹²⁵ » attended, the role of Kazakh language nationalism as cement of this international display of independence becomes apparent.

Whether it be with toponyms, cultural events or identity building, Kazakh language nationalism, by associating the Kazakh tongue to the country's unique history and identity, assists an independent Kazakhstan assert its *otherness* vis-à-vis the post-Soviet ensemble, as well as its distinctiveness as a sovereign nation state. The general signal is along the lines of 'You are dealing with a state that is distinct from other ensembles', thus enabling Kazakhstan to present itself as a sovereign, reliable and neutral partner in the scope of its multi-vector policy.

2.1.3 Language nationalism, nation-building and neoconservatism in Kazakhstan

Official nation building efforts make use of the Kazakh language to promote traditional norms and values as well as government intervention in international relations, thus placing Kazakhstan in a broader, international trend of neoconservatism. Neoconservatism denotes a political ideology which pushes for free-market economy, emphasizes tradition and advocates for the need of government involvement in international relations. It rejects discourses of universalism and generally holds an apprehensive approach towards globalization¹²⁶. As a reminder, we understand globalization as the worldwide phenomenon whereby economic and cultural fluxes

¹²⁵ Orazgaliyeva, op. cit.

¹²⁶ Ball, Terrence. « Neoconservatism », *Britannica*. <https://www.britannica.com/topic/neoconservatism> [Retrieved on May, 17th 2022].

intensify, leading to increased interdependence between nations. To many, it also leads to a cultural homogenization trend which favors the dominant English-speaking, Western culture.

Such an association is backed by Vrije Universitet Brussel professor Michel Huysseune, who states that « Nationalists tend to insert their considerations on identity within a broader vision of society. Their programs of nation-building and of national development are moreover articulated with reference to a more global context.¹²⁷ » Upon inspecting Nazarbayev's speech on the Kazakhstan 2050 strategy, one notices two main aspects: the need to catch up to an ever changing world, and anxiety towards unhinged modernization and globalizing trends. The latter aspect is highlighted by the following quote :

« We are witnessing the beginning of a new, largely unclear, historic cycle. And it is impossible to occupy a place in the advanced group of nations while preserving the old model of identity and thinking. Therefore, it is important to focus, to concentrate, go through changes, adapt to changing conditions, and take the best of what the new era offers. What was, in my opinion, the main drawback of Western modernization models in the 20th century in relation to the realities of our time? **They applied their unique experiences to all peoples and civilizations without taking into account their different characteristics.** Even largely modernized societies have cultures and traditions which are rooted long in the past. **The first condition for successful modernization is the preservation of national culture and tradition. Without this, modernization is empty rhetoric.**¹²⁸ »

We can then envision Kazakhstan's official, top-down nation building efforts as being more than a mere vessel for its multi-vector policy, as it also applies societal conservatism to Kazakhstan's international dealings as a shield from the adverse effects of external pressures. To this international end, the promotion of the Kazakh language is both a means and a goal. We argue that Kazakh language nationalism plays a key role in providing official neoconservatism with cultural concepts, references and literary works, a role not achievable without proper Kazakh language revival. Relying on Nazarbayev's 2017 address, the importance of Kazakh language literature becomes apparent:

¹²⁷ Huysseune, Michel. « Nationalism and Identity Politics in International Relations », *Encyclopedia of Institutional and International Relations*, 2004, p.2.

¹²⁸ Nazarbayev, Nursultan. *Course towards the future: modernization of Kazakhstan's identity* [speech], Akorda, April 12th 2017.

« Our national traditions and customs, language, music and literature, in one word, our national spirit should remain with us forever. Abai's wisdom, Auezov's pen, Dzhambul's touching verses, Kurmangazy's magical sounds, ancestors' eternal call are only a part of our spiritual culture.¹²⁹ »

To Nazarbayev, Kazakh language literature and authors herald Kazakhstan's specificity and distinctiveness, which are to be preserved in the face of the blind forces of a West-leaning globalization. The Kazakh language also provides Nazarbayev with proverbs and concepts, which help him further emphasizing the need for patriotism in the face of globalization:

« [...] Patriotism begins with love for one's land, for one's village, city, region, with love for a small homeland. Therefore, I propose the program “**Tugan Zher**” (“Homeland”), which will easily be translated into a wider framework – “**Tugan EI**” (“Home Country”). There is a great deal of sense in the words “**Туған жерін сүйе алмаған сүйе аларма туған елін?**” (“Is it possible for the one who does not love his homeland to love his home country?”) [...] ¹³⁰ »

This apprehension towards globalization and the dire need of differentiating the Kazakh nation internationally through tradition within the Kazakh population seems corroborated, at least to some extent, by Gulnar Akanova's research on Kazakh identity. To many of the interviewees, the Kazakh language was conditional to the very existence of the Kazakh nation, its loss resulting in the Kazakh people possibly not being differentiable from other nations¹³¹. Furthermore, most interviewees understood language as a prime vector of traditional culture¹³². This is to be linked, she argues, to the iconization function of language nationalism, where language is associated with social qualities and representations¹³³; in this case, authenticity, tradition, independence and sovereignty.

We can then envision official Kazakh language nationalism, backed by the aforementioned language policies, as a twofold phenomenon in the scope of Kazakhstan's international relations. First, it advocates for the promotion of the Kazakh language in the face external (globalization,

¹²⁹ Nazarbayev, op. cit.

¹³⁰ *Ibid.*

¹³¹ Akanova, Gulnar. « Language ideologies of Kazakhstani youth: the value of Kazakh in the context of a changing linguistic marketplace », [Thesis] Nazarbayev University, 2017, p.32.

¹³² *Ibid*, pp.31-33.

¹³³ *Ibid*, p.43.

cultural homogenization) and internal pressures (sociolinguistic dynamics in favor of the Russian language). Second, and more interestingly, it views said promotion of the Kazakh language as a tool to assert a variety of qualities (distinctiveness as a nation, sovereignty) that are meant to fend off international threats to the Kazakh(stani) nation (dependence towards Russia and China, ‘senseless’ modernization, globalization) and enable its multi-vector policy by consolidating its international image as a reliable, neutral partner. Official policies in this matter make use of Kazakh language concepts and literature to promote traditional Kazakh values and qualities, which, we speculate, could be enough to qualify Kazakhstan’s official language nationalism as neoconservative.

2.2 Language nationalism as cement of pre-existing international solidarities

The promotion of the Kazakh language enables Kazakhstan to successfully engage in partnerships whose history predates its independence, with partners who are viewed as ‘natural’ or ‘biological¹³⁴’ allies of Kazakhstan. These partnerships are relatively more predictable than those globalization entails. Contrary to a multi-vector policy, this aspect of defensive Kazakh language nationalism is highly ideologized; here, the promotion of the Kazakh language enables pan-Turkic and Eurasian solidarities to thrive in a way beneficial to the sovereign Kazakh nation. Interestingly, this aspect of Kazakhstan’s international relations comes into contrast with its relatively ideology-free multi-vector policy.

2.2.1 Language revival and the return of the Pan-Turkic ideology

Pan-Turkism is a form of pan-nationalism. As such, it defends the idea of a Turkic nation based on language and blood (especially the latter), that is considered to span many modern nation states, from the Bosphorus to the cold shores of the Okhotsk Sea. It encompasses all ethnicities considered Turkic, regardless of religion and national allegiance. Along with other pan-nationalisms, it emerged in the late 19th century within the Tatar intellectual circles of the Russian Empire, in response to Pan-Slavism. A token of the epoch from which it stems, Pan-Turkism arguments rely on a romantic rhetoric which arouses the memory of the glorious times in which the

¹³⁴ Danielsson, Sarah. « Pan-nationalism reframed», *Nationalism and Globalisation*, ed. Halikiopoulou & Vasilopoulou, 2011, p.53.

Turks were unified under a single banner: the alleged Göktürk Empire¹³⁵. This golden past is seen as enviable, as modern Pan-Turkism draws many of its references and icons from it: ancient Turkic runes, ancient epics of the steppes, Tengrism¹³⁶... all of which find particular resonance in at least some post-1991 Kazakh nationalist circles¹³⁷. Marlène Laruelle argues that « [Kazakh nationalists] [...] cultivate romanticized notions about the freedom of nomadic culture [...]»¹³⁸ » and tend to « call for a revival of the Turkic roots of Kazakhness, although with varying levels of pan-Turkism.¹³⁹ »

As researcher Sarah Danielsson argues in her 2013 article, Pan-Turkism, along with other Pan-nationalisms, is reliant on ‘biologized’ categories and identities¹⁴⁰, arguing in favor of a biological bond between Turkic peoples. Drawing on geography, Pan-Turkism furthermore locates a Turkic ‘space’, that is reputed to span all of Eurasia. According to Danielsson, it is a critical aspect of contemporary Pan-ideologies: « The geographic anchoring of the pan-National group provided one important way of linking a particular ‘biologised’ group in an increasingly global world.¹⁴¹ » We may interpret this need of a geographical anchoring of the Pan-Turkic nation as a familiar and ‘natural’ layer of identification that could provide Pan-Turkists with reassurance and order in the face of an unfamiliar and unpredictable globalization. This hypothesis would be corroborated by Hutchinson’s analysis of nationalism as an « [E]pisodic phenomenon attempting to create coherence in a world of unpredictable global change¹⁴² ». In this regard, we argue that the core purpose of Pan-Turkism for 21st century Kazakhstan can be linked to that of its, albeit very different, multi-vector policy: shield the Kazakh nation from the averse effects of contemporary international relations and globalization. An aspect worth mentioning is the increasingly pragmatic nature of modern Pan-Turkism, as Kazakh-Turkish cooperation has also come in the form of strategic partnerships in the

¹³⁵ The Göktürk Empire was a loose confederacy of Turkic speaking tribes which spanned Northeastern and Central Asia from roughly the 6th to the 8th centuries A.D..

¹³⁶ Tengrism is the term usually used to refer to the ancient religions of both Turkic and Mongolic tribes of the Eurasian steppe. Tengrists worship Tengri, the ‘Heavenly Father’, as well as a pantheon of other deities and spirits.

¹³⁷ Hyman, Anthony. « Turkestan and Pan-Turkism Revisited », *Central Asian Survey* 16(3), 1997, p.339.

¹³⁸ Laruelle, op. cit., p.181.

¹³⁹ *Ibid*, pp.180-181.

¹⁴⁰ Danielsson, op. cit., p.43.

¹⁴¹ *Ibid*, p.44.

¹⁴² Hutchinson, op. cit., p.85.

areas of energy supply, as demonstrated by the colossal B.T.C. project¹⁴³. Turkish researcher Mustafa Aydin points out the growing ‘practical¹⁴⁴’ aspect of Pan-Turkism starting in the mid-1990s. This section shall, however, solely focus on the facilitating role the Kazakh language and Kazakh language nationalism play in the educational and cultural spheres of cooperation, which are still potent forces of Kazakh-Turkish solidarity.

Here too, Kazakh language nationalism plays a central role, as the cornerstone of both Pan-Turkic and Kazakh nationalist ideologies. This is demonstrated in many recent instances, the most telling of which is the 550th anniversary of the birth of the Kazakh Khanate. As we have explained, the celebration comprised lavish performances, telling the tale of famous folk heroes hailing from the epics of the steppe. All performances were held in the Kazakh language, in a true demonstration of Kazakhstan’s long and rich history. Performances were also centered on Kazakh language literature, with open books showing Kazakh poetry displayed in the background of some plays¹⁴⁵. In the crowd, one could find « the Presidents of Azerbaijan Ilham Aliyev and Kyrgyzstan Almazbek Atambayev, Speaker of the Turkish Grand National Assembly Ismet Yilmaz and Turkmenistan Deputy Prime Minister Sapardurdy Toylyev, as well as deputies of the Kazakh Parliament and representatives of the country’s intelligentsia, sports, culture and arts fields.¹⁴⁶ » Upon viewing a video of the event, one notices the prominent place and importance given to the invited leaders of Turkic states¹⁴⁷. The celebration was followed by the 5th summit of the C.C.T.S., the Cooperation Council of Turkic Speaking States, which was « devoted to the theme of development of cooperation in the sphere of information¹⁴⁸. » This example highlights the relation between Kazakh language nationalism and Turkic solidarity, whereby the display and theatricality of the Kazakh language enhances (and in this case precedes) international Pan-Turkic cooperation.

¹⁴³ Aydin, Mustafa. « Foucault's Pendulum: Turkey in Central Asia and the Caucasus », *Turkish Studies*, 5:2, June 2004, pp.10-12.

¹⁴⁴ *Ibid.*

¹⁴⁵ Zhumagaliyev, Dauren. « Together with Balich Worldwide Shows. 550th anniversary of the Kazakh Khanate » [YouTube video], 2018. [Retrieved on April, 10th, 2022].

¹⁴⁶ Orazgaliyeva, op. cit.

¹⁴⁷ Euronews, « Kazakhstan: 550th anniversary of Kazakh Khanate - no comment », [YouTube video], September 11th 2015. [Retrieved on April, 10th, 2022].

¹⁴⁸ *Ibid.*

Other, less demonstrative initiatives of Pan-Turkic nature have also been enhanced by Kazakh language nationalism. Jacob Landau, in his 1995 book *Panturkism, from irredentism to cooperation*, goes into great detail in identifying the several areas in which Pan-Turkic cooperation has increased since the fall of the Soviet Union. Those which are of special relevant to our research are the cultural, educational and informational spheres¹⁴⁹, in which Kazakh language nationalism plays an important role. Indeed, cooperation with Turkic states, and especially Turkey, has consistently been advocated for by a wide array of Kazakh nationalists (with the intent of preserving the Kazakh culture and the Kazakh language)¹⁵⁰. In the field of education, both Turkish and Kazakh officials see the Kazakh language and its relation to Turkish as a facilitating factor. Quoted by Ametbek & Amirbek, Kazakh foreign minister Sailau Batirsha-Uli states that « Kazakh elite had to understand that the world does not just consist of the Soviet Union. For that purpose they had to see abroad. But the problem was that the foreign language most of them could speak was only Russian. It was not so reasonable to send them to Europe or America. Here Turkey was good option as Turkish language was similar to Kazakh language.»¹⁵¹ » As a result, cooperation has been plentiful. For instance, the *Great Students Project* has granted Kazakh students scholarship to study in Turkish universities, usually viewed as of good quality, since 1992-1993¹⁵². Once in Turkey, they are treated as Turkish nationals when it comes to fees, as Turkic individuals¹⁵³. A perhaps more emblematic initiative is that of the Kazakh-Turkish University, whose campus is located in the symbolically charged city of Turkestan, in Southern Kazakhstan. As explicated by Nursultan Nazarbayev himself, « Akhmet Yassawi International Kazakh-Turkish University turns Turkestan into the educational center of Turkic world¹⁵⁴ » and is a mainly Kazakh and Turkish medium university.

We can thus observe how Kazakh language nationalism, whether it be official or unofficial, converges with Pan-Turkism, as the Kazakh language constitutes a privileged vector of Turkic solidarity. Turkey and Kazakhstan have undertaken several projects in the areas of culture and

¹⁴⁹ Landau, Jacob. *Pan-Turkism, from irredentism to cooperation*, 1995, pp.201-211.

¹⁵⁰ Laruelle, op. cit., p.182.

¹⁵¹ Ametbek, Dinmukhammed & Amirbek, Adiarbek. « Kazak-Turkish Cooperation in the Field of Education », *Social and Behavioral Sciences*, 143, 2014, pp.190-194.

¹⁵² *Ibid.*

¹⁵³ *Ibid.*

¹⁵⁴ Information gathered from the university's official website.

education, with the Kazakh language as the main common denominator. Going back to Danielsson's theory on Pan-nationalism, we can speculate that the Kazakh language and Kazakh language nationalism contribute to anchoring Kazakhstan in the familiar Turkic cradle, whose discursive reproduction well into the 21st century may constitute a refuge from globalization's unpredictability.

2.2.2 The Kazakh language within 21st century Eurasian ideology

Kazakh language nationalism also assists official policy of memory in reframing the Eurasian ideology around Kazakhstan, as a means of asserting Kazakhstan's sovereignty within a familiar sphere of solidarity. Eurasianism denotes a particular ideology hailing from early 20th century Russia which places Russia as a Eurasian nation, rather than a Western or Eastern nation. Here, Eurasia is both a geographical and ideological term, drawing on McKinder's *heartland* theory¹⁵⁵. It posits that the crucial pivot a nation should control in order to assert dominance in international relations is the Eurasian *heartland*, the core of the Eurasian landmass (which he refers to as the *World Island*¹⁵⁶) and its gravity center. Eurasianism has traditionally been a relatively important driving force in Russia's foreign policy, but has also influenced Central Asian countries such as Kazakhstan. Since the fall of the U.S.S.R., Eurasianism has materialized in various ways, the most visible of which is the aptly named Eurasian Economic Union (E.E.U.), which was launched in 2015. This customs union, which functions as a single market entity not dissimilar to the European Union consists of five member states: Russia, the Belarus, Armenia, Kyrgyzstan and Kazakhstan.

Since the 2010s, however, Kazakhstan has promoted its own vision of Eurasianism, one that is relatively independent vis-à-vis Russia and the post-Soviet ensemble, which has been called 'Turkic Eurasianism'¹⁵⁷. Researcher Dmitry Shlapentokh sums up Kazakhstan's own version of Eurasianism as a « [H]istorical narrative [that presents] Turkic people as the most important players

¹⁵⁵ Golam, Mostafa. « The concept of 'Eurasia': Kazakhstan's Eurasian policy and its implications », *Journal of Eurasian Studies*, no. 4, 2013, p.160.

¹⁵⁶ McKinder, John. *Democratic Ideals and Reality*, 1919, p.150. Reference taken from Wikipedia's « The Geographical Pivot of History » article. [Retrieved on April, 13th 2022].

¹⁵⁷ Golam, op. cit.

in the early Middle Age Eurasian history, passing the imperial torch to the Mongol Empire as a basically Turkic state.¹⁵⁸ » We argue that this reframing goes hand in hand with Kazakh language nationalism, the Kazakh language being a central aspect of Kazakhstan's policies of memory. Nazarbayev's 2017 speech is a telling introduction of Kazakhstan's version of Eurasianism.

« As you know, I have always respected the scientific heritage of the 'school of Eurasians', especially, Lev Gumilyov¹⁵⁹'s original historical concept. This school left us many forward-thinking ideas. Their in-depth study becomes particularly relevant in the 21st century. However, the most valuable thing for us, living in conditions of globalization, is that Gumilyov's writings give to all peoples an opportunity **to be proud of both their unique historical and cultural code and the fact that we are all Eurasians!**¹⁶⁰ »

This enthusiastic stance towards 21st century Eurasianism seems to serve, just like Pan-Turkism, as a natural refuge from globalization and contemporary international pressures. In a similar fashion to Pan-Turkism, Kazakhstan's Eurasian identity draws heavily on references to the history of the Kazakh language (as the heir of Common Turkic), which by all metrics serves as a historical justification to Kazakhstan's cultural independence (but not opposition) vis-à-vis Russia:

« **The history of how the Kazakh language is written goes back many centuries.** From the 5th to the 15th century, the **Turkic language was the language of interethnic communication** in most of Eurasia.¹⁶¹ »

Pictured below, a 1000-Tenge bill displaying the Old Turkic alphabet, and framing Turkic history as properly Kazakh. Here, the linguistic aspect serves the centrality of Kazakhstan as a Eurasian nation of first importance.

¹⁵⁸ Shalpentokh, Dmitry. « Kazakhstan's history as a geopolitical battlefield », *The Central Asia-Caucasus Analyst*, 27th May 2016.

¹⁵⁹ Lev Gumilyov († 1992) was a Soviet anthropologist and a strong advocate of a Eurasian identity.

¹⁶⁰ Nazarbayev, op. cit.

¹⁶¹ Nazarbayev, op. cit.



Annex 4. A [2013] Kazakhstani [1000 tenge] bank note commemorative of [folk hero] Kúl Tegin, showing a sculpture of its head and a stela with his epitaph written in the Old Turkic alphabet [Памятная банкнота Казахстана, посвящённая Кюльтегину. Скульптурная голова Кюльтегина и стела с его эпитафией орхонским письмом]. An exemplification of Nazarbayev's assertion on the long written history of the Kazakh language. Courtesy to Wikipedia.

This particular citation connects the Kazakh language to a key aspect of Kazakhstan's 21st century Eurasian policy: its use as a historical precedent to Kazakhstan's multi-ethnic and ethnically tolerant society¹⁶², a core concept of Kazakhstan's 'National Unity Doctrine'¹⁶³. This doctrine is to be understood as a tool directed at both internal and external audiences. Internally, it wishes to uphold level of interethnic stability desired by Nur-Sultan, all the while justifying policies cultural preservation and Kazakhization. Externally, it promotes Kazakhstan as a benevolent, tolerant regional power, around which the history of Central Asia revolves. In an external fashion as well, it promotes and reasserts, in the face of increasing anxiety concerning Russia's hold within the E.E.U.¹⁶⁴, the idea of a Eurasian ideology respectful of state sovereignty¹⁶⁵.

¹⁶² Golam, op. cit., p.164.

¹⁶³ *Ibid*, p.166.

¹⁶⁴ Gabuev, op. cit., p.75.

¹⁶⁵ *Ibid*, pp.165-166.

At this point, several observations are to be made. First, Eurasian identity, in a decidedly Kazakh version promoted by the Kazakh government, serves as an asset for Kazakhstan's internal stability. Second, and most importantly for our research, it heralds a sense of security in Kazakhstan's external dealings by diffusing an image of tolerance and by acting as a discursive protection of Kazakhstan's national sovereignty. Third, all of this is, in part, made possible by Kazakh language nationalism, which argues in favor of a long connection between a Kazakh language boasting an extensive written history to the nation's Eurasian identity.

2.2.3 Pan-Turkism and Eurasianism as vectors of competing language nationalisms

Despite the opportunities they offer both Kazakh language nationalism and Kazakhstan's sovereignty, Pan-Turkism and Eurasianism present a number of threats to these paradigms. This section provides a realist analysis of both the E.E.U. and Pan-Turkic initiatives. In international relations theory, realism is defined as a school of thought which sees the state (as core player in international affairs) as always seeking to further its own interests and power. This is made at the expense of other states, as international relations are seen as a zero-sum game, whereby the gains of one means the losses of another. Indeed, both Turkey and Russia make use of Pan-Turkic and Eurasian solidarities in order to further their interests and own national languages at the expense of the Kazakh language. As a result, what can be seen as spaces of opportunity by Kazakh language nationalists may very well be detrimental to both the promotion of the Kazakh language and Kazakhstan's assertion of its sovereignty.

As Marlène Laruelle explains, this has long been pointed out by Kazakh nationalists. For instance, Jana Qazaqstan, a recent nationalist movement launched in the 2010s presents a programme that « [L]imits itself to principled statements about democracy, ethnocentric Turkic solidarity, leaving the Eurasian Economic Union, and criticizing Russia and China [...]»¹⁶⁶. » Predictably, Kazakh nationalism readily welcomes Turkic solidarity, while shunning Eurasian identity as a vessel serving Russian interests¹⁶⁷. We argue, however, that both Pan-Turkism and

¹⁶⁶ Laruelle, op. cit., p.187.

¹⁶⁷ Laruelle, op. cit.

Eurasianism can work as detrimental forces for Kazakhstan, as they host competing language nationalisms.

Russia is perhaps the more telling instance of the two. Nationalism researcher Natalie Sabanadzé sees language as a strong vector of soft power (an argument we will reprise later on) as « [C]ultural power can be translated into political influence and serve well Moscow's geo strategic objectives in [Central Asia] it describes as a zone of special interest.¹⁶⁸ » Russian researcher Oleg Molodov explicates that « [the] most important factor of 'soft power' lies in the Russian language's quality as a means of interethnic communication in the extensive territory of the former Soviet Union and [former] Eastern Bloc countries.¹⁶⁹ » A key observation made by Molodov is that the status of the Russian language in a given Central Asia country is usually reflective of its integration to Russian-led integration initiatives, such as the E.E.U.¹⁷⁰ Indeed, to Russian scholars on Eurasianism, the diffusion and preservation of the Russian language and its status in Central Asia represent an important part¹⁷¹ of the E.E.U.'s (but also the C.I.S.'s) role in preserving Russian interests in its Near-Abroad, as well as projecting its power in the region. In a comprehensive analysis of the E.E.U.'s role as a vector of soft power, St. Petersburg State University researcher Vera Ageeva provides a list of state initiatives aiming at promoting the Russian language in the so called 'Eurasian space'¹⁷². Among them, the Rossotrudnichestvo¹⁷³ network (launched in 2008) and the Russkij Mir¹⁷⁴ fund (launched in 2007), as well as the more recent 2011-2015 Russkij Jazyk¹⁷⁵ state programme. Their main role is to encourage and popularize the Russian language worldwide through a network of Russian schools, classes, cultural centers... Coupled with this task is the

¹⁶⁸ Sabanadzé, op. cit., p.176.

¹⁶⁹ Molodov, op. cit., p.94.

¹⁷⁰ *Ibid*, p.95.

¹⁷¹ Lebedeva & Kharkevich. « Russia's 'soft power' and the development of integration processes in the Eurasian space », [« Мягкая сила » России в развитии интеграционных процессов на евразийском пространстве], *Mezhdunarodnye Otnosheniya*, 2014, p.10.

¹⁷² In Russian « Евразийское пространство ».

¹⁷³ In Russian « Россотрудничество », a porte-manteau of Россия (Russia) or российский (Russian, i.e. from the Russian Federation) and сотрудничество (cooperation).

¹⁷⁴ In Russian « Русский мир », meaning Russian world (or Russian peace).

¹⁷⁵ In Russian « Русский язык », meaning Russian language.

popularizing and development of the idea of Eurasian integration in Central Asian countries¹⁷⁶. It is important, at this point, to put these arguments in perspective with Kazakhstan's delicate language balance. Sociolinguistically, Russian, rather than being *a* language of competing use to that of Kazakh, is *the* main challenger to the Kazakh language's development and promotion (this not meaning the two are fundamentally opposed linguistically and socially, however). Indeed, Russia's sustained, coveted efforts to maintain the prestige of the Russian language in Central Asian countries poses a serious challenge, if not threat to Kazakh language nationalists' aspirations: making Kazakh the prestige language and *lingua franca* of Kazakhstan, and preserving the Kazakh nation's sovereignty.

While research has been scarce concerning Turkey, a realist lecture of Turkey's Pan-Turkic foreign policy also yields sensible conclusions. Indeed, many aspects of Kazakh-Turkish cooperation can be understood, in part, as Turkish efforts to promote either the Turkish language or a common Turkic language in Kazakhstan (and Central Asia). Said efforts have grown substantially since the fall of the Soviet Union, as Turkish nationalists elatedly engaged with the Central Asian Turkic peoples. Of Pan-Turkist essence, Turkish nationalists deploring the « partitioning of Turkish dialects¹⁷⁷ », this renewed interest towards Central Asia bore the dream of a « [G]reat society in the world, **which speaks one language** [...]»¹⁷⁸ ». By « one language », Turkish nationalists can either refer to a common Turkic language, or the Turkish language. The latter does not necessarily mean Anatolian Turkish but is reflective of the widespread acceptance of the Turkic language family being in fact a single Turkish language, the words Turkish and Turkic not being differentiated in Turkic languages¹⁷⁹. As Kocaeli University professor Yilmaz Bingol points out, however, that « Ankara [promotes] the Turkish of Turkey as a kind of additional language, a *kultursprache* for the Central Asian Turkic peoples¹⁸⁰ », as the envisioned common Turkic language is to rely on a language with a « literary tradition¹⁸¹ » before being developed concretely. As such, the

¹⁷⁶ Ageeva, Vera. « Russian 'soft power' and Eurasian Economic Union: in search of value dimension of Eurasian integration » [Российская "мягкая сила" и ЕАЭС: в поиске ценностного измерения евразийской интеграции », *Politologija*, 2016, pp.35-36

¹⁷⁷ Bingol, Yilmaz. « Language, Identity and Politics in Turkey: Nationalist Discourse on Creating a Common Turkic Language », *Alternatives*, vol.8, no.2, Summer 2008, p.43.

¹⁷⁸ *Ibid*, p.46.

¹⁷⁹ *Ibid*. p.43.

¹⁸⁰ *Ibid*, p.46.

¹⁸¹ *Ibid*, p.48.

broadcasting of Turkish T.V. programs and the donation of Turkish textbooks to Kazakhstan starting in the 1990s can be understood, under a realist angle, as a means to promote Turkish as a prestige language in Kazakhstan, as its literary endowment and its Latin script are synonymous with modernity and unity.

We may thus understand Pan-Turkism and Eurasianism as tools to be carefully wielded by Kazakh language nationalists and Kazakh officials alike. While ‘natural’, longstanding solidarities, they are not devoid of risks to the promotion of the Kazakh language and its international standing. Both Eurasian and Pan-Turkic undertakings contain at least some elements of Turkish and Russian language nationalism that, albeit not necessarily, can work counterclockwise to the Kazakh language’s interests. Nonetheless and as we argued, both Kazakh officials and Kazakh language nationalists have put these partnerships to use in order to a) boost the Kazakh language’s relevance as an international cement and anchorage in familiar waters, b) assert the Kazakh language’s and Kazakhstan long history to foreign audiences and c) to offer a Kazakh lecture of said ideologies. This in turn serves to posit Kazakhstan as a sovereign and powerful ally to partners that are viewed as refuge from globalization’s unpredictability.

2.3 Limitations to Kazakhstan’s ‘classical’ language nationalism in the wider scope of international relations

As a more ‘obvious’ and visible form of language nationalism, what we have studied as an example of classical, neoconservative form of Kazakh language nationalism presents many limitations intrinsic both to its defensive nature and contemporary international relations. As defensive measures to preserve the Kazakh language have, at time, alienated allophones (and especially Russophones), the looming threat of an already challenging Russia appears sporadically, reminding Kazakhstan of its delicate position. This chapter will rely in part on declarations made by Russian officials up to year 2022, thus grazing world events which still lack hindsight.

2.3.1 Contestations of Kazakh sovereignty by an increasingly worrisome Russia

Kazakh language nationalism as an international political force is to be embedded in broader state-to-state interactions. As we have explained, Kazakhstan's geopolitical situation is of particular complexity, the country being wedged between China and Russia. In recent years, and as Russian 'irredentism' grew, voices have argued against Kazakhstan's (and Near-Abroad states' in general) sovereignty. This has come in the form of masked threats, the calling into question of Kazakh narrative on both Kazakhstan's cultural distinctiveness and century-long statehood, and parallels drawn between Ukraine and Kazakhstan; all in reaction of Kazakhstan's quest of sovereignty. This section seeks to outline Russia's general stance on Kazakhstan's foreign policy, which reflects an increasingly hostile view of the multi-vector policy pursued by Near-Abroad states.

Since the early 2010s, the Russian Federation's foreign policy has taken an arguably more aggressive turn some have labeled as imperialistic¹⁸². Several key events have led observers, especially those in former Soviet states (such as Kazakhstan), to reassess their stance vis-à-vis Russia. The main turning point is that of the 2014 Russo-Ukrainian crisis, which led to the annexation of Crimea and the beginning of the Donbass War. The latter escalated dramatically in February 2022, leading to a full scale Russian invasion of Ukraine. Researcher Janusz Bugajski argues that Russia's neo-imperialist turn is supported by a rather expansionistic Eurasian discourse, arguing in favor of Russia's expansion in the Eurasian space¹⁸³. This has « [sent] ripples of concern throughout the post-Soviet region¹⁸⁴ », and made Kazakhstan's multi-vector policy a much more demanding endeavor. Likewise, it hindered Nur-Sultan's appetite in further commitment in integration initiatives with Russia, the Central Asian nation renouncing plans to make the E.E.U. a monetary union with Russia¹⁸⁵. The 2022 Russo-Ukrainian war has further estranged Kazakhstan from Russia, as demonstrated by Kazakhstan's relatively neutral stance in the conflict, the latter

¹⁸² Bugajski, Janusz. « Russia's pragmatic reimperialization », *Caucasian Review of International Affairs*, vol. 4, 2010, p.4.

¹⁸³ Bugajski, op. cit., p.7.

¹⁸⁴ Vanderhill et al., op. cit., p.975.

¹⁸⁵ *Ibid*, p.983.

refusing to recognize separatist Donbass as independent¹⁸⁶. Furthermore, Tokayev's so-called 'new Kazakhstan', which comes in response to the dramatic events of 2022's Bloody January, is reputedly less likely to align with Russia. Indeed, Kazakh media outlets' (such as *Egemen Qazaqstan*) relative sympathy towards Ukraine and Nur-Sultan's decision to abstain from voting in the U.N. resolution condemning the Russian invasion in Ukraine are seen as clear signs of an ongoing distancing¹⁸⁷. In response to Bloody January, Russian scholar and notorious Eurasian advocate Alexander Dugin linked the violence to Kazakhstan's « price of distance from Moscow¹⁸⁸. »

Backing Nur-Sultan's increasing anxiety vis-à-vis Russia, Russian officials including president Vladimir Putin himself have made declarations indicative of their view on Kazakh sovereignty. The declarations which have received the most attention are those made by Putin at a 2014 Shanghai summit. There, he stated that Kazakhs never had any statehood, and « credited Kazakh President Nursultan Nazarbaev with creating 'a state in a territory that had never had a state before.'¹⁸⁹ », while « [suggesting] it was to the Kazakh people's advantage to "remain in the greater Russian world," which has developed industry and advanced technology.¹⁹⁰ » This has led Kazakhstan's history to become an object of geopolitical contention between Kazakhstan and Russia. Shortly thereafter, both Kazakh officials and Kazakh media users reacted starkly. Putin has also stated that « Kazakhstan is a Russian-speaking country in the full sense of the word¹⁹¹. The narrative according to which statehood and modernity were « gifts¹⁹² » the Kazakhs received from

¹⁸⁶ RFE/RL's Kazakh Service, « Kazakhstan says it does not recognize separatist-controlled territories in Ukraine as independent », *Radio Free Europe*, 5th April 2022.

¹⁸⁷ Rees, Kristoffer. « How Ukraine Could Remake Kazakhstan's Relationship With Russia », *The Diplomat*, 10th March 2022.

¹⁸⁸ Dugin, Alexander. « Everything happening in Kazakhstan is the price of distance from Moscow », *Katehon*, 16th January 2022.

¹⁸⁹ Najibullah, Farangis. « Putin Downplays Kazakh Independence, Sparks Angry Reaction », *Radio Free Europe*, 3rd of September 2014.

¹⁹⁰ *Ibid.*

¹⁹¹ Dorsey, James. « Contesting Russia requires renewed US engagement in Central Asia », *Fair Observer*, April, 29th 2022. [Retrieved on May, 2nd, 2022].

¹⁹² Shlapentokh, op. cit.

the Russians is relatively widespread (in forms sometimes much more extreme¹⁹³), and its proponents have faced dire legal consequences in Kazakhstan.

We can thus observe how Kazakhstan's efforts towards cultural and linguistic distinctiveness are a road to be walked with great care, as the risk of upsetting an increasingly hostile Russia has turned into a threat whose consequences are more dreaded by the day. Indeed, Russian nationalist circles and networks located both in Russia and Kazakhstan have at times strongly reacted to Kazakh language nationalism.

2.3.2 A Russophobic policy? The contrariety of nationalist circles in Russia

In spite of Nazarbayev's astutely built discourse on ethnic balance and tolerance, defensive Kazakh language nationalism, whether it be state sponsored or stemming from civil society, has at times generated strong resentment in parts of Kazakhstan's population. To many, the promotion of the sole Kazakh language as the national language (the language of all Kazakhstanis) factually excludes individuals and communities which do not fully identify with Kazakh. Dissident elements within the Russophone minority constitute the best studied example of counter narratives to Kazakhstan's language nationalism. Indeed, when discontent, extreme elements have advocated in favor of the secession of Northeastern Kazakhstan, while Russian nationalists both in Kazakhstan and Russia have been vocal critics of Kazakhstan's language nationalism. While this section will focus on Kazakhstan's Russophones, it is important to note that other ethnicities, such as the the Dungans, have expressed concern over Kazakhstan's language nationalism and have suffered some of its most extreme manifestations.

Upon inspecting Kazakhstan's language laws, one notices the inclusive intent in which they were designed and written. Dublin University professor Donnacha Ó Beacháin states that while Kazakhstan's language policy *de jure* seeks to grant the Kazakh language preeminence over all other languages, « [i]n practice, only the Russian language is concerned¹⁹⁴ », as sociolinguistic competition only takes places between these two languages. This is not dissimilar to Québec's 1977

¹⁹³ Dugin, op. cit.

¹⁹⁴ Ó Beacháin, Donnacha & Kevlihan, Rob. « State-building, Identity and Nationalism in Kazakhstan: Some Preliminary Thoughts », *Centre for International Studies*, no.1, 2011, p.5.

Bill 101 which states that the French language is to be given preeminence over other languages on commercial signage, which turns out to only really hinder the English language¹⁹⁵. This highlights the core limit of a language legislation designed in response to a perceived threat: the wording may be as general and inclusive as possible, the underlying design usually resurfaces in practice.

This statement is to be pondered with in mind the widespread levels of disinvolvement, or at times defiance, observed within parts of the Russophone population of Kazakhstan. Several studies have stressed the persistence of discourses of relative hostility towards Kazakh sovereignty and language nationalism. For instance, a study conducted in 2019 by researcher Matthew Blackburn pointed at the endurance of Russian centric narratives on Kazakh history in part of the Russophone population of Kazakhstan. When polled by Blackburn, respondents stressed the critical role Russia and the Soviet Union played in bringing modernity to the Kazakhs, some expressing annoyance over the Kazakhs' alleged lack of recognition thereof¹⁹⁶, while cultivating what Blackburn calls a 'Soviet-Russian' identity¹⁹⁷. Interviewees viewed Kazakhstan's language policy as mostly nonsensical, deeming the status quo in favor of Russian as perfectly sensible, underscoring Russian's quality as a modern European language¹⁹⁸ fit to be the country's natural lingua franca. This is further observed in cities in Northeastern Kazakhstan, where a plurality of the population identifies as Russian or European¹⁹⁹, inhabitants held a mostly negative view of Nur-Sultan's language policy. Interviewees for a *Frankfurter Allgemeine Zeitung* article largely disregarded official toponyms, preferring to refer to streets and city names with their Soviet names²⁰⁰. Since 1991, discontent allophones have thus either left Kazakhstan, opposed passive resistance or developed more extreme responses to Kazakh language nationalism such as separatism.

An aspect of particular relevance to our research are the transnational dynamics at play in Russian nationalism and separatism in Kazakhstan. In the late 1990s, for instance, a Russian

¹⁹⁵ Leclerc, Jacques. « L'affichage commercial et l'article 58 de la Charte de la langue française », *Université de Laval*. [Retrieved on April, 17th 2022].

¹⁹⁶ Blackburn, op. cit., p.223.

¹⁹⁷ *Ibid*, p.221.

¹⁹⁸ *Ibid*, p.224.

¹⁹⁹ Between 30% (Öskemen) and 50% (North-Kazakhstan) of North-Eastern Kazakhstan identify as Russians, according to Kazakh censuses.

²⁰⁰ Schmidt, Friedrich. « Ethnische Zwietracht unter Kontrolle », *Frankfurter Allgemeine Zeitung*, 25th April 2015.

separatist group which operated in Northeastern Kazakhstan was led by Viktor Kazimirchuk, a Russian national. He planned on carry on a coup in Öskemen (also named Ust-Kamenogorsk in Russian) and claimed that both Russian officials and the Russophone population of the area supported him. After his arrest and trial, he received support from Moscow in the form of an attempted repatriation and the coverage of his attorney fees²⁰¹. This somewhat infamous instance backs Appadurai claims that nationalistic genie has become diasporic²⁰², with nationalism relying on diasporic communities to overcome borders. Sabanadzé provides a succinct yet astute description of Russia's goals in this regard : « [Russia] claims to act as a protector of Russian speaking minorities in the so-called near abroad and a defender of the Russian language and culture²⁰³ » The international implications of such an observation are profound for Kazakh language nationalism, as the interests of the Russophone population of Kazakhstan are the object of many Russia-based initiatives. A noteworthy example of such initiative is the aforementioned Rossotrudnichestvo network, which acts as a lever of action to promote the Russian language in Kazakhstan. If a realist lecture of Russia's interest in preserving the interests of the Russian speaking minority of Kazakhstan may lead us to the notion of soft power²⁰⁴, it can also help us appreciate Russia's possibly antagonistic stance regarding a defensive Kazakh language nationalism. In the recent years, voices from both Russia and Kazakhstan have made themselves more vocal in their defiance of Kazakhstan's language nationalism, sometimes openly threatening Kazakh sovereignty. In August 2021 Eurasianet article, Zholdas Orisbayev quoted Rossotrudnichestvo head Evgeni Primakov, the latter denouncing the « anti-Russian » nature of some Kazakh language nationalists, and urging the Kazakh government to « rein in the agitators²⁰⁵ ». The article also makes mention of Duma deputies overtly threatening Kazakhstan in response to a widely reported « anti-Russian » Kazakh language nationalism, reportedly stating that « In Kazakhstan, they can afford the luxury of thinking that they are self-sufficient [...] But in fact, no one is self-sufficient, either in security or economic terms. All [former Soviet] republics are still

²⁰¹ Pannier, Bruce. « A Tale Of Russian Separatism In Kazakhstan », *Radio Free Europe*, 3rd August 2014.

²⁰² Appadurai, op. cit., p.160.

²⁰³ Sabanadzé, op. cit. p.8.

²⁰⁴ Ageeva, op. cit. p.37.

²⁰⁵ Orisbayev, Zholdas. « Kazakh language police trigger Russian politicians », *Eurasianet*, 16th August 2021.

very dependent on Russia, including Kazakhstan, which has the longest land border in the world with the Russian Federation. But, as we can see, this does not teach them anything.²⁰⁶ »

These examples highlight the intrinsic limits of Kazakhstan's defensive language nationalism. The latter, acting upon a perceived threat, is at constant risk of alienating language minorities. This proves critical with the Russophone minority, whose ties with Moscow can turn Kazakh language nationalism into a potent catalyst of international tension.

2.3.3 Kazakhstan's government response to xenophobic incidents in the scope of the country's international balancing strategy

Cautious not to provoke Russia and China in the wake of violent outbursts of nationalistic nature, Kazakhstan has, at times, had to intervene internally to demonstrate its good will. This has led Nur-Sultan to either condemn or arrest nationalist elements when faced with controversy. We argue that defensive language nationalism can, in this regard, be prove limitative for Kazakhstan's foreign policy, compelling the Central Asian nation into situations whereby Nur-Sultan is forced to correct its course towards compromise and mitigation.

Kazakh language nationalism in its most classical form is not devoid of extreme instances of xenophobia and prejudice, especially when associated with ethnic rivalries and hatred. This section mainly covers bottom-up language nationalism, as official language nationalism, in the form of legislation and governmental initiatives, seldom displays extreme viewpoints and rhetoric. As Marlène Laruelle states, Kazakhstan's nationalists (or national-patriots) of all kinds see both China and Russia as « Kazakhstan's main enemy²⁰⁷ ». Guided by resentment or mistrust of Russia, extreme elements have, on occasions, displayed hostile behavior towards Russophones, and sometimes allophones. A widely reported instance was that of the so-called « Kazakh language police », which operates in the large urban centers of Kazakhstan, especially Almaty. Frustrated with Russian speakers' attitude towards the Kazakh language, and their reported lack of effort to learn it, Kazakh language activists publish videos in which they demand they be served in Kazakh

²⁰⁶ *Ibid.*

²⁰⁷ Laruelle, *op. cit.*

in buses and businesses. At times, the videos contain confrontational encounters, where quarrelsome activists engage in full blown public arguments with Russian speakers²⁰⁸. Hostile statements towards Russian-speaking communities were also observed within nationalist groupes such as Ult Tagdyry. In 2006, for example, Ult Tagdyry's leader suggested Russians « take the opportunity²⁰⁹ » to go back to Russia in the wake of Putin's newly launched repatriation program. A more dramatic example of Kazakh language nationalism turned extreme are the 2020 Dungan pogroms²¹⁰. In the early that year, violent riots directed at the Dungan minority, a Muslim, Sinitic-speaking minority, erupted in and around Dungan villages in Southern Kazakhstan. This violent outburst between Kazakhs and Dungan resulted in the displacement of more than 20 000²¹¹ ethnic Dungans to neighboring Uzbekistan. One of the main reasons behind these pogroms was widespread frustration among Kazakhs at the lack of respect and interest the Dungans held towards the Kazakh language²¹².

Nur-Sultan sees such instances as both serious and embarrassing. From an internal point of view, they constitute grave contraventions to Kazakhstan's official, ethnic peace-based policy and provide its detractors²¹³ strong counter examples. Externally, and more relevantly for our research, extreme language nationalism leads to delicate situations which are to be dealt with extreme caution by Kazakh officials. In a way similar to the ties the Russophone populations sustains with the Federation, the Dungan minority's crucial relevance in Kazakhstan's external affairs is to be understood through its ties with China. One of the main sources dealing with Chinese-Dungan relations is *Renmin Ribao* journalist Ying Shuguang²¹⁴'s year long field work with the Dungan of southern Kazakhstan. He observed regular occurrences of Chinese-Dungan exchanges as Dungans from the village of Masanchi (the very village where the 2020 pogroms took place) regularly sent

²⁰⁸ Orisbayev, op. cit.

²⁰⁹ Laruelle, op. cit., p.174.

²¹⁰ The word pogrom has been used by part of international media to refer to these events. Another qualification used is that of 'ethnic clashes'.

²¹¹ Bahiga, Jengis. « Our homemade nationalism is senseless and merciless [Наш доморощенный национализм – бессмысленный и беспощадный] », *Central Asian Monitor*, 12th February 2020.

²¹² *Ibid.*

²¹³ By 'detractors', we do not necessarily mean individuals who disagree with the intent of such policies. Rather, this refers to individuals stressing the apparent hypocrisy of Nur-Sultan's ethnic policies.

²¹⁴ Known in Cyrillic as Инь Шугуан (In' Shuguan).

delegations to their home provinces of Shaanxi and Gansu²¹⁵. Likewise, Chinese officials often visited the Dungan, providing them with Chinese language textbooks, computers and overall « generous support²¹⁶. » Ying concludes his article by evoking Central Asian countries' interest in preserving good relations with the Dungan, the latter being seen as cultural bridges between them and China²¹⁷.

Embedding the Russophone and Dungan populations within broader transnational networks of cooperation, we can argue that the excesses of an aggressive, defensive language nationalism trigger consequences that are to be dealt with by Nur-Sultan as to not lose face internationally. Kazakh researcher Dadabayeva rightfully states that Kazakhstan's very language policy is carefully worded because of Nur-Sultan's fear of seeing more Russophones emigrate ('vote with their feet') towards Russia²¹⁸. Furthermore, Kazakh officials, in a proof of good will vis-à-vis their Russian neighbor, have at times arrested Kazakh nationalists. For instance, in the wake of the 2012 Janaozen riots, notorious Kazakh nationalist Janbolat Mamai was arrested and charged for inciting ethnic hatred²¹⁹, an allegation similar to that of human rights activist Bolatbek Mlyalov, who was arrested in 2015. As Laruelle argues, Kazakh nationalists have been used as political 'fall guys'²²⁰ in international demonstrations of cooperativeness and tolerance from Nur-Sultan's behalf. More recently, Kazakh president Tokayev condemned Egyptian officials' suggestion that Kazakhstan should be rid of Soviet toponyms²²¹. In 2022, Tokayev publicly denounced the so-called 'Kazakh language police' for inciting ethnic hatred²²².

²¹⁵ Ying, Shuguang. « Dungsans and China: a yet to be finished history [Дунгане и Китай: незаконченная история] », *Renmin Ribao*, 24th February 2010.

²¹⁶ *Ibid.*

²¹⁷ *Ibid.*

²¹⁸ Dadabayeva, op. cit., p.127.

²¹⁹ Laruelle, op. cit., p.176.

²²⁰ *Ibid.*

²²¹ Radio Azattyq. « Tokayev reprimanded Kazakh ambassador to Egypt for suggesting getting rid of 'controversial names' » [Токаев объявил выговор послу Казахстана в Египте, предложившему избавиться от «спорных названий»], February, 17th 2022. [Retrieved on May, 10th, 2022].

²²² Vaal, Tamara. « Tokayev called 'language patrols' provocation which aims at undermining national unity » [Токаев назвал «языковые патрули» провокацией, направленной на подрыв национального единства], *Vlast.kz*, April, 29th 2022. [Retrieved on May, 1st, 2022].

We can thus see that, however judicious Nur-Sultan's wielding of 'extreme' nationalist elements, said elements' propensity to offend, marginalize or even abuse language minorities which sustain strong ties with great powers on either sides of Kazakhstan's borders constitute a serious limitation to both Kazakhstan's international sovereignty and margin of action.

Conclusion

In this chapter, we have analyzed Kazakh language nationalism as both a means and an end to a somewhat defensive conception of international relations and globalization. In the face of unpredictability, cultural homogenization and external pressures, the promotion of the Kazakh language serves the purposes of asserting Kazakhstan's international sovereignty and distinctiveness (2.1) and cementing as well as embedding Kazakhstan in familiar, reassuring solidarities such as Pan-Turkism and Eurasianism (2.2). As we have argued, however, a defensive Kazakh language nationalism is at a risk of marginalizing Russian- and Sinitic-language minorities. Given the increasingly challenging conception Russia holds regarding Kazakh sovereignty, the existence of transnational Russian nationalist networks, as well as China's interest in Kazakhstan's Sinitic-speaking minority, this proves to be a serious limit of such a conception of language nationalism in the scope of international affairs (2.3). We argue that a reflection on the limitations of language nationalism as it is classically understood, a way of defending a language from external pressures which conveys an apprehensive view of global flows and dynamics, is to be made. Indeed, while envisioned as a key aspect of Kazakhstan's multi-vector policy, this conception of language nationalism paradoxically impedes its full deployment, as its most violent (and arguably not easily controllable) outburststs place Nur-Sultan in positions which compel it to demonstrate mitigation and conciliation.

Chapter 3: Language nationalism as a key to harnessing globalization and international forces

Complementary to its defensive value, Kazakh language nationalism as both a means and an end is considered a key to harnessing globalization's forces. In this conception of international affairs, globalization, if its flows are wielded correctly, is considered to be a potential asset to the survival of the Kazakh language as well as Kazakhstan's internal stability and international standing as researcher Astrid Cerny explains that « The states in Central Asia have been in a state of flux since the early 1990s with the dissolution of the Soviet Union and the disintegration of the Soviet Socialist Republic model.²²³ ». This section shall outline two elements of Nur-Sultan's policy: its repatriation policy involving the *Oralmanar* (3.1) and Kazakh's already well publicized switch from the Cyrillic to the Latin script (3.2). In so doing, two important aspects associated with globalization will be mobilized: transnational migrations, and *modernity* (and all the subjectiveness this concept bears). An assessment of the intent and, when possible, results of said policies will attempt to outline the existence of a type of governmental language nationalism which does not view external dynamics and globalization as a threat, but a tool to be wielded to serve its endeavor. A third section shall stress the limits of such endeavors, the latter significantly constricting the possibilities this particular sort of language nationalism holds. In doing so, our reflexion will draw on language policy theory. Finally, this section will also attempt to analyse language nationalism reframed as a tool of transnational policy.

3.1 Wielding globalized migratory flux to benefit the Kazakh language: the *Oralman* policy

Starting in the 1990s, Kazakhstan has developed a repatriation policy directed at the *Oralman* (in Kazakh, *returnee*²²⁴). This section aims at outlining the origins as well as main features of Kazakhstan's Oralman policy, its ideological justifications and precedents and its use as a tool of nationalist language policy in favor of the Kazakh language.

²²³ Cerny, Astrid. «Going where the grass is greener: China Kazaks and the *Oralman* immigration policy in Kazakhstan », *Pastoralism*, Vol. 1 No. 1, January, 2010, p.222.

²²⁴ Mendikulova, Gulnara. « La diaspora kazakhe et la politique de rapatriement de la République du Kazakhstan », *Migrations en Asie centrale et au Caucase*, vol.26, no.3, 2010, pp.159-162.

3.1.1 Introducing Kazakhstan's repatriation policy

The *Oralman* policy can be considered as starting in 1992, when then president Nursultan Nazarbayev declared Kazakhstan as the homeland of all Kazakhs²²⁵. This declaration constitutes an early example of Kazakh nation building, as some Kazakh communities outside of Kazakhstan (for instance the Kazakhs of Western Mongolia), are generally considered to have always lived there²²⁶. A number of laws aimed at providing Kazakhstan's repatriation policy with a legal framework. Congruently with Nazarbayev's 1992 declaration came the 1992 Migration Law, which allowed ethnic Kazakhs from outside the state's border to emigrate into the country²²⁷. In 1997, the « Law of the Republic of Kazakhstan "On Migration", 1997 » defined the term *Oralman* as an ethnic Kazakh who resided outside Kazakhstan's border at the time it gained independence²²⁸. A 2011 revision²²⁹ of the Migration Law set a yearly quota of Oralman arrivals. When these quotas would be met, further Oralman arrivals would still be welcomed into the country, but would not benefit from the various assistance programs reserved to those who were comprised in the quota²³⁰. Since 2013, the Oralman have had to present the same documents and go through the same procedures as other migrants, but still retain a number of aforementioned privileges exclusive to their quality. Furthermore, they can automatically claim Kazakh citizenship after 5 years of living in Kazakhstan²³¹. This seems to reflect a rationalizing of Kazakhstan's repatriation policy, the latter surely not being devoid of an ideological framework.

²²⁵ Arntz, Helena. « Neo-Eurasianism or ethnic Kazakh nationalization », dir. Kemper, *Universiteit Amsterdam*, May 2018, p.50.

²²⁶ Mendikulova, op. cit., p.156.

²²⁷ Nurtaikyzy, Marzhan. « The Role of Language in the Integration of Repatriated Students in Kazakhstan », [Thesis] Nazarbayev University Graduate School of Education, may 2020, pp.5-6.

²²⁸ *Ibid*, p.5

²²⁹ Kassenova, A. & Zhanguttin, O. « The issues of Oralman's integration into modern Kazakhstani society », *Abay Kazakh National Pedagogical University Bulletin*, 2016. [Retrieved on May, 6th, 2022].

²³⁰ Arntz, op. cit., p.51

²³¹ Kassenova & Zhanguttin, op. cit.

In total, it is estimated that 952 882 Oralmanar had emigrated to Kazakhstan by 2014²³², a figure that accounted for 5.51% of the country's total population at the time. Their origins are many, as the Kazakh diaspora is characterized by its diversity. Among the most numerous are China Kazakhs, numbering 1.462 million persons as of 2010²³³. Transnationally, ethnic Kazakhs are also present in Uzbekistan, Mongolia and Russia²³⁴. Three other noteworthy Kazakh communities are the Kazakhs residing in Turkey, Iran's Kazakh community²³⁵ which is concentrated in the Golestan Province (across the Turkmen border) and Kazakhs residing in the West, either descended from Turkish Kazakh or Kazakhstan Kazakh economic migrants. All of these communities combined, an alleged 4 million ethnic Kazakhs live outside Kazakhstan's border, « More than a quarter of the world's Kazakh population²³⁶ », explains Diplomat journalist Colleen Wood. She stresses the communities' diverse backgrounds, some being the result of Russian and Soviet border delimitation (Uzbek and Russian Kazakhs), others being descended from 18th to 19th century refugees fleeing the Dzungars or the Russian Empire (China Kazakhs), while others are descended from political refugees from the 1940s and 1950s (Turkey Kazakhs)²³⁷. A map below (figure 5) illustrates and locates the Kazakh diaspora²³⁸:

²³² Kassenova & Zhanguddin, op. cit.

²³³ Data from the 2017 Chinese census. Retrieved at: <http://www.neac.gov.cn/seac/mzwh/201706/1014586.shtml>. [Retrieved on May, 10th, 2022].

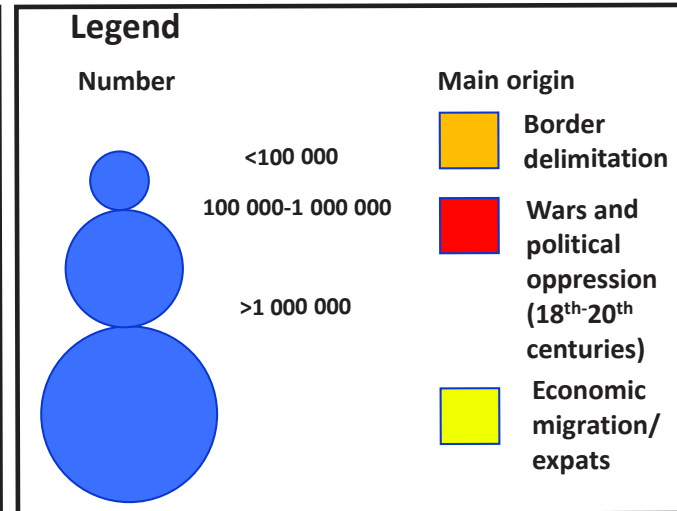
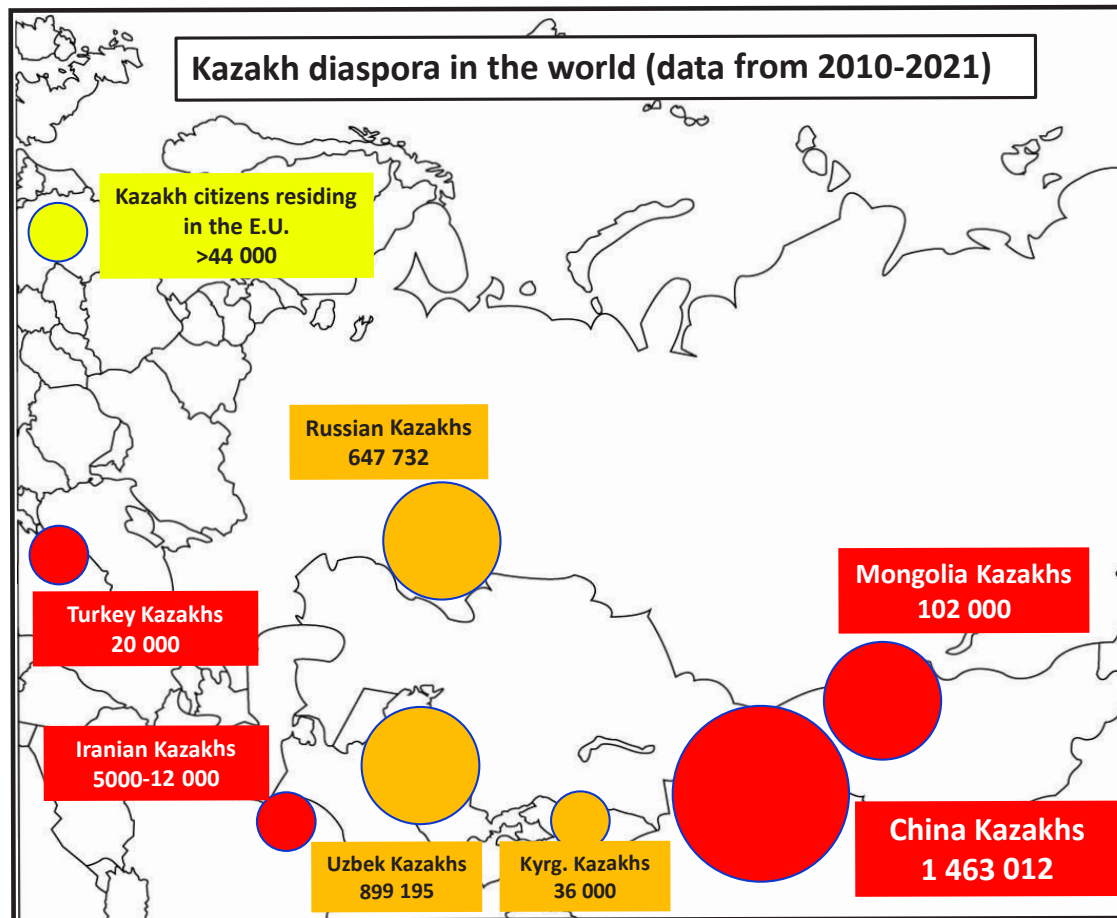
²³⁴ Kassenova & Zhanguddin, op. cit.

²³⁵ Wood, Colleen. « Meeting the Kazakh diaspora », *The Diplomat*, February, 28th 2019. [Retrieved on May, 8th 2022].

²³⁶ *Ibid.*

²³⁷ *Ibid.*

²³⁸ *Ibid.*



References

- For China: 2014 census of the People's Republic of China [retrieved on May, 3rd 2022]
- For Uzbekistan : Koblandin (2008) [retrieved on May, 3rd 2022]
- For Russia: 2010 census of the Russian Federation [retrieved on May, 3rd 2022]
- For the E.U.: figures from Germany, retrieved at *Kazakhstan* (Prague Process website) [retrieved on May, 3rd 2022]
- For Mongolia: 2010 census [retrieved on May, 7th 2022]
- For Turkey: Rakhmizhanova (2021) [retrieved on May, 3rd 2022]
- For Kyrgyzstan: 2015 census of the Kyrgyz Republic [retrieved on May, 3rd 2022]
- For Iran: Kazinform, 2010. [retrieved on May, 5th 2022]

The *Oralman* repatriation policy, while directed at all ethnic Kazakhs outside independent Kazakhstan, has attracted specific waves of returnees. The first wave of Oralmanar consisted mainly of Turkey Kazakhs, while more recent arrivals are from Chinese Kazakh communities. There, « [N]ot only the oralman programme, but the very concepts and opportunities for immigration into Kazakhstan have captured the imagination of many Kazaks living in Xinjiang.²³⁹ » This general appeal is stressed by a 2006 U.N.D.P. report, which mentions a growing number of Oralman arrivals between the 1990s and 2004²⁴⁰.

While the purpose of this section was to introduce the Oralmanar and Kazakhstan's *Oralman* policy, we shall now outline the ideological foundations of the policy, before attempting to reframe it as an instrument of nationalist language policy.

3.1.2 Linguistic justifications and ideological precedents of the repatriation policy

In properly assessing Kazakhstan's repatriation policy and reframing it as a tool of nationalist language policy, outlining its ideological precedents and components. In other words, before answering the question 'How does Kazakhstan's repatriation policy serve Kazakh-language nationalism and its goal of promoting the Kazakh language?', we must first analyze how Kazakh-language nationalism views 21st century migratory flows of repatriates. Drawing on other examples of ethnic migrations (namely Germany), we argue that an important aspect of the *Oralman* policy is the conception that the *Oralmanar* are heralds of a pristine Kazakh language and culture, thus being of special interest for Kazakh-language nationalism.

Kazakhstan's repatriation policy constitutes an example of ethnic migration. In their 2020 Master of Arts thesis, Marzhan Nurtaikyzy defines ethnic migration as « [referring] to “return migration”, which describes an ethnic group who lived abroad and “returned” to their historical homeland²⁴¹. » Instances of return migration are plenty, one noteworthy examples being Germany.

²³⁹ Cerny, op. cit., p.222.

²⁴⁰ Zeveleva, *Status of Oralman in Kazakhstan*, UNDP, 2006, p.8.

²⁴¹ Nurtaikyzy, op. cit., p.8

In this country's repatriation policies, the linguistic component is apparent. For instance, the German Ministry of the Interior and for the Homeland (*Bundesministerium des Innern und für Heimat*) states that : « Ethnic German resettlers are Germans within the meaning of the Basic Law who return to the country of their ancestors to live there permanently. Resettlers²⁴² **are admitted to Germany as ethnic Germans if they declared their commitment to German traditional culture in their home country and learned the German language at home.**²⁴³ » This emphasis on practice — or at least will to practice, the national language is indicative of the view that ethnic Germans speak the German language. In other words, it is implied that the *Aussiedlerpolitik* is not to be implemented at the expense of the national language.

We argue that the *Oralman* policy goes further in protecting the national language of Kazakhstan, as it views repatriates as holders of a pure, non-russified Kazakh language. This belief is of historical nature, as the Kazakh diaspora outside of Central Asia has not suffered the influence of Soviet russification policies. In Mongolia and China, ethnic Kazakhs have been allowed to maintain a nomadic way of life, and their language has not seen the 'pervasive' influence of Russian loanwords. In Turkey, Kazakh communities live in a Turkic speaking environment, which may be deemed less disfiguring for the Kazakh language than Russian. Most importantly, the Oralman usually speak Kazakh as their first language (while a non negligible part of Kazakhstan Kazakhs do not) and may « have little to no command in the Russian language²⁴⁴ », which they oftentimes find themselves struggling with upon arriving in Kazakhstan²⁴⁵. A study conducted with Oralman students showed that « returnees from Mongolia » saw themselves as « pure Kazakhs.²⁴⁶ »

Quoting the 2006 U.N.D.P. report which we have mentioned previously, Amsterdam University research Helena Arntz depicts Kazakhstan's repatriation policy as « [O]ne of the most

²⁴² The German term is *Spätaussiedler*, « late returnee ».

²⁴³ *Spätaussiedler*, from the website of the German Ministry of the Interior and for the Homeland. Retrived at : <https://www.bmi.bund.de/DE/themen/heimat-integration/kriegsfolgen/spaetaussiedler/spaetaussiedler-node.html> [retrived on May, 4th, 2022].

²⁴⁴ Zeveleva, op. cit., p.16.

²⁴⁵ Toktau, Zhuldyz. « Bridging Language, Identity and Integration in the Ethnic Migration- Student Experience of China-Kazakhs in Kazakhstan », [Thesis] Nazarbayev University Graduate School of Education, June 2017, p.73.

²⁴⁶ *Ibid*, p.6.

important government policies on national identity and cultural consolidation.²⁴⁷ » The report states that, reciprocally, Oralman repatriates view Kazakhstan as a safe haven for the preservation of their culture and language, mainly emigrating with this intent in mind²⁴⁸. In our view, Kazakhstan's returnees are an opportunity for Nur-Sultan to exemplify its notion of Kazakhness through the Oralman, while making these Kazakhs from all around the world referential Kazakhstanis by only welcoming them as *Oralman* and making them the Kazakhstani nation's own returnees. This in turn helps blur the delimitation between Kazakh and Kazakhstani, both concepts becoming synonymous of one another. In other words, by framing the state of Kazakhstan as the homeland of all Kazakhs, Nur-Sultan transcends the belief that Kazakhstan's borders were but a matter of Soviet whims. Rather, they now serve to harbor the Kazakh(stani) nation.

This section aimed at outlining the main ideological components of Nur-Sultan's Oralman policy: cultural and language purity, as well as nation-building. At this point, the language-nationalist aspects of said policy are already coming into shape, as the promotion of the Kazakh language as the language of the Kazakh(stani) nation, its purity and status are fully embedded in Nur-Sultan's *Oralman* narrative. Furthermore, this intent is born by the *Oralman* themselves. We thus observe how Kazakh-language nationalism views 21st century ethnic migratory flows as the promise of the promotion of a pristine, strengthened Kazakh language.

3.1.3 When language nationalism instrumentalizes globalized flow of people: Kazakhstan's repatriation policy as an instrument of language policy

Now that the ideological foundations of the *Oralman* policy have been laid, we may try to reframe it as a tool of language policy. We may begin our argument by making two conceptual reminders. Firstly, language nationalism, as we have defined it, denotes the belief that one language is to be preserved and promoted as the nation-state's official language. This can be done at the expense of other languages, whether they be minority or not. Secondly, language policy (or language planning²⁴⁹) denotes a set of governmental policies whose purpose is affecting the status

²⁴⁷ Arntz, op. cit., p.50

²⁴⁸ Zeleva, op. cit. p.23

²⁴⁹ Nordquist, op. cit.

or the corpus of a language. In the case which will be made below, the *Oralman* policy is going to be understood as a tool for Nur-Sultan's nationalist *status* language planning policy.

Reprising the 2006 U.N.D.P. report on the Oralman, we can assert that « Under conditions of globalization, when there is an unlimited exchange of information and technology all over the world, and the borders for using languages are blended, migration policies in these countries pursue very specific aims.²⁵⁰ » In this case, migration policies pursue a nationalist aim of skewing the balance in favor of the Kazakh language in regions where it has lost ground. We can thus argue that the *Oralman* policy constitutes a tool of status language planning policy made possible by globalization. By status language planning policy, we understand a policy designed to positively affect the status of the Kazakh language in Kazakhstan. This is done by making the language gain prestige (social value), or demographic weight. In this definition, the main foundation for reframing Kazakhstan's repatriation policy as tool for status language planning is the dispatching of *Oralmanar* to Kazakhstan's Northern and Northeastern regions, notorious for being heavily russified. This has been observed by many commentators. Elena Arntz underscores that Nur-Sultan's rhetoric greatly encourages Oralmanar to emigrate to Northeastern Kazakhstan, and facilitates them in doing so by « [claiming] a lack of workforce²⁵¹ », but really only sending ethnic Kazakhs. This was done in the scope of the *Nurly Qosh* (or « bright path ») program, which incentivized Oralmanar to move from « unfavorable » regions (the densely populated south) to the workforce deprived North²⁵². This is combined with domestic migrations whereby Kazakhs from Southern Kazakhstan, usually Kazakhophones, are encouraged to move to said russified regions²⁵³; the latter, however, have done so in very little number from 1991 to 2015²⁵⁴. These policies are implemented with the design of making regions such as Petropavl or Öskemen (which we have already covered in the previous chapter), more Kazakh speaking. The deliberate nature of this settlement pattern becomes apparent when confronted with the preferences of the Oralman in terms

²⁵⁰ Shoji, Yuriko. « Foreword by the United Nations development program », *Status of Oralman in Kazakhstan*, UNDP, 2006, p.5.

²⁵¹ Arntz , op. cit., p.50

²⁵² *Ibid.*

²⁵³ *Ibid.*

²⁵⁴ Jaksylykov, Serik. « Northern oblasts and population of the south: migratory policy and migratory flows in Kazakhstan » [Северные области и население юга: миграционная политика и потоки миграции в Казахстане], *Central Asian Analytical Network*, June, 11th 2018. [Retrieved on May, 7th 2022].

of settling: the more Kazakh-speaking South and Southwest²⁵⁵. What we argue constitutes a tool of nationalist language policy in favor of the Kazakh language follows and assists the well-documented decision to move Kazakhstan's capital from Almaty to Nur-Sultan (then Astana), in order to re-center the Kazakh-speaking power's point of gravity towards the russified North²⁵⁶.

As Kazakh-language nationalism is both a means and an end to Nur-Sultan, the promotion of the Kazakh language in the Northern and Northeastern oblasts can be understood as an effort to promote stability in said regions, this especially being true in the early years of the Republic²⁵⁷. The main threat to be dealt with in this respect is the spectre of ethnic-Russian separatism. While fears of ethnic-Russian secession were strong in the years following Kazakhstan's independence, the 2014 annexation of Crimea by the Russian Federation renewed fears of nationalist unrest. Following the events, « [A]n official order was issued that all the Oralman who returned were to be settled in the Akmola, Atyrau, West-Kazakhstan, Kostanay, Pavlodar, North-Kazakhstan, and East-Kazakhstan provinces.²⁵⁸ » Thus, the *Oralman* policy as a tool of status language planning serves to enhance stability by « restoring the ethnic balance²⁵⁹ » in favor of Kazakh-speaking Kazakhs in the North and Northeast. This constitutes an interesting example of globalized migratory flows wielded as to promote stability. In other words, promoting the Kazakh language by compelling Oralmanar to settle north also holds the promise of bringing ethnic tranquility of mind in the region.

The linguistic aspect of the *Oralman* policy is not to be understated. Nonetheless, it is not devoid of economic considerations. Mendikulova argues that « In the Kazakh case, the lever is mainly of economic nature. Members of the diaspora in Turkey, the United States and Western Europe possess a rich experience in entrepreneurship in the capitalist world²⁶⁰. » Resettling Oralmanar in the population- and job-deprived North thus cannot be solely understood as an instrument of nationalist language policy, but also as an instrument of economic policy.

²⁵⁵ Zeveleva, op. cit., p.14.

²⁵⁶ Jaksylykov, op. cit.

²⁵⁷ *Ibid.*

²⁵⁸ Pannier, op. cit.

²⁵⁹ Arntz, op. cit., p.53.

²⁶⁰ Mendikulova, op. cit., p.15

We may further nuance Kazakhstan's repatriation policy as a language planning tool by stressing its failure at meeting the expectations set by Nur-Sultan. Indeed, researcher Astrid Cerny highlights that « The ongoing nature of the demand for entry and the oralman quota data suggest that even the primary practical goal of the programme: to recover the population numbers following the departure of large numbers of Russians has not been met effectively.²⁶¹ »

This first section analyzed the *Oralman* policy as illustrative of how Kazakh-language nationalism attempts to canalize globalized flows of people (in the form of a repatriation policy) to pursue the aim of promoting the Kazakh language, especially in regions where it is sparsely spoken. As migrants usually settle across the border — Kazakhs from Mongolia and Russia settle in the North, those from Uzbekistan and Kyrgyzstan settle in the south —, this could constitute an example of trans-border language nationalism. As the 2006 U.N.D.P. report stresses, the *Oralman* policy is made possible by and is deeply rooted in globalization, as the Kazakh government and the Kazakh diaspora intensified their relations with the help of new means of communication²⁶². We argue that the *Oralman* policy as a tool of nationalist language planning in favor of the Kazakh language significantly differs from the language-nationalist endeavors we have hitherto mentioned, as it carefully engages with globalization. Rather than a threat, it is seen as an opportunity whose migratory flows are to be put to use.

3.2 Kazakhstan's transition to the Latin script as a gateway to the globalized world

The decision to write the Kazakh language in the Latin script has been the object of much scholarly attention. To many, and rightfully so, it is a way for Nur-Sultan to distance itself culturally and geopolitically from Russia²⁶³. This section shall explore a different aspect of this change, and analyze it as a twofold decision. First, the Kazakh language written in the Latin script is considered to be a gateway to modernization in a globalized world, a 'catching up' of sorts for Kazakhstan.

²⁶¹ Cerny, op. cit., p.224.

²⁶² Shoji, op. cit.

²⁶³ Suslova, Ekaterina. « Where the language leads. Why Kazakhstan switched to the Latin script » [Куда язык доведет: почему Казахстан перешел на латиницу], *Gazeta*, 20th February 2018. [Retrieved on May, 8th, 2022].

Second, it holds the promise of one standardized, globally approachable alphabet for Kazakh, allowing for its spread in the diaspora. In both of its purported goals, globalization, if correctly engaged (that is, by adapting to it), is seen as an opportunity for Kazakh-language nationalism. Here too, the promotion of a Latin-written Kazakh language is both a means to integrate to a globalized modernity and an end pursued by encouraging and allowing the diaspora to maintain the Kazakh language.

3.2.1 Nazarbayev's vision of modernity: a glimpse into the relation between nationalism and modernity

This introductory section aims at outlining Nur-Sultan's, and most specifically former president Nursultan Nazarbayev's view on 21st century modernity. Most of said vision has been publicly announced in many of Nazarbayev's speeches and in the scope of the former president's 'Course towards the future: modernization of Kazakhstan's identity' speech. This will allow us to discuss the complex relation that exists between nationalism and modernity.

As we have already mentioned, Nursultan Nazarbayev's — and by extension Kazakh officials' — stance on modernity is an ambiguous one. Indeed, it shall not be done at the expense of national peculiarities, languages and cultures. In Nazarbayev's view lies more than this rather apprehensive view of globalized modernity. His 2017 speech exudes a common theme: that of Kazakhstan catching up to other nations, and possibly integrating the thirty most developed nations in the world²⁶⁴. In Nursultan Nazabayev's 'Kazakhstan-2050' address to the nation of Kazakhstan, globalization and the many changes that come in its wake are not seen as an obstacle, but a formality: « 21st Century Kazakhstan is an independent and self-confident state. We are not afraid of the ongoing changes in the world.²⁶⁵ » Not being afraid of ongoing changes in the world was made possible, Nazarbayev explains, by undertaking rapid modernization policies « in all areas of society²⁶⁶. » 'Kazakhstan-2050' promotes, in actuality, a wide range of economic and financial policies of modernization. As long as national identity is concerned, the main idea is to carefully engage with modernity: embrace its most productive and enviable aspects, and respectfully reject its

²⁶⁴ Nazarbayev, op. cit.

²⁶⁵ Nazarbayev, Nursultan. *Kazakhstan 2050* [speech]. Retrieved at:<https://kazakhstan2050.com/2050-address> [Retrieved on May, 9th, 2022].

²⁶⁶ *Ibid.*

averse effects such as homogenization and « blind²⁶⁷ » application of the Western model in other national contexts.

This allows us to highlight a key — and often somewhat misunderstood — aspect of nationalism: its relation to modernity. In popular belief, nationalism is indeed often conflated with a certain refusal of 21st century globalized modernity. Such examples may include Central European countries from the Visegrád Pact, which combine nationalism, populism and conservatism. However, modernism (the political doctrine advocating in favor of embracing modernity) and nationalism are complementary. University of California researcher Craig Calhoun states that Modernity itself [is] one of the crucial projects taken on in the name of nations. Modernization [means] variously strength; freedom; intellectual advancement; it always [means] progress²⁶⁸. »

An example of special relevance for our argument is that of Turkish-language nationalism under Kemalist Turkey. Under Mustafa Kemal (Atatürk)'s rule, the then young Republic of Turkey underwent a series of modernization policies congruent with emerging Turkish nationalism. One especially well documented chapter of Atatürk's rule is the switch of Turkish from the Arabic script to the Latin script, in 1928. This marked the *de facto* transition from Ottoman Turkish to modern Turkish. By all metrics, the Latin script was viewed as: a) a script better suited for Turkish²⁶⁹ (an argument reprised for Kazakh²⁷⁰), b) a gateway to modernity. Contemporary commentator from the Constantinople Women's College Margaret M. Wood considers that the Arabic script was a « factor in Turkish educational lag and isolation from Europe²⁷¹ ». In the context Kemalist Turkey, Europe was seen as both a beacon of 'civilization' and modernity, and an enviable cultural ensemble whose integration would benefit Turkey.

²⁶⁷ Nazarbayev, 2017, op. cit.

²⁶⁸ Calhoun, Craig. « Nationalism and the Contradictions of Modernity », *Berkeley Journal of Sociology*, Vol. 42, 1997-1998, p.2.

²⁶⁹ Mignon, Laurent. « The Literati and the Letters: A Few Words on the Turkish Alphabet Reform », *Journal of the Royal Asiatic Society*, vol.20, no.1, 2010, p.13.

²⁷⁰ Altynbaev, Kanat. « Kazakhs express approval of new Latin-based alphabet », *Caravanserai*, May, 5th, 2021. [Retrieved on May, 11th, 2021].

²⁷¹ Wood, Margaret. « Latinizing the Turkish Alphabet: A Study in the Introduction of a Cultural Change », *American Journal of Sociology*, vol.35, no.2, 1929, p.194.

We can conclude this short introductory section by tying up the two concepts we have covered: language nationalism and modernity. Drawing on Nursultan Nazarbayev's speeches on the future of the Kazakh nation and on the example of Kemalist Turkey, we can argue that, as Calhoun states, nationalism and modernity are complementary. Indeed, nationalists have pursued the goal of modernizing the nation as modernization holds the promise of prosperity and integration.

3.2.2. Kazakh in the Latin script, a modern language fit for globalization

We argue that Kazakh-language nationalism, in a way not dissimilar (but not entirely comparable) to Turkish-language nationalism in the 1920s and 1930s, seeks to obtain the benefits associated with a globalized modernity through the Latinization (and thus modernization) of the Kazakh language. Before properly assessing Kazakh's switch to Latin, it is necessary to once again reprise Nursultan Nazarbayev's 'Kazakhstan-2050' and 'Course towards the future: modernization of Kazakhstan's identity' speeches, as they outline the policy's roadmap. Afterwards, our argument will focus on the switch to Latin and its discursive implications. We argue that the goal of 'modernizing' the Kazakh language constitutes an example of language nationalism interacting with globalization, as it wishes to integrate Kazakh to globalized modernity as a way to ensure its endurance. Interestingly, Kazakh-language nationalism sees Latin Kazakh itself as a means to integrate the Kazakh nation to said modernity.

The transition to the Latin script was announced in December 2012 by then president Nursultan Nazarbayev. In a 2017 speech, he publicly disclosed the government's roadmap in latinizing the Kazakh language : « In December 2012, in my annual State of the Nation Address to the People of Kazakhstan "Kazakhstan – 2050", **I said that we need to begin changing our alphabet into the Latin alphabet starting from 2025.** This means that we must begin switching to the Latin alphabet in all spheres. In other words, **by 2025, we will start publishing workflows, periodicals, textbooks and everything else in the Latin alphabet.** And we must now start preparing for this transition which has its own strong logic.²⁷² » *Gazeta* journalist Ekaterina Suslova offers an in-depth analysis of the transition. Interestingly, she quotes Nazarbayev : « In mid-September 2017, Nazarbayev even stated that the Cyrillic script « distorts » the Kazakh language.

²⁷² Nazarbayev, 2017, op. cit.

« In the Kazakh language, there is no « щ », « ю », « я », « ь »²⁷³. By using these letters, we distort the Kazakh language. That is why, by introducing the Latin script, we make it simple. »²⁷⁴ ». This argument echoes that of 20th century Kemalist Turkey, the latter stating the Latin script was more adapted to the Turkish language than the hitherto prevalent Arabic abjad. The annex below displays the definitive version of the Latin script which is to be used for the Kazakh language:

ЖАҢА ҚАЗАҚ ӘЛПБИІ

№	латынша	кирилше	әріптің атауы	№	латынша	кирилше	әріптің атауы
1	A a	А а	<i>а</i>	18	O o	О о	<i>о</i>
2	Ä ä	Ә ә	<i>ә</i>	19	Ö ö	Ө ө	<i>ө</i>
3	B b	Б б	<i>бы</i>	20	P p	П п	<i>пы</i>
4	D d	Д д	<i>ды</i>	21	Q q	Қ қ	<i>қы</i>
5	E e	Е е	<i>е</i>	22	R r	Р р	<i>ыр</i>
6	F f	Ф ф	<i>фы</i>	23	S s	С с	<i>сы</i>
7	G g	Г г	<i>гі</i>	24	Ş ş	Ш ш	<i>шы</i>
8	Ĝ ğ	Ғ ғ	<i>ғы</i>	25	T t	Т т	<i>ты</i>
9	H h	Х х, Н н	<i>һы</i>	26	U u	У у	<i>ұу</i>
10	İ i	Й й, И и	<i>йй</i>	27	Ū ū	Ұ ұ	<i>ұ</i>
11	I i	І і	<i>і</i>	28	Ū ū	Ү ү	<i>ү</i>
12	J j	Ж ж	<i>жы</i>	29	V v	В в	<i>вы</i>
13	K k	К к	<i>кі</i>	30	Y y	Ы ы	<i>ы</i>
14	L l	Л л	<i>ыл</i>	31	Z z	З з	<i>зы</i>
15	M m	М м	<i>мы</i>	*С, X, W таңбалары цитаталық принциппен жазылатын шеттілдік сөздерде қолданылады.			
16	N n	Н н	<i>ны</i>				
17	D ŋ	Ң ң	<i>ың</i>				



Figure 6. The New Kazakh alphabet. Courtesy to the *Astana Times*.

<https://astanatimes.com/2021/02/kazakhstan-presents-new-latin-alphabet-plans-gradual-transition-through-2031/>

The State program for the implementation of the language policy of the Republic of Kazakhstan for 2020-2050 suggests that 50% of publications be written in the Latin script by 2025²⁷⁵. The aforementioned roadmap has known some changes since its initial draft. Indeed,

²⁷³ This is a reference to the existence of Russian-only sounds in Kazakh Cyrillic. In Chapter I, we stressed how dramatic this aspect was in allowing Russian loanwords to flow into Kazakh unaltered.

²⁷⁴ Suslova, op. cit.

²⁷⁵ Bekmurzaev, op. cit., p.8.

following the events of January 2022, president Tokayev has advised not to rush the process of Latinization, stressing the sensitive aspect of language policy²⁷⁶.

Beyond simplicity of use, the switch to Latin answers to the « requirement of the modern world and a step towards the integration into the common informational space and the global system of science and culture²⁷⁷ » for both the Kazakh language and the Kazakh nation. Nazarbayev also stresses the importance of Latinizing the Kazakh language for educational purposes, stating that if Kazakhs students are well-versed in the Latin script, they will surely integrate English quicker²⁷⁸. In other words, as Ekaterina Suslova explains, letting Cyrillic go means to « embrace contemporary technological, communicative and even scientific processes of the 21st century²⁷⁹. » In the scope of our interviews and four-month strategic watch on Kazakh social media, usage of the Latin Kazakh script seemed to be on the rise. A Kazakh interviewee working in the music industry even stated :

« To be honest, I didn't even notice it when it happened but at some point **everyone starting writing in the Latin script** when it [first] appeared. »

« Честно говоря сам не заметил как так получилось но в какой-то момент **все начали расписывать на латинице** когда она появилась. »

We argue that the switch to Latin bears both genuine and discursive intents, which see the promotion of the Kazakh language in the Latin script as both a means to modernity, and an end to be pursued. Subjectively, it means the adaptation of the national language to the requirements of 21st century globalized modernity, the latter dominated by the Latin script and European languages. Adapting Kazakh to contemporary paradigms may be seen as a way for the language to endure through the hardships of aversive effects of 21st century international relations (neo-imperialism, cultural homogenization...), and instead thrive in said contemporary paradigms. In this sense, the promotion of the Kazakh language is also seen as a *tool* for integrating the Kazakh nation to the

²⁷⁶ Pavlenko, Oles'ya. « Tokayev suggests not to rush switch from Cyrillic to Latin » [Токаев предложил не спешить с переходом с кириллицы на латиницу], *Kommersant*, 17th February 2022. [Retrieved on February, 28th 2022]

²⁷⁷ Bekmurzaev, op. cit., p.7.

²⁷⁸ Nazarbayev, 2017, op. cit.

²⁷⁹ Suslova, op. cit.

circle of modern, globally integrated nations. As *Zakon* journalist Tatyana Usitnova explains, « Such a universal and global script will allow linguistic intelligibility [...] with most countries that use the Latin script²⁸⁰. » Constructivist theories help explicit the discursive undertone inherent to this belief. Indeed, discursively, this also permits the Kazakh nation to *display* the modernity of its language to the world. As Suslova underscores, this also enables Nur-Sultan to assert its independence vis-à-vis Moscow²⁸¹.

This example allows us to outline a kind of language nationalism which wishes to engage in 21st century globalization *on its terms*. In this case, Kazakh-language nationalism pushes for the latinizing (and thus modernizing) of the Kazakh language in order to: a) ensure its survival and relevance on the international, Latin-dominated stage, b) use Latin-written Kazakh to propell the Kazakh nation in the circle of modern, global nations. Another decisive aspect of the switch to Latin its use as a tool of diaspora policy.

3.2.3 One Latin script as the promise of language communion of ethnic Kazakhs across the world

More than a gateway to modernity, the promotion of a Latin-script Kazakh constitutes a tool of diaspora nationalism, for it aims to bolster the use and prestige of the national language among the diaspora. Once again, Appadurai's statement that « nationalistic genie has become diasporic²⁸² » echoes with this observation. After introducing the many scripts in which the Kazakh language is written abroad (and the resulting obstacles to mutual intelligibility), we shall outline the effects Kazakh-language nationalism hopes to achieve by switching from the Cyrillic alphabet to a more universal, globalized Latin-script Kazakh. Said effects are difficult to quantify as the Latin Kazakh script is still in its infancy, but can be speculated based on individual experiences from members of the Kazakh diaspora.

Prior to the progressive implementation of the Latin script, Kazakh-language nationalism was in an awkward state whereby the Kazakh-speaking diaspora could not be efficiently addressed.

²⁸⁰ Ustinova, Tatyana. « Ethnic Kazakhs don't know Kazakh » [Этнические казахи не знают казахского], *Zakon.kz*, 26th June 2017. [Retrieved on May, 3rd 2022]

²⁸¹ Suslova, op. cit.

²⁸² Appadurai, op. cit., p.160.

Indeed, no less than three writing systems are currently used to write the Kazakh language. In Turkish Kazakh communities, both in Turkey and in the Western world, the Latin script is in use. In Kazakhstan, Central Asia and among expats from Kazakhstan abroad, the Cyrillic alphabet has been in use since the 1940s. In China, while written with the Latin script from the 1960s to the 1980s, the Kazakh language is nowadays written with the Perso-Arabic abjad once prevalent in Central Asia. This result in a pluricentric language. A pluricentric language denotes a situation whereby one language is regulated by more than one regulatory body, resulting in more than one standard form²⁸³. A notable example of pluricentric language is Serbo-Croatian, which is written in the Latin script in Croatia, and with the Cyrillic script in Serbia, Montenegro and Bosnia and Herzegovina. While the differences between the Croatian and Serbian standards are more profound than those of, for instance, Turkey Kazakh and Xinjiang Kazakh²⁸⁴, the absence of a common writing system permits comparison within measure. Below pictured, a table displaying the three standards in use for the Kazakh language (the Latin version is the most recent version which was agreed upon):

Latin alphabet (as of 2021)	Cyrillic script (official in Kazakhstan)	Perso-Arabic abjad (official in Xinjiang)
Barlyq adamdar tumysynan azat jāne qadir-qasietı men qūqyqtary teñ bolyp dūniege keledı.	Барлық адамдар тумысынан азат және қадір-қасиеті мен құқықтары тең болып дүниеге келеді.	ارلىق ادامدار تۇمىسىنان ازات جانە قادىر-قاسىيەتى مەن كۇقىقتارى تەڭ بولىپ دۇنيەگە كەلەدۇ.

Figure 7. First sentence of article 1 of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights in all three Kazakh alphabets. Courtesy to Wikipedia article *Kazakh Alphabets*²⁸⁵.

This pluricentric situation makes intelligibility between Kazakh speakers from around the world difficult. A 2017 article from Kazakhstani journalist Tatyana Ustinova for Kazakh newspaper *Zakon* does an efficient job at highlighting the problems the lack of a common alphabet generates. Quoting members from the Kazakh diaspora, the article explains that : « It turns out that when reading, we have three languages. And we cannot understand each other, we cannot understand the

²⁸³ Stewart, William. « A sociolinguistic typology for describing national multilingualism », *Readings in the Sociology of Language*, 1968, pp.534-535.

²⁸⁴ The Serbo-Croatian language is traversed by isoglosses as it constitutes a dialect continuum. In other words, the Croatian and Serbian standards may exhibit differences in pronunciation, verb conjugation and vocabulary.

²⁸⁵ Retrieved at : https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Kazakh_alphabets. [Retrieved on May, 7th, 2022].

script. It distances us²⁸⁶. » An ethnic Kazakh from Germany explains that young Kazakhs only speak the language at home or with elders, as « of course, they cannot read [Cyrillic]²⁸⁷. » As a result, access to Kazakh-language content from Kazakhstan, whether it be online or on paper format, turns out to be impossible for Kazakhs not acquainted with the Cyrillic script. Gulnara Mendikova stresses this dramatic aspect, as the existence of three alphabets « [c]onsiderably complicates comprehension, the approach of literature and written documents, sent by Kazakhstan to Kazakh communities in Western Europe²⁸⁸. » We can thus argue that this status quo hinders Kazakhstan's diaspora policy. As the Migration Research Hub defines it, « diaspora engagement policies consist of a variety of government measures aimed at **engaging, maintaining or developing a relationship with their diaspora living abroad**.²⁸⁹ » In the case of Kazakhstan, the lack of a common alphabet makes all three aspects of diaspora policy cumbersome and of little efficiency.

This difficulty also proves problematic in regard to Kazakhstan's *Oralman* policy. Indeed, the Cyrillic script is disorienting from *Oralman* from areas which use other scripts to write the Kazakh language. As Astrid Cerny explains, « Although China Kazaks speak the newly instated national language, and are freed from the pressure to have their children educated in Chinese language schools, most China Kazaks are used to Arabic-based script while the older generations were taught in Romanized Kazak. **Kazak language in Kazakhstan is Cyrillic-based and this has contributed to less than seamless integration of the new immigrants**²⁹⁰. » This was already reported the 2006 U.N.D.P. report, the latter stressing the poor integration *Oralman* children face when enrolling Kazakh-medium schools, as prior knowledge of the Cyrillic script is usually non-existent²⁹¹.

²⁸⁶ Ustinova, op. cit.

²⁸⁷ We Project. « Ethnic Kazakhs from Europe about diasporas in different countries and preservation of the Kazakh language », February, 8th, 2019. [Retrieved on April, 30th, 2022].

²⁸⁸ Mendikulova, op. cit., p.27.

²⁸⁹ Definition from the Migration Research Hub website. Retrieved at: <https://migrationresearch.com/taxonomies/topics-migration-governance-migration-policy-and-law-diaspora-engagement-policies#:~:text=Diasporas%20refer%20to%20migrants%20or,with%20their%20diaspora%20living%20abroad.> [Retrieved on May, 11th, 2022].

²⁹⁰ Cerny, op. cit., p.239.

²⁹¹ Zeveleva, op. cit., p.20.

In this context, we can understand the latinization of Kazakh as a means to promote an intelligible, universal version of written Kazakh to co-ethnics worldwide, thus facilitating Nur-Sultan's diaspora policy. According to Ustinova's 2017 article, the Latin script is seen by Kazakh officials as a more than facilitating intercomprehension with countries that use it as it allows for « linguistic intelligibility among all Kazakhs²⁹². » The website *We Project*, which compiles testimonies from members of the Kazakh diaspora, quotes a Kazakh man who says : « My wife and I speak Kazakh. Previously, when the Kazakh alphabet was written in Cyrillic, it was difficult for us. **Now we find films on YouTube in the Kazakh language and show them to children.** Previously, the Kazakhs who moved to England spoke in Russian. **Now I notice young people speak Kazakh more and more.**²⁹³ » Here, the increase in consumption of Kazakh-language media is congruent with the increase in Latin-script content, allowing for members of the Kazakh diaspora to pass on the Kazakh to younger generations, an impossible feat before the introduction of the Latin script.

These observations allow us to argue that Kazakh-language nationalism forms a tool of trans-border nationalism²⁹⁴, as it helps Kazakhstan maintain its prestige and influence among the diaspora, but also ethnic Kazakhs living across the Russian, Uzbek, Kyrgyz and Chinese borders. This argument permits us to conclude the core hypotheses formulated in this section, where we have argued that the promotion of the Latin script for the Kazakh language pursues the goals of: a) the endurance and integration of the language to globalization, thus ensuring its survival, b) *using* this newly integrated and globalized language as a way to propel the Kazakh nation to the circle of developed nations, c) unite Kazakhs across the world around one modern script, allowing for more efficient diaspora policy, and thus trans-border nationalism.

²⁹² Ustinova, op. cit.

²⁹³ We Project, op. cit.

²⁹⁴ Lesińska, Magdalena & Héjj, Dominik. « Pragmatic Trans-Border Nationalism: A Comparative Analysis of Poland's and Hungary's Policies Towards Kin-Minorities in the Twenty-First Century », *Ethnopolitics*, 20:1, 2021, p.53.

3.3 The delicate endeavor of trans-border language nationalism

Just as the ‘defensive’ language nationalism we covered in the first chapter, a language nationalism which seeks to influence its diaspora and trans-border Kazakh communities necessarily treads on the sovereignty of other nations. It has been posited that ethnic Kazakhs from China view themselves « as part of a greater cross-regional Kazakh population²⁹⁵ », thus allowing us to endow Kazakh-language nationalism with trans-border qualities. This section wishes to highlight that even when engaging with globalization and modernity on its terms, Kazakh-language nationalism is oftentimes confronted with a harsh reality. Indeed, the *Oralman* policy (which we covered in section 3.2) is seen, as many, as incomplete and lackluster when it comes to the proper integration of *Oralman*. This brings into question its efficiency as a tool of nationalist language policy. Furthermore, it is at risk of upsetting influential, major foreign powers such as the Russian Federation and China.

3.3.1. Logistic and socioeconomic difficulties of the *Oralman* policy

The *Oralman* policy’s ideological and linguistic foundations are rather clear: promoting the Kazakh language within Kazakhstan thanks to globalized migratory flows. While section 3.2 presented the intents and justifications of Kazakhstan’s repatriation policy, this section tentatively assesses its effects. Upon inspecting testimonies from Oralmanar, it is clear that the *Oralman* policy is not as efficient in meeting its goals as envisioned.

The Diplomat’s Catherine Wood, in her article on the Oralman, documented apprehension among the Oralman themselves when it comes to integration in Kazakhstan. Quoted in the article, an Oralman family before they emigrated to Kazakhstan « [A]sks the camera, “Will they like us? Will they accept us?”²⁹⁶ ». Astrid Cerny highlights the uncertain quality of emigration to Kazakhstan, saying that « Based on my research with pastoral Kazaks (henceforth ‘China Kazaks’) in Xinjiang, I argue that although the Kazakhstan emigration opportunity is an important new

²⁹⁵ Cerny, op. cit., p.225.

²⁹⁶ Wood, op. cit.

option for these Kazaks to choose a sustainable future, **it contains at least the same level of risk as their life in China – and additional constraints.**²⁹⁷ »

Said constraints are manifold: poor employment opportunities, low social standing, trouble adapting to the russified, sedentary culture of contemporary Kazakhstan, xenophobia and prejudice from Kazakhstanis... Cerny identifies « lack of preparedness and thoroughness of Oralman integration²⁹⁸ » as causing the Oralman to either « rely on the trial and error method, or their own relatives who have emigrated earlier », thus making them potential victims of corruption and abuse at the hands of local Kazakhstanis²⁹⁹. Nurtaikyzy stresses the widespread prejudice held against the Oralman in Kazakhstan, quoting a 2014 survey conducted among a younger population which found that « 14 percent of respondents did not wish to live near ethnic repatriates³⁰⁰ ». As a result, Oralman repatriates often find themselves become second-class citizens³⁰¹ in a state which specifically advocated for and organized their return. Discrimination against ethnic- or co-national-repatriates is not unheard of. Two examples highlight the limits of repatriation policies in the scope of nation building: the Beta Israel³⁰² in Israel, and Spätaussiedler from Central Asia in Germany. While the Beta Israel are subjected to recurrent abuse and discrimination³⁰³, Spätaussiedler from Central Asia — no matter their education — struggle with unemployment rates higher than both local Germans and recent immigrants from other backgrounds³⁰⁴. As a result of the discrimination and economic hardships the Oralman experience when emigrating to Kazakhstan, many never fully integrate in Kazakhstani society³⁰⁵.

²⁹⁷ Cerny, op. cit., p.220.

²⁹⁸ *Ibid.*, p.240.

²⁹⁹ *Ibid.*

³⁰⁰ Nurtaikyzy, op. cit., p.20.

³⁰¹ Cerny, op. cit.

³⁰² The Beta Israel are a Jewish ethnic group originating in the Ethiopian Highlands. They were almost entirely repatriated to Israel in the 1980s.

³⁰³ Jordan, Holly. « Black, Poor and Jewish: The Ostracism of Ethiopian Jews in Modern Israel », *Migration Policy and Practice*, 2016, pp.180-182.

³⁰⁴ Brück-Klingberg et al. « Verkehrte Welt: Spätaussiedler mit höherer Bildung sind öfter arbeitslos », *IAB-Kurzbericht*, no. 8, 2007, p.3.

³⁰⁵ Nurtaikyzy, op. cit. p.20.

A final, noteworthy limitation of the *Oralman* policy is, as we mentioned in section 3.1.2., the tendency of Oralmanar to emigrate in Kazakh-speaking areas, mostly in the Lesser or Greater Jüz. The Middle Jüz, spanning North-Central and Northeast Kazakhstan, was precisely the desired area of Oralman settlement for Nur-Sultan, which wished to both « restore the ethnic balance³⁰⁶ » of the region and promote its use of the Kazakh-language. The fact that the *Nurly Qosh* program, aimed at funneling Oralmanar to North-Central and Northeastern Kazakhstan, was called off the year of its implementation is a telling proof of Nur-Sultan's relative lack of control upon Oralman settlement patterns. In terms of Kazakh-language usage and proficiency in the targeted regions, quantitative results of the *Oralman* policy are difficult to assess. Based on the references used in this chapter, we speculate that they may be disappointing to Nur-Sultan.

These observations allow us to underscore two main limitations the use of globalized flows of people as tool of nationalist language policy encounters. Firstly, and corroborated by other examples such as the Beta Israel and Central Asian Spätaussiedler, the nation, its definition and boundaries are not as easily integrated by human groups the nation views as its kinsmen. In other words, ethnic repatriates, even though Nur-Sultan views them as heralds of the national language, constitute local Kazakhs' *other*³⁰⁷. Secondly, globalized flows are elusive as they ebb and flow according to logics not entirely within Nur-Sultan's control. More critically, the *Oralman* policy appears to be a rather unpredictable instrument of language planning, as repatriates have not been settling the regions in need of Kazakh-speakers in numbers. As a result, the status of the Kazakh language is reinforced in its traditional stronghold, the South, while its use remains scarce in Northern cities such as Petropavl, Öskemen and Pavlodar.

We can thus identify the limitations of a 'globalization-wielding' Kazakh-language nationalism as practical, logistical and normative, as globalization as a tool to promote the Kazakh language can prove unpredictable and unreliable.

³⁰⁶ Nurtaikyzy, op. cit., pp.19-20.

³⁰⁷ Arntz, op. cit., p.53.

3.3.2 Between a rock and hard place: the case of Xinjiang's Kazakhs

Limited logistically, 'globalization-wielding' language-nationalism is also limited and limiting in the scope of Kazakhstan's international relations as an instance of trans-border language nationalism. Along with Mongolia's ethnic Kazakhs, Xinjiang Kazakhs are part of a trans-border community of Kazakhs³⁰⁸, with families sometimes on both sides of the border. By incentivizing their return (or emigration) to Kazakhstan, Nur-Sultan positions itself as an actor of trans-border nationalism. As ideological justifications for the return of Xinjiang Kazakhs revolve around the arguments that Xinjiang Kazakhs are keepers of a pristine, non-Russified Kazakh language, we argue that they are the also object of said kind of language nationalism. Since the 2010s, Xinjiang Kazakhs, along with the Uighurs, have been subjected to systemic abuse by Chinese authorities, in an effort to invisibilize and erase Muslim minorities in an increasingly Han Xinjiang³⁰⁹. This section wishes to stress the limits of language nationalism when implemented at a regional trans-border scale, here the *Oralman* policy and narrative.

The *Oralman* policy, in addition to its many flaws and limitations, finds itself entangled in a complex international game of subtle maneuvers and balancing, whereby offending a powerful China constitutes the least desirable outcome to Nur-Sultan. This proves especially problematic to Nur-Sultan's balancing as both *Oralman* and national-patriots have put Kazakhstan in a delicate position. Early in the Xinjiang crisis, ethnic Kazakhs started fleeing to Kazakhstan illegally³¹⁰, usually by crossing the Kazakh-Chinese border by foot. To the national-patriots, ethnic kin is to be given special treatment, and many national-patriots took on the task of assisting new arrivals from Xinjiang by providing them shelter. A national-patriot organization known to assist newcomers from Xinjiang is Atajurt, a non-official human rights organization whose goal is to help Xinjiang Kazakhs and advocate in their favor. Soon, however, their task would turn out to consist mainly of hiding the refugees³¹¹, as, in an antithetical turn of events, Nur-Sultan began orchestrating the

³⁰⁸ Lacaze, Gaëlle. « Le choix du mouvement : stratégie(s) communautaire(s) des Kazakhs-Mongols », *Revue européenne des migrations internationales*, vol. 26, no.3, 2010, p.173.

³⁰⁹ Rickleton, Chris. « Kazakhstan: After Xinjiang, the long road to recovery », *Eurasianet*, September, 11th 2019. [Retrieved on April, 30th 2022].

³¹⁰ Umirbekov, Darkhan. « Kazakhstan: Chinese Kazakhs arrested, face trial in remote location », *Eurasianet*, October, 15th 2019. [Retrieved on May, 1st 2022].

³¹¹ *Ibid.*

expulsion of many of them³¹². As *The Diplomat* explains, « What the ethnic Kazakhs and Kyrgyz in Xinjiang's camps have that Uyghurs don't **is a neighboring state that has, in the past, claimed them as brethren.**³¹³ » To Xinjiang refugees, Kazakhstan's unwillingness to help them is thus surprising, as the country has been promoting Kazakhstan as the homeland of all Kazakhs at a trans-border scale in the scope of its *Oralman policy*.

This has generated a considerable rift between the Kazakh government and Kazakh nationalist groups. Indeed, while Nur-Sultan has always maintained an ambiguous relation to formations such as Ult Tagdyry or Atajurt, this particular topic sees a clear opposition. Atajurt has made « campaigning to draw international attention to the plight of ethnic Kazakhs in China » its international priority³¹⁴. Some cases of Xinjiang Kazakhs have gained international attention. Pictured below, an Atajurt activist demonstrating on October, 1st, 2019. One notices the use of the Kazakh Latin script on Atajurt's logo reading *Atajurt Erikitleri*, meaning *Atajurt Volunteers*.

³¹² Umirbekov, op. cit.

³¹³ Putz, Catherine. « Central Asians Organize to Draw Attention to Xinjiang Camps », *The Diplomat*, December, 4th 2018. [Retrieved on May, 10th 2022].

³¹⁴ Umirbekov, op. cit.



Annex 8. An Atajurt activist in 2019. Courtesy to the Society of Threatened People's Twitter account. <https://twitter.com/Rightsbehindyou/status/1179035309587042304?cxt=HHwWgMCg2cCX49wgAAAA>

A heavily mediatized case was that of Sayragul Sauytbay, who was arrested in Kazakhstan « for illegally crossing the border to join her husband and children, who had been living in Kazakhstan since 2016 and had become citizens³¹⁵ ». After many unsuccessful appeals to prevent her deportation back to China, Sauytbay ended up seeking asylum in Sweden, where she currently lives.

Nur-Sultan's apparent lack of sympathy to the very kinsmen it acclaimed as heralds of an authentic Kazakh language and culture is rather unsurprising, given the geopolitical context in which Kazakhstan finds itself. We can reprise *Eurasianet*'s astute statement that the Kazakh government finds itself in « [T]he awkward position of having to **prioritize between its relations with important economic partner China**, which will almost certainly push hard to have the men returned forthwith, and the **increasingly inflamed sentiments of Kazakh nationalists and people exercised by Beijing's excessive clout**.³¹⁶ » In a way similar to its treatment of Kazakh nationalists vocal in their mistrust of Russia, Nur-Sultan has detained Atajurt activists such as Serkijan Bilach. The latter was prosecuted for inciting ethnic hatred³¹⁷, a ruling not unlike that of anti-Russian Kazakh nationalists in the wake of the 2012 Janaozen riots³¹⁸.

This last section allows for a discussion of the limits the trans-border aspect of Kazakh-language nationalism (here, the *Oralman* policy) encounters. As for the defensive kind of language nationalism we analyzed in chapter II, 'globalization-wielding' language nationalism is potentially limiting of Nur-Sultan's multi-vector and balancing policies. Indeed, addressing trans-border and diasporic Kazakh communities can be met with a fierce response from the countries in which they reside. Well aware of this danger, Kazakh officials have thus carefully avoided addressing the topic, and have gone countercurrent to the *Oralman* policy.

Conclusion

If Kazakh-language nationalism often sees globalization and international relations as a threat, parts of it bear a 'globalization-wielding' aspect, as it tries to bend globalization's forces in

³¹⁵ Putz, op. cit.

³¹⁶ Umirbekov, op. cit.

³¹⁷ trad. Palisson, Miriam. « Le Kazakhstan éteint le mégaphone du Xinjiang », *Global Voices*, March, 19th 2019. [Retrieved on May, 9th, 2022].

³¹⁸ See Chapter II.

favor of the Kazakh language. This chapter reviewed two such instances: the *Oralman* policy and the switch to the Latin script. In the first example, globalized migratory flows are put to use as instruments of language planning in favor of the Kazakh language. In the second example, the promotion of the Latin script for Kazakh language is both a means for the Kazakh nation to integrate a globalized modernity and an end, as it prevents the language from ‘missing out’ on globalization. Both instances constitute examples of diaspora nationalism, as the Kazakh diaspora is seen as a relay of Kazakh-language nationalism. ‘Globalization-wielding’ language nationalism is three dimensional in nature, as it constitutes: a) an end met by bending globalized forces to its advantage, a means to b) bending such forces and c) integrating in a globalized world. As we have stressed, this integration is not absolute and has to be done on Nur-Sultan’s terms, as to not alter its vision of Kazakhness. As a kind of trans-border nationalism, it is at risk of upsetting foreign powers where ethnic Kazakhs live, such as China. The latter’s fearsome nature has compelled Nur-Sultan to, at times, go countercurrent to the *Oralman* policy.

Chapter 4: When language nationalism embraces globalization: the case of contemporary Kazakh-language pop culture

This chapter will study Kazakh language nationalism as a phenomenon embedded, and willfully so, in globalization. Two key features of contemporary Kazakh language nationalism shall be studied as potent vectors of soft power, nation branding and liberal discursive strategies: Q-Pop and Kazakh language digital artists on social media. As Mihelj and Giménez-Martinez explain, nationalism can nowadays be understood as « [E]veryday life and mundane practices taken for granted³¹⁹ », supporting a level of language nationalism other than legislation and political formations. The works of Hutchinson and Sumy provide much of the theoretical basis allowing us to postulate the existence of a ‘post-classical’ Kazakh language nationalism embedded in global flows. Hutchinson states that « Ethnic formations, when strongly institutionalized, are subjected to recurring external challenges of different kinds which may result in internally generated innovation.³²⁰ » In Kazakhstan’s case, such challenges have already be largely identified: Russian irredentism, Chinese ambitions in Central Asia, and globalization’s cultural homogenization. We argue that Q-Pop and Kazakh language digital art are such innovations, that, unlike official and classical language nationalism, view globalization as an opportunity³²¹. Anthony D. Smith lays the foundation of such a conception of globalization, stating that « [F]ar from homogenizing the world, global flows of people, goods, media and technology have modified and diversified indigenous cultures³²². » This chapter will make use of the one in-person interviews with Kazakhs involved in the music industry, and the additional five online interviews with Kazakh language digital artists from Instagram and Twitter, conducted from March 2022 to April 2022.

³¹⁹ Mihelj, op. cit., p.334-335.

³²⁰ Hutchinson, op. cit., p.88.

³²¹ Sabanadzé, op. cit., p.174.

³²² Smith, Anthony. « Nationalism and global culture », *Nationalism and Globalisation, conflicting or complementary?* ed. Halikiopoulou & Vasiliopoulou, 2011, p.159.

4.1 Q-Pop as a vector of soft power in favor of the Kazakh language

Kazakhstan's Q-Pop's advent has drawn attention for its role in popularizing the Kazakh language among younger Kazakhs and Kazakhstanis. As Appadurai argues, a cornerstone of nation building is the the « [shared], collective experience of reading books, pamphlets, newspapers [...]»³²³. We argue that music is an integral part of such collective experience, with Q-Pop a strong vector of language nationalism within Kazakhstan. Most studies focusing on contemporary Kazakh language pop have, however, tended not to leave the national scale, as research on the international aspects of Kazakh language nationalism through Q-Pop have seldom been studied in depth (with the notable exception of Kakim Danabayev). Thus, our research offers to delve into Q-Pop role, as a 'post-classical', globalized instance of language nationalism, in popularizing the Kazakh language abroad and strengthening Kazakhstan's soft power. We shall stress the globalized aspect of said phenomenon, Q-Pop performers and recruiters being eager to *engage* in a globalization which they see as an opportunity for the Kazakh language to thrive and make Kazakhstan known in the world.

4.1.1 Short introduction to Kazakh pop's rise to prominence

The term Q-Pop broadly refers to a new genre of Kazakh language pop which arose in the early- to mid-2010s. In contrast with previous music genres from Kazakhstan, Q-Pop makes extensive use of globalized fashion standards, being notorious for its brightly colored hairstyles and fashionable dressing style. This section will aim at reviewing Q-Pop's history and place within Kazakh language music, before introducing its core actors and features.

Before the 2010s, the most popular, contemporary music genre in Kazakhstan was *toi*, which featured rhythmical, easy going songs usually played at *tois* (Kazakh evening parties or gatherings). Then lacking funding, Kazakh language musicians oftentimes performed at private *tois*, where they could be paid handsomely. As a result, much of Kazakhstan's pop music predating Q-Pop funneled towards the *toi* genre, being produced in order to be performed as such private gatherings³²⁴. The lack of depths to the Kazakh-language lyrics, as well as the lucrative intent behind the production of *toi* music earned an increasingly negative perception among the younger

³²³ Appadurai, op. cit., p.161.

³²⁴ Information on the *toi* genre and business were provided by friend Almas ZHALGASBEK.

population of Kazakhstanis, and contributed to Kazakh-language pop music (and by extension the Kazakh language) being seen as cheap, unsophisticated and uneducated. This reinforced the harmful prejudice associated with rural Kazakh speakers, them being sometimes perceived by parts of the Russophone (Kazakh and non-Kazakh like) as boorish, ill-mannered and tempered³²⁵.

Contemporary Q-Pop seems to have come in response to this perceived lack of sophistication in Kazakh-language music. Cultural entrepreneurs belonging to alternative musical genres, began pushing for a new genre of Kazakh language pop music. The most notorious is Erbolat Bedelkhan, which founded the Juz Entertainment company in 2014, in the hopes of fostering new Kazakh talents and promote the Kazakh language through pop music³²⁶. One of the may efforts behind the advent of Q-Pop is of unmistakable nationalist essence, as it seeks to promote the Kazakh language as the language of not only ethnic Kazakhs, but the whole Kazakhstani nation³²⁷. It was Juz Entertainment that gave rise to Kazakhstan's first Q-Pop group, Ninety One. From then on, the studio recruited and formed Kazakh language artists in a way identical to those in South Korea³²⁸. Stylistic origins of the newly formed genre point heavily to K-Pop, Danabayev explaining that, in essence, Q-Pop « mainly developed from K-Pop³²⁹ ». In this regard, a discussion whether Q-Pop could be considered as a hybrid genre (similar to J-Pop or K-Pop) is indicated, as while stylistically similar to K-Pop, Q-Pop also draws from American rap.. Ninety One, and subsequent girls- and boys-bands, brought the Kazakh language to new artistic heights, putting its particular grammar and sonority to use in order to produce deep, well-thought lyrics. Where *toi* would aim for easy-going lyrics and titles (one noteworthy example being the song *Marija Magdalena*³³⁰), Q-Pop metaphorizes and alliterates, helping the Kazakh language be seen as a language just as sophisticated as any other. Furthermore, the genre incorporates elements of Kazakh tradition and customs, thus positioning itself as a participant in the country's nation-

³²⁵ Blackburn, op. cit., p.229.

³²⁶ Khagai, Marina. « They did without 'toi', how Kazakhstan's most provocative group lives », [Взяли без тоя: как живет самая провокационная группа из Казахстана Ninety One], *Caravan*, June, 29th 2021. [Retrieved on April, 18th, 2022].

³²⁷ Danabayev, Kakim. « Q-pop as a Phenomenon to Enhance New Nationalism in Post-Soviet Kazakhstan », *Asia Review*, March 2020, p.13.

³²⁸ Otan, Merey. « Not suitable for Kazakhs? authenticity and national identity in contemporary Kazakhstan » [Thesis], Nazarbayev University, 2019, p.109.

³²⁹ Danabayev, op. cit., p.5.

³³⁰ 'Marija Magdalena' refers to Saint Mary Magdalen. According to Almas, the title does not bear any spiritual meaning. Rather, it was chosen because it 'sounded good'.

building. Within Kazakhstan, Q-Pop has undoubtedly greatly benefited the Kazakh language and its rise to prestige.

Interestingly, Q-Pop constitutes an essentially bottom-up initiative, that has received ambiguous responses from the top. Themes covered by Q-Pop songs, and especially those by Ninety One, graze untold taboos of Kazakh society, such as corruption and conservatism. An instance is the aptly named *Taboo*, a Ninety One piece featuring the group Irina Kayratnova. The lyrics of the song decry judgmental (and often conservative³³¹) media and music entrepreneurs, and indirectly name said people by vaguely sounding like their name and surname. For instance, the stanza « **баяндайм ала көзінді ойып** » (*banyadaim ala közindi ойып*), meaning « I'll tell you my story and smash your evil eye », was made as to loosely resemble the name of music industry tycoon and notorious critic of Ninety One Bayan Alaguzova³³². As it started as an under- and countercurrent to Kazakhstan's music scene, Q-Pop mainly spread through social media such as Instagram and Tik Tok, and artists received funding through private performances at parties³³³. This has led the Q-Pop genre to become somewhat independent from official funding.

Erbolat Bedelkhan, the driving force behind labels such as Juz Entertainment, as well as former Ninety One group member Dulat Mukhametkali stated in a 2018 speech that « just like K-Pop », Q-Pop was to become a business for Kazakhstan³³⁴. Forbes journalist Viktor Budrin, in his 2019 article « Why is it important to develop Kazakhstan's 'soft power'? », makes special reference to Kazakhstan's young and talented population that operates in the sphere of culture and music³³⁵ as a means to export the Kazakh language and culture abroad. The following section will analyze Q-Pop and its role in popularizing the Kazakh language both domestically and abroad as an instance of language nationalism. We will argue said role is successfully attained.

³³¹ Ekstrom, Marin & Yermukhametova, Assiya. « Q-Pop: A Musical Expression of Kazakhstan's National and Global Identity », *The Diplomat*, July, 7th 2021. [Retrieved on April, 20th 2022].

³³² Translation and information from Almas ZHALGASBEK.

³³³ Information from Almas ZHALGASBEK.

³³⁴ Otan, op. cit., p.109-110.

³³⁵ Budrin, Viktor. « Why is it important to develop Kazakhstan's 'soft power'? » [Почему важно развивать «мягкую силу» Казахстана?], *Forbes KZ*, 26th December 2019. [Retrieved on April, 20th, 2022].

4.1.2 Q-Pop artists as international ambassadors of the Kazakh language

This section covers what is arguably one of the most effective means of language promotion in a globalized 21st century: pop music. Incidentally, pop music also constitutes a potent vector of soft power. In this section, we argue that Q-Pop artists, whose use of Kazakh is (as we have seen) of patriotic nature, act as ambassadors of the language abroad by making the language known, discussed about, and even an object of admiration among globalized audiences. In this regard, it can be argued that Q-Pop constitutes an instance of language nationalism eager to integrate in international flows. As part of our argument, we shall cover two instances of Q-Pop (Ninety One, and rapper Madi Rozymbayev) and Dymash Kudaibergen (who is not usually considered to be a Q-Pop singer).

As we have mentioned, Q-Pop's use of the Kazakh language is rooted in internal considerations, music producer Erbolat Bedelkhan stating in a 2016 interview: « For the moment, we want to put the accent on the Kazakh language. We perform in our country, and know that there is a language problem, and we want that the Kazakh language becomes trendy, actual and important to the youth.³³⁶ » In the same interview, however, he quickly underlines that « The reaction of people from Canada or Europe to our language is incredible. They first say « Who are you, where are you from? » as, in all honesty, no one knows about Kazakhstan.³³⁷ ». He further explains that « Our language has been appreciated in other countries. People write very nice words: 'what a language', 'how beautiful does it sound', 'we want to know more' [...]»³³⁸ ». A renowned Kazakh-language rapper who was interviewed in the scope of our research listed the home countries of some of the fans who reached out to him :

« Yes, many people chimed in; I think they came from **Korea**, some users from **China**. This is what I observed... **Kyrgyzstan**, I had some from neighbouring **Russia**... »

[Да, несколько человек добавили; помню были из Кореи, несколько [из]Китая пользователей. Это то что наблюдал... Кыргызстан, у соседей России у меня был...]

³³⁶ Khegai, op. cit.

³³⁷ *Ibid.*

³³⁸ *Ibid.*

Artists with bigger followings, such as Dimash Kudaibergen and Ninety One, boast fans all around the world, sometimes united within fandoms. For instance, Ninety One's fandom, the EagleZ, hail from countries as diverse as « Russia, Kyrgyzstan, Uzbekistan, Turkey, South Korea, U.S.A., Latin America, and Europe³³⁹. » A 2018 article gives a few examples of the many Dimash Kudaibergen and Ninety One fans who became interested in learning Kazakh after taking a liking to their music, some of them actively doing so with the help of Kazakh social media users³⁴⁰. In his exhaustive 2020 study on Q-Pop, Kakim Danabayev found that « 'Q-pop' raises interest among foreigners to learn the Kazakh language even though they try to sing in Kazakh language [...]. This suggests that the Kazakh language is slowly beginning to be recognized abroad. » This international interest regarding the Kazakh language is evidently a positive side effect of foreign audiences' interest towards Q-Pop.

We argue that Q-Pop, whose singing language is always Kazakh, aptly intertwines the Kazakh language and Kazakhstan's soft power in an example of 'adaptive' language nationalism. As defined by Joseph Nye, soft power represents a nation's ability to attract and influence, usually through means other than military or economic power. Soft power includes, among others, cultural influence (namely through music, language, media...) and diplomatic networking. While music's role in soft power has been the object of much attention,

In the case of Q-Pop, the Kazakh language is combined with appealing musicality and dressing style, sparking interest in foreign audiences hitherto unexposed to the language. This is reflected by Q-Pop artists apparent commitment to address the crowds of the many countries where they perform in Kazakh. Various YouTube videos³⁴¹ show Ninety One band members repeatedly thanking a Chinese crowd in Kazakh. YouTube videos also provide a glimpse into East Asian audiences' reaction to hearing the Kazakh language sung. Reactions include the noted similarity between Korean and Kazakh, an interviewee even confusing an extract of Ninety One's song *All I Need* with Korean³⁴². These somewhat anecdotal observations corroborate researchers Marin

³³⁹ Danayev, op. cit., p.96.

³⁴⁰ *Ibid*, p.122.

³⁴¹ Juz Entertainment. *NINETY ONE in CHINA* [Video], YouTube, July 2019. Retrieved at: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=yAx5k3JVSkE&t=1925s>. [Retrieved on February, 17th 2022].

³⁴² Song Wonsub. *Korea's best humorist watches [NINETY ONE - ALL I NEED] QPOP IDOL. Lee Se-young*. [Лучший комик Кореи, чтобы увидеть [NINETY ONE - ALL I NEED] QPOP IDOL, 0|세영] [Video], YouTube, 2019. [Retrieved on February, 22nd 2022].

Ekstrom and Assiya Yermukhametova, the latter stating « Now that Q-Pop has become a more established institution, it could play a key role in how Kazakhstan projects itself on a global level³⁴³. » as exposure to the Kazakh language increases both Kazakhstan's prestige and influence in relevant areas.

Kazakh-language pop music also contributes to increase Kazakhstan's influence in Central Asia, in a way not dissimilar to non-Q-Pop artists such as Erke Esmahan. A telling example is the yearly organizing of the Q-Fest by Juz Entertainment (Erbolat Bedelkhan's music studio), a festival held in Almaty featuring the genre which saw no less than 16 artists perform in 2018. Among them, several came from Kyrgyzstan. This suggests a « trans-nationalization of cultural tastes in the Central Asian region³⁴⁴ » in which, we may speculate, the Kazakh language is to play an important role through the Q-Pop genre. An alternative, while not necessarily opposite, interpretation would be that of Mathilde Cerqueira's article on J-Pop, where she states that « Asia being immensely populated, these new industries have for vocation to conquer their neighbor countries first of all.³⁴⁵ » Applicability of Cerqueira's argument to Central Asia, given its demographic difference vis-à-vis East Asia, is to be discussed, however.

Singers belonging and identifying to the Q-Pop genre thus constitute strong ambassadors of the Kazakh language to international audiences, consolidating its international standing and endurance. This is achieved by combining appealing aesthetics partly drawn from other successful genres such as K-Pop and the musicality of the Kazakh language in front of foreign audiences. The latter gain interest and even knowledge in the language. Furthermore, the Kazakh language may, in the future, constitute a standard for the development of a Central Asian pop music scene, centered around events such as the Q-Fest.

³⁴³ Ekstrom & Yermukhametova, op. cit.

³⁴⁴ Danayev, op. cit., p.100.

³⁴⁵ Cerqueira, Mathilde. « The Soft Power of the Music Industry—Where Does It Start and Where Does It End? Insights from the United States and Japan », *International Marketing and Management Research*, 2018, p.98.

4.1.3 Q-Pop and the Kazakh language as a bottom-up, ‘post-classical’ tools of nation (re)branding

More than a means to achieve soft power, Kazakh language nationalism through Q-Pop appears to serve another, less explicit purpose: the nation ‘rebranding’ of Kazakhstan as a properly Asian country. Q-Pop arguably serves as an example of bottom-up and globalized instance of contemporary language nationalism.

In reference to the more ‘classical’, apprehensive form of nationalism which we have outlined in our second chapter, we may *tentatively* qualify Q-Pop a ‘post-classical’ or ‘post-modern’ instance of language nationalism. Indeed, any apprehension or mistrust towards international flows and more generally globalization seem to be lifted, giving rise to a kind of language nationalism fit to fare well in an international environment otherwise fearsome because of its unpredictability. Ekstrom and Yermukhametova aptly sum up Q-Pop’s nature as a phenomenon of language nationalism, rightfully stating that « Q-pop offers a deeper commentary on how Kazakhstan is attempting to embrace the forces of globalization while simultaneously establishing a renewed sense of national identity [...]»³⁴⁶. This statement corroborates our view that, in the case of language nationalism through 21st century pop music, nation building and international flows are no longer seen as separate, but as working hand in hand. In other words, Q-Pop offers an example of national language promotion and nation building embedded in globalization. Aware of the genre’s utility as an instrument of nation building and a tool for the promotion of the Kazakh language, a hitherto rather uninvolved Kazakh government seems to have taken an interest in funding Q-Pop artists³⁴⁷. This can also be explained by the precedents of the K-Pop industry in Korea, which was in part a conscious effort by the successive Korean governments to promote the Korean language abroad³⁴⁸. This observation is one of many which allows our argument do go further, as we argue that more than nation building, Kazakh-language Q-Pop enables Kazakhstan to rebrand itself as an Asian nation.

³⁴⁶ Ekstrom & Yermukhametova, op. cit.

³⁴⁷ Otan, op. cit., p.5;p.110;p.118.

³⁴⁸ Ryall, Julian. « South Korea wants the world to learn Korean with K-pop », *Deutsche Welle*, October, 7th 2020. [Retrieved on May, 1st, 2022].

Before attempting to outline Q-Pop's role in Kazakhstan's nation rebranding, it is necessary to define nation branding. Brunel University researcher Ying Fan outlines six levels of nation branding, and explains that « At next level C, a nation brand concerns the country's **image, reputation and positioning**, a role quite similar to that of corporate branding.³⁴⁹ » He further argues that « Like commercial brands, a nation's image can be repackaged, **repositioned** and communicated in a professional fashion.³⁵⁰ » Ying stresses that nation branding's main purpose is to influence how a nation is perceived by *others*, and is a rather conscious endeavor usually not undertaken by the common layperson³⁵¹ (the latter being key in producing national identity, a distinct concept). With this definition in mind, we argue that Q-Pop singers and music producers act as both agents of Kazakh-language nationalism and nation branding as an Asian nation.

This argument can be supported by several examples, and nuanced by several others. Drawing on Danayev and Otan's observations on the genre, we can view Q-Pop as a phenomenon of both localization (« modifying global cultural contents to the demands of local consumers³⁵² ») and glocalization (« high quality localization of one hegemonic culture that is meant to be re-exported to other countries due to a small domestic market »³⁵³) of K-Pop. Whether K-Pop constitutes, by the early 2020s a 'hegemonic' musical culture is open to debate, but its prestige and worldwide influence are undeniable. Kazakhstan's hypothetical rebranding as an Asian nation can thus be supported by Q-Pop music producers and their role in modeling Q-Pop's selection processes and general functioning after K-Pop, an example of either localization or glocalization allowing this Kazakh-language genre to anchor Kazakhstan in Asia. Indeed, music producers have consistently selected and train potential artists in the scope of TV-shows that imitate that of entertainment companies from South Korea: such is the example of *K-Top Idols*³⁵⁴. Furthermore, Ninety One singers have stated on multiple interviews that they received formation and training in South Korea, in the scope of traineeships. For instance, Ninety One singer Azamat Zenkayev spent two years

³⁴⁹ Ying, Fan. « Branding the nation: Towards a better understanding », *Place Branding and Public Diplomacy*, no.6, 2010, p.100.

³⁵⁰ *Ibid*, p.101.

³⁵¹ *Ibid*, p.102.

³⁵² Otan op. cit., pp.108-109

³⁵³ *Ibid*, p.108

³⁵⁴ Danabayev, Kakim & Konieczny, Piotr Bronislaw. « Q-Pop, the pride of Kazakhstani youth and its simulation of ethnic identity », *Central Asia Program*, September, 16th 2021, p.5.

training at a South Korean music company³⁵⁵. The very name of the genre is a reference to K-Pop which incorporates the letter Q as part of a broader, nationwide endeavor of latinizing the Kazakh language³⁵⁶. These observations in mind, commentators have mechanically linked Q-Pop to South Korean *hallyu*³⁵⁷ (or Korean wave).

Another example is the presence of Z-Pop artists at the 2018 Q-Fest. Z-Pop, as per its webpage, aims at « [authoring] the new sound of Generation Z and the standard for pop culture so as to blaze a trail from Asia to the world. It is an inspiring entertainment lifestyle that redefines what it means to live the modern pop life by producing a new breed of cultural ambassadors who are creatively multilingual onto the global entertainment stage.³⁵⁸ » The participation of this pan-Asian cultural and musical project has yet to prove fruitful (further information was scarce), but constitutes an interesting example of Q-Pop's role in anchoring Kazakhstan in an Asian 'cultural sphere'.

Discursive proximity to South Korea and the East Asian sphere also seems to be sought by putting the Kazakh language's phonology to use. This was observed by one Kazakh interviewee, who pointed out several Ninety One song extracts. Namely, the alliteration of alveo-palatal consonants³⁵⁹ (in Kazakh *ʃ*, in the I.P.A. *ɕ*) and the extensive use of coda nasal velar sounds (in Kazakh *ń/ñ*, in the I.P.A. *ŋ*) were, according to said interviewee, designed to make the Kazakh language sound like Chinese pop. Nasal velar endings are commonplace in Kazakh, as they denote the genitive case; musical insistence on said sound could thus be reminiscent of Mandarin Chinese lemmas ending in such fashion (in Pinyin *-ng*). This evidence remains largely anecdotal, however, and a more thorough survey of Q-Pop fans regarding this assertion would be crucial before lending it more credit.

³⁵⁵ Khegai, op. cit.

³⁵⁶ Danabayev & Konieczny, op. cit., p.5

³⁵⁷ Ekstrom, op. cit.

³⁵⁸ Information from Z-Pop's website. Retrieved at: <https://zpopdream.com/our-projects/>. [Retrieved on May, 8th 2022].

³⁵⁹ Alveo-palatal fricatives are common in Sino-Tibetan, Koreanic and Japonic languages. They are also found in most Slavic languages.

While different from nation branding, instances of nation building resulting in a repositioning of a nation's external identity through music have been observed. One example is that of Colombia, whose emphasis on promoting regional *costeña* (music from the Caribbean coast of Colombia) music as nationwide Colombian music resulted in « [nowadays'] Colombia being much more Caribbean than that of yesterday³⁶⁰ ». We can thus conclude this section by observing, rather than affirming, the apparent role Kazakh-language nationalism, through Q-Pop, plays in presenting the Kazakh nation as more Asian than Western, or post-Soviet. This may in turn help the nation's multi-vector policy and balancing efforts by further nuancing and layering Kazakhstan's image as a bridge between the West and the East.

4.2 Kazakh-language nationalism in today's new media landscape

Hand in hand with the advent of Q-Pop, Kazakh language social media has experienced a boom in popularity in recent years. *Numbers*. Our reflexion will follow the footsteps of Mihelj's, the latter deploring that « [R]ecent studies on nationalism and social media primarily focus on the most obvious, passionate and hate-filled nationalisms.³⁶¹ » This section offers to do the opposite, and cover mundane social media activities of Kazakh language nationalism with special reference to Kazakh-language digital art on Twitter and Instagram. Driven by global audiences' research of authenticity, tradition and originality in the face of modernity (in a way reminiscent to romanticism), the rising popularity of Kazakh-language digital art acts as a launching pad for Kazakhstan's soft power through social media. Akin to Q-Pop, Kazakh language digital art views globalization as an opportunity to popularize the Kazakh culture and language worldwide, and completely integrates its codes and standards as to draw audiences as large as possible.

4.2.1 The growing usage of social networks in Kazakh

In recent years, the use of the Kazakh language in social networks has dramatically increased. This section will rely on Karlygash Abiyeva's and Anar Fazylzhanova's work on

³⁶⁰ Wade, Max. « Prólogo », *Música, Raza y Nación: la Música tropical en Colombia*, University of Chicago Press, 2000, p.11.

³⁶¹ Mihelj, op. cit., pp.332-333.

mapping the progression of the Kazakh language in social networks, before attempting to outline, backed with our interviewee's experiences, the reasons digital artists in Kazakhstan have turned to the Kazakh language more in the last ten years.

In her 2011 study, Kazakh-French researcher Karlygash Abiyeva found that the Kazakhization of social networks was still underway and its infancy³⁶² as she wrote her article. She furthermore stressed the importance of Russian-language social media among the Kazakh-speaking youth, the latter overwhelmingly turning to Russian-language email (mail.ru) and social media services (VKontakte)³⁶³. Anar Fazylzhanova's 2018 article significantly refreshes findings from the early 2010s, stating that among the polled Kazakhophone sample, most used the Kazakh language³⁶⁴. Indeed, after updates allowing Facebook to support a Kazakh-language version, some 140 000 persons used said version exclusively³⁶⁵, while, more tellingly perhaps, out of the 20 respondents who said they used VKontakte regularly, 12 used the Kazakh language exclusively. Keeping in mind that VKontakte's user base in Kazakhstan exceeds the 12 millions, Fazylzhanova deems the number of Kazakh-only VKontakte users in the country to be high³⁶⁶. Adding up to traditional social networks such as the aforementioned VKontakte, mail.ru and Facebook, a 2021 Eurasianet article identifies Instagram and Telegram as the youth's prime source of information. As of that year, 56% of respondents used Instagram as their main source of information³⁶⁷. Our observations regarding Instagram and Twitter allow us to tentatively identify three main types of Kazakh-language social media users among those followed. The first are Kazakh-only users, such as most *toi* and Q-Pop artists, as well as some users on Twitter and Instagram. Second are occasional, 'heritage' Kazakh-language users, posting in Kazakh during traditional events such as Nowruz or using Kazakh expressions untranslatable in Russian. Occasional Kazakh-language users among digital artists tended to use Kazakh when naming artworks and pieces. Third, and in a way relevant to upcoming sections, users who used the Kazakh language as a means of overt dissent vis-

³⁶² Abiyeva, 2011, op. cit., p.174-175.

³⁶³ *Ibid.*

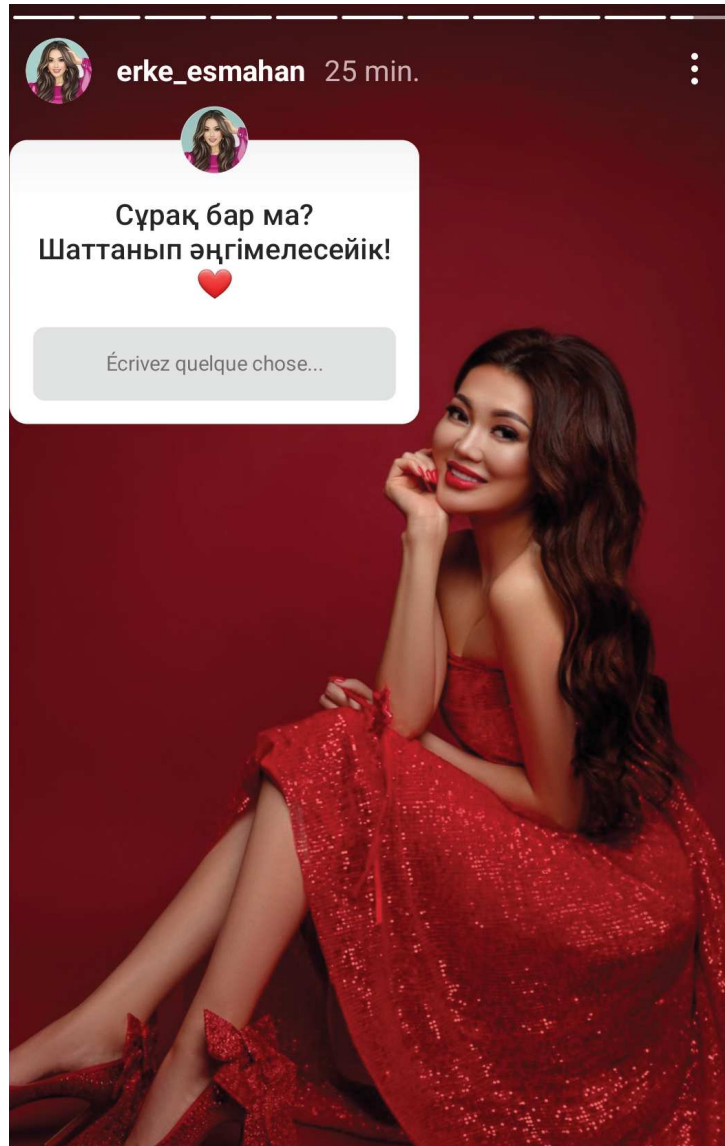
³⁶⁴ Fazylzhanova, Adar & Düsyen, Quwat, « Kazakh social network and network users: digital and qualifical linguistic analysis », *Nauchnyj Zhurnal*, 2018/4 (86), dec. 2018, p.30.

³⁶⁵ *Ibid*, p.31.

³⁶⁶ *Ibid*, pp.30-31.

³⁶⁷ Kudebayeva et al. « Perspectives | Kazakh students ditching Russian social media », *Eurasianet*, 26th July 2021. [Retrieved on April, 1st 2022]

à-vis Russia and the Russian-friendly Kazakh government. One example of Kazakh-only social media user is famous *toi* singer Erke Esmahan, who posts exclusively in Kazakh. Pictured above is one of numerous ‘poll’ stories she regularly posts on her account. Of said poll stories, the fan replies she displays on her account are solely in Kazakh.



Annex 9. Erke Esmahan’s instagram story. [Retrieved on March, 4th 2022].

The surge in Kazakh-language content and posts can be explained by several factors. One such factor is the research of alternative news sources. As Abiyeva states « [S]ocial networks may present a welcomed alternative to gather information, but they remain accessible to certain groups, mainly stemming from urban areas³⁶⁸ ». Following this logic, the Kazakh language may present itself as an alternative to Russian-language news. Out of the five digital artists polled in the scope of our study, all of them used Kazakh as their mother tongue, and usually made equal use of Kazakh and Russian when using social networks. However, most expressed their desire to increase their Kazakh-language content, one interviewee stating that:

« Except for Russian, I use English and Kazakh. **Lately, I am trying to use them more.** I use Kazakh to chat with friends who speak Kazakh. » (An.)

In a social media environment where the use of Kazakh seems to be on the rise, Kazakh language nationalism is conveyed in many ways. Our research shall, however, focus on the particular example of Twitter and Instagram's Kazakh-language digital artists, and their relation with a globalized world.

4.2.2 Twitter and Instagram as digitalized launching pads for Kazakh-language soft power: the example of Twitter's digital artists

On both Twitter and Instagram, digital artists from Kazakhstan, with following as high as 43.000 users, incorporate the Kazakh language in their art. This section will rely on five interviews conducted following a qualitative method. The interviewees are all female, Kazakh-language artists active on Twitter and Instagram, and whose artworks incorporate Kazakh aesthetics, traditional motifs, references and language. The five interviews, conducted via online messaging, allow us to outline the main characteristics of Kazakh-language digital art on social media. First, the use of the Kazakh language by social media artists is of nationalist essence. Second, this particular kind of online language nationalism relies on globalized artistic standards, due both to the artists' particular exposure to such standards and their will to reach as large of an audience as possible, thus exposing

³⁶⁸ Abiyeva, 2011, op. cit.

more people to the Kazakh language. Finally and somewhat unsurprisingly, the theme of Turkic solidarity seems to credit, at least in part, the use of the Kazakh language.

A theme consistent with all five respondents is the will to promote the Kazakh language among Kazakh audiences. Thus, Kazakh-language titles, captions and texts are a means to make their nation's traditions and language to their countrymen. Instagram digital artist An. explains:

« I want to help promote my language as much as I can. »

To Ar., Kazakh-language art is also a way to make the language 'cool', the latter still being assimilated to uneducated, rural populations :

« It was **considered "lame" to know Kazakh** and they made us think that people who speak it are **low educated and came from a village** (in a bad way). »

« Some young people are still thinking that Kazakh language and culture is lame or boring, so **I want to show them the opposite.** »

Upon inspecting pieces made by S., a very popular Twitter-based Kazakh digital artist, the educational intent they had in mind is evident. Along with the picture below, the original Tweet includes English translations of the different parts named:



Annex 10. Piece by S. titled ‘Some information about the equipment of the golden eagle’, 2021. [Retrieved on April, 15th 2022]

In popularizing the Kazakh-language among foreign audiences, S. seems rather successful, as they state that:

« From time to time my subscribers ask me where they can learn Kazakh. »

Another recurrent aspect of the interviewee’s art style reflected a blend of traditional Kazakh motifs, mundanities and legends with aesthetics common to and understood by globalized audiences, reminiscent of the universally successful Japanese *manga*. As Erlandsen (2019) explains: « ethnic digital media are not only capable of focusing on different specific niches, **but are also able to find the best way to offer the right channels for reaching particular audiences thanks**

to technologies such as mobile internet and smartphones³⁶⁹. » T., an Almaty-based digital artist illustrates this argument:

« My style can be compared with the style of **Korean, Chinese comics like manhwa and manhua**. The main source of inspiration is the **history of my country, Kazakhstan**. I draw the "humanization" of my country and other countries. »

The result of such a blend is appealing to whomever is acquainted with Korean *manhwa* or Japanese *manga*, while incorporating Kazakh-language lines:



Annex 11. Extract of T.'s comic. The line reads *Сен менің нанымды алдың* and translates *You have taken my faith*. [Retrieved on May, 1st 2022]

³⁶⁹ Erlandsen, Matthias. « Ethnic media in the digital age » [Book review], *Critical Studies in Media Communication*, 2019, p.2.

We argue that this kind of artwork seeks to embed the Kazakh language within global artistic standards, the latter being presented the way a Chinese-, Korean- or Japanese-language speech bubble would. It furthermore constitutes a telling example of how digital Kazakh-language nationalism benefits Kazakhstan's soft power, as it presents Kazakhstan's history and language in a way appealing and palatable by foreign audiences.

A third element which seemed prominent is the intertwining of the Kazakh-language and the bolstering of Turkic solidarity. T. simply states:

« Kazakh language belongs to the Turkic world. »

Similarly, Almaty-based artist M. says that interest vis-à-vis the Kazakh language has mainly come for Turkic-speaking friends:

« [M]y non-Kazakh friends have made some comments-mostly Turkish (and one Turkmen friend), as our languages and culture share a certain degree of similarity. »

This is both unsurprising as Pan-Turkic sentiment has been on the rise in the last decades, and interesting as we have treated Turkic solidarity as an effect sought by a rather more classical kind of language nationalism which sees it as a refuge.

While deserving of a proper sociological survey, Kazakh-language digital nationalism is shrewdly conveyed by artists who seek to promote it to the broadest audience possible. As a conclusion, we may once again quote T. as they say that:

« [A]nd if people begin to be interested in the Kazakh language, the culture of the Kazakh people, **this will allow Kazakhstan to show its culture** »

By combining the Kazakh-language with engaging and rather universal art styles, these artists allow for a rather efficient popularization of the language abroad, all the while acting as launching pads for Kazakhstan's soft power through the outreach of Kazakhstan's culture and history.

4.2.3 Neoromantic aspects of digital Kazakh-language nationalism

While the previous section analyzed the intent and effects of Kazakh-language digital art as a form of globalized language nationalism, this section seeks to characterize it in order to assess its innovative nature. We shall first assert our argument that Kazakh-language digital art *is* a form of nationalism, before attempting to tie it to two distinct concepts: economic nationalism and (neo)-romanticism.

As we have stated in our previous section, we argue that Kazakh-language digital art constitutes a form of online nationalism. Indeed, most interviewees stressed that, in their view, the Kazakh language is to be congruent with the Kazakh nation and state. For instance, T. views the Kazakh people's language and culture as indissoluble, stating that :

« The Kazakh language is the basis of the culture of the Kazakh people. »

S. hold similar views, arguing that:

« [...] I think it is not right to use the aesthetics of a culture while moving away from the language of this culture »

Ar. associates the Kazakh language to the Kazakh state, and deems that it should be known by all Kazakhstanis:

« I wish all of Kazakhstan spoke Kazakh well [...] **I support our governmental Kazakh language** »

Ar. uses a wording that, we speculate, might have been a direct translation of *государственный язык*. While literally translating to *governmental language*, it usually correctly translates to *official language*.

While none of the respondents use the word *nation* directly, we observe that the Kazakh language is conceived in congruence with a state (Kazakhstan) and a people (the Kazakhs), while the

Kazakhstani nation is indirectly mentioned by Ar. when she « wishes that all of Kazakhstan spoke Kazakh well ».

Regarding the Kazakh language's role in their artworks, several interviewees seemed to view the language as an added value, esthetically speaking:

« In recent years I've started to realize the **value of the Kazakh language** [...] I think the Kazakh language is both sonorous and soft and very beautiful. » (An.)

« [The] Kazakh language is very aesthetic. **All words come from [the] soul and it is [a] more lyrical one.** I think what foreigners like about Kazakh language is that it sounds interesting » (Ar.)

With this in mind, we can tentatively tie this form of Kazakh-language nationalism to romanticism (or in this case, 'neo'romanticism). As author Anthony D. Smith defines it, romanticism denotes the « need of authentic human experience, naturalness of humanity's major groups, especially national [...]»³⁷⁰ ». We argue that references to Kazakh being a language where « all words come from the soul [...] » and which is « a more lyrical one (Ar.) » could be understood as a romantic conception of the language. This corroborates Otan's interpretation of some of Q-Pop's developments: « Musicians performing in Kazakh demonstrate a shifting language ideology, **looking at the language not as “traditional” or “old-fashioned”, but as something “unique” and “authentic”**»³⁷¹ ».

A Kazakh-language bearing such characteristics as 'uniqueness' and 'authenticity' constitutes a convincing selling argument for Kazakh-language digital artists, in regard to both domestic and foreign audiences (whence An.'s use of the word 'value'). This argument thus views digital Kazakh-language nationalism as an instance of economic nationalism embedded in a more generalized increase in the demand for 'ethnic' digital art³⁷². Corroborating our argument, S. observes:

³⁷⁰ Smith, op. cit., p.154.

³⁷¹ Otan, op. cit., p.54.

³⁷² Mihelj, op. cit., p.333.

« It also seems to me that people have recently become **more interested in the culture of various ethnic groups.** »

About economic nationalism, Mihelj writes: « in the online sphere, nations are increasingly imagined and communicated as communities of consumers—a trend that further enhances the already evident growth of economic and consumer nationalism, [...] ³⁷³ » Of course, economic or consumer nationalism can be directed at foreign consumers as well as members of the nation. This is reflected by the interviewees' aim of promoting the Kazakh language through art to Kazakh, Kazakhstani *and* foreign followers.

We may conclude this section by quoting Mihelj, who writes : « nation branding, consumer ethnocentrism and commodification of ethnic identities have come to play a central role in the reproduction of nationalism in the 21st century³⁷⁴ ». Digital Kazakh-language art, as a genre incorporating Kazakh-language nationalism, is one such example of economic, 'neo'romantic nationalism which very aptly engages with globalization. By doing so, it grants the Kazakh language with renewed prestige and visibility, and popularizes Kazakhstan's culture to a worldwide community of users (or consumers) in search of authenticity and uniqueness.

4.3 Bottom up Kazakh language dissidence on social networks: a polysemic, globalized and yet to be studied phenomenon

As we have explored, both Q-Pop and Kazakh-language digital art can be understood as instances of a contemporary kind of language nationalism, intricately woven with globalization and global audiences. While sections 4.1 and 4.2 have treated the said phenomena as vectors of soft power, this section wishes to tentatively analyze their dissident component as bottom-up instances of language nationalism presented to global audiences as a means to integrate the circle of democratic nations and disavow Russia and the general Slavic, post-Soviet sphere of influence.

³⁷³ Mihelj, op. cit., pp.332-333

³⁷⁴ *Ibid*, p.341.

4.3.1 The example of the 2022 Russian invasion as seen from Kazakh language social networks

The role contemporary social media play in the production and diffusion of bottom-up discourses has been widely studied. Language nationalism is, in this regard, no exception. Indeed, while quoting Pakistan et al., Mihelj explains that « '[T]he common man' is currently a more significant actor in nationalism, given that digital media facilitate 'the construction and dissemination of democratized bottom-up discourse'.³⁷⁵ » As we have seen, social media acts as a launching pad for the promotion, and use, of Kazakh to a globalized audience, bolstering its international standing. Nevertheless, they also bring about the emergence of discursive practices that are presented to globalized audiences and groups as a means for nationalists (or national-patriots) to dissociate themselves publicly from Nur-Sultan's regime or the Slavic, post-Soviet cultural ensemble. We argue that the Kazakh language and its use, which constitutes a form of digital language nationalism³⁷⁶, are central to Kazakhs willing to present their dissent to globalized, democratic audiences. We distinguish to forms of Kazakh-language dissent: one that dissociates social media users from any kind of affiliation to an increasingly imperialistic Russia, another that denounces Kazakhstan's soft balancing and reportedly lenient stance vis-à-vis Russia. In a cautionary manner, this section shall not attempt to provide an analysis of the dramatic 2022 'Bloody January' riots and unrest, as they still lack the hindsight necessary to do so.

Perhaps the more visible of the two aforementioned kinds of dissent, dissent vis-à-vis the post-Soviet *status quo* aims at publicly displaying one's hostility towards Russia's aggressive foreign policy, colonial and 'neo-colonial'³⁷⁷ legacy and contempt towards Central Asians. Deeply intertwined with this discourse is the dissident, at times 'provocative' use of the Kazakh language to distinguish oneself from the Russian sphere of culture and language. To properly analyze this trend, we may draw from the postcolonial school of studies, whose influence has been markedly high among Kazakh social media users. Strictly speaking, postcolonial studies aim at analyzing the dynamics between the former colonies of the West and the latter. Developed in the 1980s in the United States, chiefly through cornerstone works such as Edward Said's *Orientalism* (1978), they

³⁷⁵ Mihelj, op. cit., p.338.

³⁷⁶ *Ibid.*

³⁷⁷ Post-colonial and decolonial theories have gained significant momentum in the post-Soviet space of the last decades.

place special emphasis on contesting West-centric concepts and discourses on both the colonial experience and international affairs³⁷⁸, as former colonial overlords are likely to be biased in a worldview they project and impose on formerly colonized societies. After the dissolution of the U.S.S.R., this theme was reprised in C.I.S. countries to denounce the effects Russian imperialism in Turkic, Baltic, Siberian or Caucasian societies. In Kazakhstan, activists have been particularly vocal in denouncing the Soviet concept of *friendship among peoples*³⁷⁹, as it conceals the abuse and Russification ethnic Kazakhs suffered while under Soviet rule³⁸⁰. Yerevan University researcher Narek Mrktchyan states that « [K]azakhstan has experienced [...] colonization practices [...], but the alteration of cultural and language priorities in favor of colonizers is the best indicator of marginalized Kazakh identity. The idea of civilizing mission of Russia is considered as a part of ethnic Russian's discourse on the role of Soviet policies.³⁸¹ » Such 'ethnic Russian discourse' on Soviet policies as mentioned by Mrktchyan is not uncommon, and instances of 'neo-colonial' narratives are the object of harsh criticism from ethnic Kazakhs.

A rather recent trend observed in the scope of our four-month watch of Kazakhstani Twitter is the increasing number of ethnic Kazakh (but also Kazakhstani) users making the switch from Russian to Kazakh as their main language of use on the platform. For instance, when Kazakh journalist Madina Kuanova asked about fellow Kazakh users who decided to make the switch to the Kazakh language after the 2022 Russian invasion of Ukraine³⁸², testimonies were plentiful. One user testified that they had tried, « [S]ince March, to speak 100% Kazakh ». Another user declared that « All my life, I have read, written and thought in Russian. Honestly, I have a little accent when I speak. But now, Russian phrases no longer appear on my name on the internet. » Yet another respondent said that, despite lacking vocabulary in Kazakh, they « [T]ry to speak Kazakh both in real life and on the internet » as they « Do not really want to use Russian anymore. » This is further

³⁷⁸ Mezzadra et al., « Introducción », *Estudios postcoloniales, Ensayos fundamentales*, June 2008, p.28.

³⁷⁹ In Russian, дружба народов (*druzhba narodov*).

³⁸⁰ Mrktchyan, op. cit., p.23.

³⁸¹ *Ibid.*

³⁸² Kuanova, Madina & Grigoryanits, Aleksandr. « Being brave. War in Ukraine fueled Kazakhstan's abandonment of the Russian language and search of national identity » [Батыл бол. Война в Украине подтолкнула казахстанцев к отказу от русского языка и поиску национальной идентичности], *Mediazona*, May, 10th, 2022. [Retrieved on May, 12th, 2022].

corroborated by the experience of one of our interviewees, who embedded their use of Kazakh in a dissident practice almost directly stated to be part of a postcolonial endeavor:

« I have only recently started using Kazakh language in my works **as part of unpacking of colonial trauma.** » (Ar.)

The discursive use of the Kazakh language has also been reported in pro-Ukraine (or anti-war) demonstrations in Almaty, whose snapshots were widely diffused on social media. Pictures included cardboards and signs using solely the Kazakh language, or alongside an English or Ukrainian message of support. An art piece from Twitter artist @qantars is a telling example, as it has been reprised on cardboards in the scope of demonstrations:



Annex 12. Qantar, *Kazakhstan Supports Ukraine*, [Qazaqstan Ukrainanı Koldaidı], 2022. [Retrieved on March, 31st, 2022].

This particular art piece is reflective of a will to ‘circumvent’ the otherwise very influential Russian language through demonstrative use of the Kazakh language, the latter being paired with the global lingua franca. Tellingly, the author states that « When our Russian-dependent government is silent, we, the people of Kazakhstan, declare that we stand in support of Ukraine [...]»³⁸³ ».

While internal considerations behind the surge of Kazakh language users on social networks in the wake of the 2022 events are evident, its global reach is not to be underestimated. Indeed, we see how Kazakh language nationalism serves as a tool of ostentative disavowing of the Russian cultural and political ensemble, the latter being posted on Twitter and Instagram for the world to see. Here, it is not Kazakhstan as a state that takes position, but Kazakh civil society, thus reflecting the highly composite nature of Kazakh language nationalism.

4.3.2 Online Kazakh language nationalism and ‘global civil society’

The use of the Kazakh language on social networks can also be a means to disavow Kazakhstan’s government and its policies, the latter seen as lenient, or even submissive towards a hegemonic Russia. This critique is deeply embedded in broader dissident practices, which denounce the government’s authoritarian and corrupt nature. We argue that a liberal interpretation of the ostensive use of Kazakh as a political critique is possible, for it is as internal as it is external. We thus see that even explicitly domestically oriented online Kazakh language nationalism bears and seeks international effects.

Indeed, dissident posts on social networks are presented to a globalized audience, thus seeking to reflect Kazakhs’ sympathy towards the democratic and liberal ideas of the West, and belonging to a liberal ‘global civil society’³⁸⁴. This reflexion shall draw from the liberal school of international theory, the latter seeing international relations as mutually profitable for states, while

³⁸³ Qantar [@qantars] (2022). *When our Russian-dependent government is silent, we, the people of Kazakhstan, declare that we stand in support of Ukraine [...] [Tweet]. [Retrieved on May, 21st 2022].*

³⁸⁴ The concept of ‘global civil society’ was first coined by John Keane in 2003, and refers to « the vast assemblage of groups operating across borders and beyond the reach of governments. » (John G. Ikenberry, 2003).

promoting democracy as the prime condition for functional, non-violent international affairs. In this regard, liberal scholars have considered that democracy is universally enviable, and advocate for its advancement in non-democratic states through what defensive liberalism calls « power through example³⁸⁵ ». Such example is to inspire citizens of non-democratic states to strive towards democracy.

This reflexion may furthermore be purported by Mihelj, who states that « [D]igital technology has brought the greater participation, diversification and even democratization [...] where dominant imaginaries, narratives and myths are developed, sustained, **renewed and contested**³⁸⁶ » before concluding that « [M]ore actors [have] the potential of **constructing and communicating alternate versions of national identity**³⁸⁷ ». This proves to be of crucial relevance for the articulation of liberalism and online Kazakh language nationalism; indeed, we argue that Kazakh language dissidence helps building a counter narrative to many of Nur-Sultan's policies and international stances. This argument shall rely on three examples of dissident practices whereby the Kazakh languages assumes a central role, taken in the scope of our four-month watch of Kazakhstani social networks: 1) dissidence against Nur-Sultan's soft balancing vis-à-vis Russia, 2) in the scope of the 2022 Women's March in Almaty, 3) against Nur-Sultan's neoconservative narrative on Kazakhness. These examples evidently do not represent all of Kazakh society, and merely serve the purpose of raising the question of the relation, which we hypothesize as close, between online Kazakh language nationalism and globally shared liberal dissidence.

The first instance has largely been covered in our previous section as it is intertwined with an increasingly widespread rejection of Russian-Soviet heritage³⁸⁸.

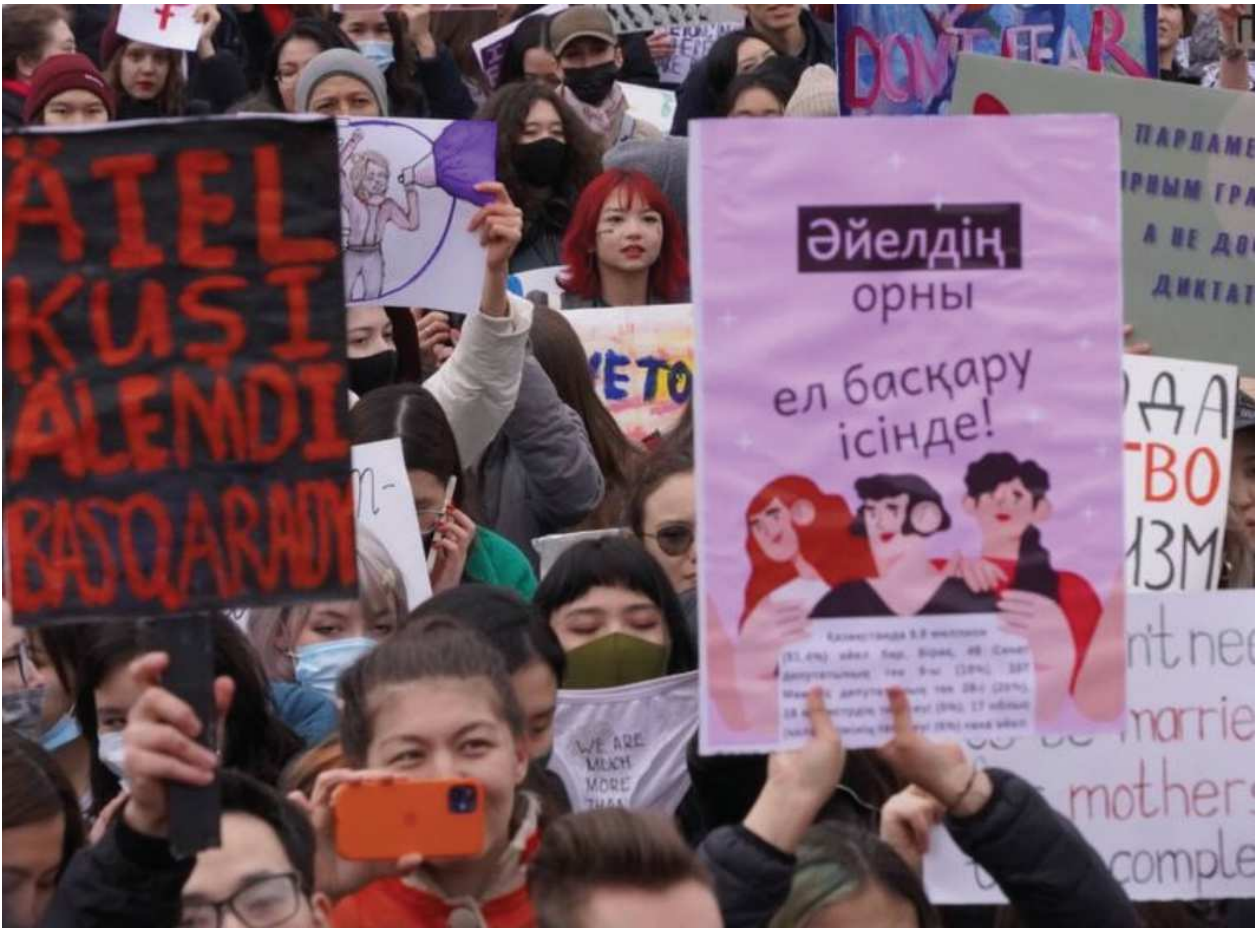
The second example worth mentioning here is the widespread use of Kazakh-language cardboards in the scope of the 2022 Women's March in Kazakhstan, and its subsequent spread on social media. In his 2017 essay on protests in international relations, York University researcher Alejandro Peña outlines the liberal interpretation of protests : « [...] from [...] liberal perspectives,

³⁸⁵ Miller, Benjamin. « Democratic Promotion: Offensive Liberals versus the Rest », *Millenium - Journal of International Studies*, 38:3, 2010, p.589.

³⁸⁶ Mihelj, op. cit., pp.338-339.

³⁸⁷ *Ibid.*

³⁸⁸ For said heritage, see Chapter 1.



Annex 13. Kazakh demonstrators holding Kazakh-language signs at the 2022 Women’s March in Almaty. Courtesy to *Vlast.kz*. Retrieved at: <https://twitter.com/Vlastkz/status/1501125291770617857>. [Retrieved on March, 8th 2022].

[movements are largely discussed] as part of associational ‘global civil society’ networks contributing to **democratization, norm-diffusion**, and global governance [...]»³⁸⁹ ». As the author argues himself, liberalism as an ideal-type offers one possible interpretation of such demonstrations, the latter being furthermore authorized by the Kazakh government. We speculate, however, that the ostentative use of Kazakh on signs and cardboards can be understood as a way to discursively differentiate members of Kazakhstan’s civil society from the government and its affiliates, as they are seen responsible for linguistic and gender divides in the country³⁹⁰. This may help embed Kazakh language nationalism, already an important postcolonial discursive tool, in global feminism

³⁸⁹ Peña, Alejandro. « Social Movements in International Relations: Recognizing Complexity » [Abstract], *ECPR*, 2017. Retrieved at: <https://ecpr.eu/Events/Event/PaperDetails/34736>. [Retrieved on April, 26th 2022].

³⁹⁰ Kudaibergenova, Diana & Laruelle, Marlène. « Making sense of the January 2022 protests in Kazakhstan: failing legitimacy, culture of protests, and elite readjustments », *Post-Soviet Affairs*, May, 16th 2022. [Retrieved on May, 16th 2022].

(alongside Russian³⁹¹). While this hypothesis is tentative and to be supported by a proper sociological survey, we note that socially liberal and feminist nationalism has been a recurring occurrence in postcolonial contexts as argued by Kumari Jayawardena in her famous *Feminism and Nationalism in the Third World*³⁹².

The third aspect of Kazakh language dissidence online is its widely publicized role in alternative bottom-up nation building. Our watch provided numerous examples of Kazakh language artists who combined the promotion of the Kazakh language and pro-L.G.B.T.Q.+ artworks, statements or tweets. Said artworks featured, for instance, scenes of homosexual or lesbian love involving characters in traditional Kazakh clothing, and depicted in Kazakh. The instance of a Twitter digital artist presenting Kazakh terms of endearment while stressing the gender free nature of the language seems to also corroborate this argument, presenting the Kazakh language's compatibility with a growing globalized trend of tolerance towards gender neutrality and non-binary genders. Furthermore, as Kazakh-language artists partake in network-wide events such as Lesbian Visibility Day (held on the 26th of April 2022) they interact with artists from other parts of the world (chiefly Western or East Asian), exchange ideas and thus weave Kazakh language art in the numerous English-language (or others) artworks posted in the scope of such events.

We argue that such artworks and statements made by Kazakh-language social media users serve the purpose of offering a counter narrative to Nur-Sultan's conservative nation building, which, as we have seen, emphasizes tradition in the face of globalization. Instead, young and connected Kazakh-language users, whose endeavor is nationalist in essence (promote the Kazakh language and its international standing through social media), strive towards an inclusive and progressive Kazakh nation. To globalized readership, this conveys a message which, albeit indirect, is clear: Kazakh-speaking civil society is open minded, and part of the circle of the democratic and liberal 'global civil society'.

Drawing on the constructivist school of international relations theory, we can thus consider the aforementioned discursive practices as a way, for young Kazakh-language social media users, to identify and adhere to an ensemble (global civil society) seen as desirable. This highlights the

³⁹¹ As Russian remains a globalized language, and is viewed as such in the post-Soviet space.

³⁹² Rowbotham, Sheila. « Feminism and Nationalism in the Third World by Kumari Jayawardena – review », *The Guardian*, August, 9th 2017. [Retrieved on April, 27th 2022].

composite aspect of the attitudes Kazakh language nationalism holds towards globalization. Contrary to most official nationalist policies concerning the Kazakh language, online Kazakh language nationalism seems to welcome globalization, and appear to view the Kazakh language and its use on social media as a means of fully engaging in it, while advocating for its broader use on social media platforms.

4.3.3 A phenomenon limited in a way similar to top-down, classical nationalism

While its attitude towards globalization and internal affairs is more liberal in essence, digital Kazakh-language nationalism seems to suffer the same intrinsic limits as the more classical, defensive type of language nationalism we have analyzed previously. Indeed, it is not devoid of extreme elements and statements, which can be limitative of Kazakhstan's official international balancing and online civil society's liberal discursive practices.

This short section will reprise Mihelj's statement that « Global changes have led to the proliferation of anxieties about national security, this has made nationalism into a palpable political force³⁹³ ». Indeed, while better integrated in globalized systems of culture and values, Kazakh-speaking Twitter users are not devoid of genuine anxieties regarding potential external threats. This has been dramatically exacerbated by the 2022 Russian invasion of Ukraine, which has led many Kazakhstan-based observers to wonder whether Kazakhstan is next³⁹⁴. As Russian citizens, seeking to evade sanctions, pour into Kazakhstan, Kazakh-language social networks display an ever decreasing level of patience towards their guests' demeanor. Indeed, when confronted to Kazakh-language nationalism, a number of Russian citizens decried what they called *russophobia*, a trend also observed in Georgia³⁹⁵. These instances have been met with harsh criticism from some of the users we have polled, some posting or sharing 'rent posts' which censor the words *орыс*³⁹⁶,

³⁹³ Mihelj, op. cit., p.334

³⁹⁴ Tazhutov, Akhas. « Will Kazakhstan Become Russia's 'Next Ukraine'? – Analysis », *Eurasia Review*, March, 24th 2022. [Retrieved on April, 29th 2022].

³⁹⁵ Goradze, Keto. « "Fear is partly justified": Is it possible to talk about 'Russophobia' in Georgia? », [«Страх отчасти обоснован»: Стоит ли говорить о «русофобии» в Грузии?], *Wonderzine*, March, 28th 2022. [Retrieved on May, 9th 2022].

³⁹⁶ 'Russian' in Kazakh.

*россиянин*³⁹⁷ or *российский*³⁹⁸ in an effort to compare them to slurs. Often enough, such posts bear a hardly mistakable post-colonial flavor, using the word *колонизация*³⁹⁹ when referring to Soviet Kazakhstan. Other examples of rather non-cooperative Kazakh language nationalism online are the recent posts and memes directed *at* Russian audiences, usually delivered in a deliberate provocative tone. Pictured below, a ‘public service announcement’ type of post made by a Kazakh-language activist constitutes the milder end of this trend:

³⁹⁷ ‘Russian citizen’ in Russian.

³⁹⁸ Adjective denoting anything with relation to the Russian Federation.

³⁹⁹ ‘colonization’ in Russian.

Памятка для приезжающих в Казахстан граждан России

1. Государственный язык Казахстана – казахский. Русский язык **не является** государственным, а лишь обладает статусом официального в государственных учреждениях (наряду с казахским). Статус государственного языка обладает **более высоким приоритетом**, чем статус официального языка.
2. Казахстан с 1991 года является независимым государством. Всякие попытки смотреть на Казахстан сквозь розовые очки колониального и имперского мышления являются актом неуважения и агрессии по отношению к гражданам Казахстана.
3. Три наиболее распространенных слова, которые используют шовинстически настроенные русские по отношению к казахам и другим представителям тюркской национальности: **“мамбет”, “калбит”, “чурка”**. Употребление этих слов в Казахстане ускорят вашу **депортацию** из страны.
4. В 1921-1922 и 1930-1934 годах вследствие преступных действий коммунистов, казахский народ подвергся голодомору и насильственной седентеризации, потеряв как минимум около **1/3 населения** (погибло до 2 млн человек). Отрицать вину советского руководства в этой рукотворной трагедии казахского народа – значит обесценивать миллионы жертв этой бесчеловечной политики.
5. В Казахстане не используется исторический термин “присоединение Казахстана к Российской империи”. В Казахстане это событие называют **“Колонизацией/захватом казахских земель Российской империей”**, и последнее более точно отражает историческую действительность.
6. Существует **три волшебных казахских слова**, использование которых моментально изменят к вам отношение и превратят вас в наиболее почетного гостя страны:
1) **“сәлеметсіз бе”** /~сәлеметсізбе/ – здравствуйте;
2) **“рақмет”** /~рахмет/ – спасибо;
3) **“сау болыңыз”** /~сауболыңыз/ – до свидания.
Что касается произношения казахских слов и названий, **не стоит использовать правила русского языка относительно к казахскому**. Например, в казахских словах букву “Е” читайте аналогично русской “Е”, а не как “Э”: не “тЭнгЭ”, а “тенге”, не “АсЭль”, а “Асель”. Букву “О” в безударном положении нужно читать не как “А”, а как “О”: не “Атбасы”, а “Отбасы”, не “ТАкаев”, а “ТОкаев”. Знание этих языковых нюансов ускорит вашу интеграцию в казахстанское общество.
7. После обретения независимости названия некоторых городов Казахстана на русском языке были изменены и приближены к казахским вариантам. **Не стоит использовать старые, советские варианты**. Например: Алма-Ата → Алматы, Чимкент → Шымкент, Кокчетав → Кокшетау, Кустанай → Костанай, Актюбинск → Актобе, Джамбул → Тараз, Семипалатинск → Семей, Жезказган → Жезказган, Кызыл-Орда → Кызылорда, Талды-Курган → Талдыкорган.
8. В Казахстане нет и не может быть русофобии, т.к. 90% населения в той или иной степени владеют русским языком. Так же не является русофобией, если местные сделают вам замечание по поводу ваших проблематичных высказываний (см. пункты 1-7), т.к. уважение к культуре и истории страны пребывания еще никто не отменял.

Памятка составлена участниками проекта @QazaqGrammar.

Annex 14. 'Qazaq Grammar', « Refresher for Russian citizens visiting Kazakhstan ». Retrieved at: <https://twitter.com/qazaqgrammar/status/1510889038516994048?cxt=HHwWgICyverk4PcpAAAA>. [Retrieved on April, 13th 2022]

The first two points state facts that are of common knowledge whose mere reminder seems to be of condescending intent: first, Kazakhstan's official language is Kazakh, and *not* Russian. Second, Kazakhstan has been an independent country since 1991. Points 3, 4 and 5 give a Kazakh lecture of Russian rule in Kazakhstan. Points 6 and 7 teach basic Kazakh phrases, and toponymic guidelines which outright ban the use of Soviet toponyms in favor of native Kazakh names. Point 8 explains that *russophobia* does not exist in Kazakhstan. Points 6 and 7, combined with points 1 and 2 really help understand how Kazakh-language nationalism can be, even on social networks, of defensive nature.

The aforementioned user demographic is usually, as we have seen, vocally critical of Nur-Sultan's soft balancing and leniency vis-à-vis the Russian Federation. Our research has yet to know of instances where such relatively aggressive posts have led to consequences for Kazakhstan in the way our first chapter presented. If a hostile reaction from Russian nationalist circles, or even Russian officials in response to a perceived threat to the interests of visiting (or residing) ethnic Russians were to happen, Nur-Sultan's screw on social media is likely to tighten. While an attempt at maintaining good relations with Russia, this could result in the closure of an essential online launchpad for Kazakh-language nationalism.

Conclusion

At a time where international economic and cultural flows become more intense and integrated, nationalism adapts, once again proving its remarkable resilience. By integrating to globalized flows of ideas, standards and norms, Kazakh-language nationalism provides the Kazakh nation and state with sustained visibility and prestige, whether it be through Q-Pop or Kazakh-language digital art. At the same time, it appears in a 'tamer' fashion than defensive, top-down language nationalism. The authors highlight a key aspect of our thesis: there exists within Kazakhstan a kind of language nationalism which actively seeks to engage with globalization, for it views it as god-sent. We argue that such language nationalism, through Q-Pop, also does great work in allowing Kazakhstan to re-brand itself as a properly Asian nation. Similarly, the dissident use of Kazakh seems to serve the purpose of publicly dissociating the Kazakhs from Russia, while discursively embedding Kazakh-language civil society in a purported 'global civil society'. These hypotheses — rather than assertions, would need a more in-depth study to be fully corroborated.

While the international advantages — both for Kazakhstan as a nation and its language — are plenty, digital, globalization-integrated Kazakh-language nationalism is not devoid of extremes which could threaten Kazakhstan’s carefully elaborated multi-vector policy.

General conclusion

This essay attempted to analyze Kazakh-language nationalism according to three of its different conceptions of international affairs, and more broadly, globalization. Chapter 2 covered what can be considered to be the most ‘obvious’, classical kind of language nationalism: one which is apprehensive and distrustful of globalization and international affairs. Its goals mostly revolved around asserting its cultural and linguistic distinctiveness as a nation, thus assisting Kazakhstan’s multi-vector policy and allowing it to anchor itself in traditional international solidarities such as Pan-Turkism and Eurasianism, the latter on its terms. Chapter 3 wished to analyze Kazakh-language nationalism as an endeavor which does not necessarily fear globalization, as it has used globalized migratory flows (in the scope of the *Oralman* policy) to meet its goals. It has also helped the Kazakh nation integrate to a globalized vision of modernity — said modernity being an asset for its end of promoting the Kazakh language as well. Here, Kazakh-language nationalism sees globalization and international flows as tools to be wielded carefully, in sync with official views on Kazakhness. We have tentatively called this kind of language nationalism ‘globalization-wielding’ nationalism. Chapter 4 covered a section of Kazakh-language nationalism which, unlike the former two, willfully and wholly engages with globalization and international flows. Through the examples of Q-Pop and Kazakh-language social media, this latter kind of globalized language nationalism proved to be a strong vector of soft power, nation branding and a liberal discursive tool. This essay corroborates French author Stendhal’s belief that « The first instrument of a people’s genie is its language⁴⁰⁰ », as it shows how Kazakh language nationalism constitutes an international tool wielded skillfully by both Kazakh officials and civil society in a variety of ways reflective of the diversity of standpoints its advocates hold towards 21st century international relations and globalization.

⁴⁰⁰ Stendhal, « Des périls de la langue italienne », *Racine et Shakespeare*, 1825, p.210.

While yielding different kinds of positive outcomes in the scope Kazakhstan's international affairs, all three types of language nationalism present the very same limitations: the risk of upsetting the nation's powerful neighbors. National-patriots (Chapters 2 and 3) have, on numerous occasions, offended Russian nationalists and Chinese officials, forcing Nur-Sultan to take repressive measures against Kazakh-language nationalists or to go countercurrent to some of its policies. After the 2022 invasion of Ukraine, even the liberal, digitalized fringe of Kazakh-language nationalism has displayed hostility vis-à-vis Russia in the form of aggressive Tweets and online posts, which do not appear too dissimilar to what was covered in Chapters 2 and 3. In this regard, Kazakh-language nationalism, regardless of its relationship with the outside world, can severely hinder Nur-Sultan's multi-vector and balancing policies. We argue that these widespread limitations, which are common to all three kinds of language nationalism, are mostly the consequence of Kazakhstan's particularly delicate position in international affairs.

In answering the question of the relation between Kazakh-language nationalism, globalization and international affairs, this essay hopes to rise a number of open questions.

The first question relies on Hutchinson's assertion that « Ethnic formations might develop overtime a repertoire of many different pasts, cultured heritages and hence models of cultural identity⁴⁰¹ ». This statement, we argue, is exemplified by Q-Pop's tentative re-branding of the Kazakh nation as an Asian nation. Our reflexion thus wishes to raise the question of the promotion of the Kazakh language as a discursive tool allowing the Kazakh nation to brand itself as more Asian than it is European or Eurasian.

The second question is that of the 'neo'-romantic nature of digital Kazakh-language nationalism. Indeed, as we have argued, Kazakh-language digital artists view their mother tongue as a sort of added value and a selling argument as it heralds the authenticity and originality of their work compared to the work of others. A more in-depth study could tentatively qualify language nationalism as a romantic selling argument in the scope of post-modern social networks.

The third question is broader, and concerns the recent evolution of nationalism in the scope of international relations. The three types of language nationalisms ('defensive', 'globalization-wielding' and 'globalized') covered in this essay are, as we explained, not exclusive of one another, and can involved a variety of top-down and bottom-up actors alike. Their coexistence begs the question of their relation to one another, however. Indeed, is language-nationalism so composite

⁴⁰¹ Hutchinson, op. cit., p.88.

that it necessarily holds, at all times, such a variety of views regarding globalization and international affairs? If not, is language-nationalism transitioning away from its more classical, defensive form and into a fitter, globalized form?

Finally, the year 2022 has seen a number of unprecedented changes for Kazakhstan. Since January 2022, Kazakhstan has been undergoing profound political changes which were, for the most part, not anticipated by this essay. Despite the inclusion of references to post-January 2022 developments, hindsight is decidedly too small to permit reliable interpretation. As the writing of this thesis nears its end, president Tokayev has announced that a constitutional referendum was to be held in June 2022⁴⁰², raising as many eyebrows as it raised questions. As the Nazarbayev legacy seems to drift away slowly, Tokayev's presidency is shrouded in uncertainty as for the future of Kazakh-language nationalism. More recently, the dramatic escalation in the Russo-Ukrainian conflict has led to renewed anxiety in the face of Russian foreign policy and its new developments. As the world seems to go through major reconfigurations, the dynamics between Russia and Kazakhstan are the object of much apprehension, and many questions. In this regard, Kazakh-language nationalism, we argue, is bound to evolve one way or another.

⁴⁰² Gotev, Georgi. « Le président du Kazakhstan appelle à un référendum constitutionnel et met en garde contre les provocateurs », *Euractiv*, May, 2nd 2022. [Retrieved on May, 12th, 2022].

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