

## **Ethnodemographic situation in Kazakhstan**

The formation of the polyethnic population in the territory of contemporary Kazakhstan began in the mid-eighteenth century. Nevertheless, up until the beginning of the twentieth century, the population structure remained rather homogeneous, and Kazakhs constituted the absolute majority. Thus, according to the First General Census of the Russian Empire of 1897, the Kazakh population within the territory of contemporary Kazakhstan was 3,392,751 people, or 81.7 percent of the total population.

According to the 1897 census, the Russian population was 454,402, or 10.95 percent of the Kazakhstan's total population; there were 79,573 Ukrainians (1.91 percent); 55,984 Tatars (1.34 percent); 55,815 Taranch (present-day Uighurs) (1.34 percent); 29,564 Uzbeks (0.7 percent); 11,911 Mordovans (0.28 percent); 4,888 Dungan (0.11 percent); 2,883 Turkmen; 2,613 Germans; 2,528 Bashkir; 1,651 Jews; and 1,254 Poles.

Subsequently, as a result of Stolypin's resettlement policy under tsarism, which was directed at increasing the size of Kazakhstan's peasant populations, a significant increase in the size of the Russian and Ukrainian population occurred. By 1911, these populations increased to 1,543,138 and came to represent 28.5 percent of the overall population. The Kazakh share of the population, for its part, declined to 67.2 percent.<sup>6</sup>

During the first half of the twentieth century up until the 1959 census, the Kazakh share of the population constantly declined as a result of a vigorous influx of other ethnic populations to Kazakhstan and massive deaths among the Kazakh population during collectivization, the civil war, World War II, and other extreme moments in history.

If, according to the first All-union Census of 1926, Kazakhstan's Kazakh population stood at 3,713,394 (or 57.10 percent), by the census of 1937, the absolute population and share of the total had declined to 2,182, 000 and 38.8 percent. The absolute retreat of the Kazakh population during the period between the two censuses, from 1926 to 1937, was 39.8 percent. Although the 1959 census established a slight growth in the number of Kazakhs (2,794, 966, an increase of about 28 percent for a period of more than 20 years), their share of Kazakhstan's population (30.02 percent) continued to decline.

In subsequent years, the absolute number and the share of Kazakhs have significantly increased as a result of a high natural population growth. Thus, according to data of the All-union Census of 1970, the number of Kazakhs increased to 4,234,166 persons, constituting 32.54 percent of Kazakhstan's population. The All-union Censuses of 1979 and 1989 established further growth in the number and share of the Kazakh population: 5,289, 349 (36.02 percent) and 6,534,616 (39.68 percent), respectively.

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<sup>6</sup> N. V. Turchaninov, "Naselenie aziatskoi Rossii. Statisticheskii ocherk," *Azaiatskaia Rossiia*, vol. 1 [St. Petersburg, 1914], pp. 82, 91, 92; [author missing] *Khozaistvo kazakhov na rubezhe XIX-XX vv.* [Alma-Ata, 1980].

Consequently, the number and share of the Russian-Ukrainian and other nonnative [inoetnichnoe] ethnic groups changed. These signaled a permanent and growing tendency, mainly at the expense of migrational flows from Russia to Kazakhstan. If, according to the census of 1926, there were 1,279,979 Russians (19.68 percent) and 860,822 Ukrainians (13.23 percent), according to the 1959 census, there were already 3,974,229 Russians (42.68 percent) and 762,131 Ukrainians (8.18 percent). Thus, while the growth of the Russian population was 210 percent, the number and share of the Ukrainian population significantly declined.

According to the 1970 census, the Russian population in Kazakhstan was 5,521,917 (42.44 percent) and 933,461 Ukrainians (7.17 percent). According to the 1979 census, the corresponding figures were 5,991,205 (40.80 percent) and 897,964 (6.11 percent). As we see, from the 1970, 1979, and the 1985 censuses, for the first time in more than an entire century, despite an increase in absolute numbers, there was a gradual decline in share of the Russian population: 42.44 percent, 40.80 percent, and 37.82 percent. At the same time, as in the past, the 1989 census showed an increase in the Russian population, which reached 6,227,549.

One of the most significant population groups in Kazakhstan in the twentieth century was the Germans deported during the war years. According to the 1926 census, there were only 51,102 Germans in Kazakhstan. In 1970, however, there were 858,077 Germans in Kazakhstan; in 1979, 900,207; and in 1989, 957,518.

From 1926 to 1989, there was also a significant increase in the following groups: Tatars (from 80,642 to 327,982); Belarusians (from 25,614 to 182,601); Uighurs (from 63,434 to 185,301); Koreans (from 42 to 103,315), and so on. Uzbeks maintained their rather significant representation; during this period their numbers increased from 213,498 to 332,017. At the same time, if Uighurs and Uzbeks increased their numbers by means of natural population movement, then all other peoples grew for the most part by mechanized population movements (migration, deportation, exile, etc.).

Kazakhstan's sovereignty has led to the complete transformation of the country's ethnodemographic situation. For the first time in a century and a half, large-scale migration processes from Kazakhstan to Russia and other countries contributed to a significant decrease in the overall population: by more than 9.1 percent, from 16,464,464 to 14,953,126.

The decline in the number of German and Slavic inhabitants of Kazakhstan was especially significant. As a result of mass immigration to Germany, the number of Germans declined by more than 63.1 percent, from 957,518 to 353,441. The Russian population declined by 28.6 percent, from 6,227,549 to 4,479,618; the Ukrainian population declined by 38.9 percent, from 896,240 to 547,052; the population of Tatars declined by 24.1 percent, from 327,982 to 248,952; the population of Belarusians declined by 38.7 percent, from 182,601 to 111,926; the population of Koreans declined by 3.5 percent, from 103,315 to 99,657; the population of Azerbaijanis declined by 13.1 percent, from 90,083 to 78,295; and the population of Poles declined by 21.1 percent, from 59,956 to 47,297.

In addition, there was a decrease in the following groups and in the absolute majority of other peoples of Kazakhstan: Chechens, Bashkirs, Moldovans, Ingush, Mordovans, Armenians, Greeks, Kyrgyz, Bulgarians, Lezgins, and Turkmen (see Table 2).

As we can see, in the years of sovereignty, the ethnodemographic structure of Kazakhstan seriously changed. With the exception of just a few ethnic groups, the population of the majority of Kazakhstan's peoples have, during the period between the 1989 and 1999 censuses, significantly declined. Only the following groups experienced an insignificant increase in population: Kazakhs, 22.1 percent, from 6,534,616 to 7,985,039; Uzbeks, 11.6 percent, from 332,017 to 370,663; Uighurs, 13.5 percent, from 185,301 to 210,339; Dungans, by 22.4 percent, from 30,165 to 36,945; and Kurds, by 28.8 percent, from 25,425 to 32,764. Obviously, the main reasons for the population decline are mechanical factors and, foremost, migrational factors. We shall examine a breakdown by *oblast* of the 1999 census (see Table 2).

TABLE 2

**Population of Kazakhstan, 1999 census data**

Ethnic groups	1999	1989	1999 as percentage of 1989	Ethnic group as a percentage of total population in 1999
Total population	14,953,126	16,464,464	90.82	100.0
Kazakhs	7,985,039	6,534,616	122.19	53.40
Russians	4,479,618	6,227,549	71.93	29.95
Ukrainians	547,052	896,240	61.03	3.65
Uzbeks	370,663	332,017	111.63	2.47
Germans	353,441	957,518	36.91	2.36
Tatars	248,952	327,982	75.90	1.66
Uighurs	210,339	185,301	113.51	1.40
Belarusans	111,926	182,601	61.29	0.74
Koreans	99,657	103,315	96.45	0.66
Azerbaijanis	78,295	90,083	86.91	0.52
Poles	47,297	59,956	78.88	0.31
Dungans	36,945	30,165	122.47	0.24
Kurds	32,764	25,425	128.86	0.21
Chechens	31,799	49,507	64.23	0.21
Tajiks	25,657	25,514	100.56	0.17
Bashkirs	23,224	41,847	55.49	0.15
Moldovans	19,458	33,098	58.78	0.13
Ingush	16,893	19,914	84.82	0.11
Mordva	16,147	30,036	53.75	0.10
Armenians	14,758	19,119	77.19	0.09
Greek	12,703	46,746	27.17	0.08
Kyrgyz	10,896	14,112	77.21	0.07
Bulgarians	6,915	10,426	66.32	0.04
Lezgins	4,616	13,905	33.19	0.03
Turkmen	1,729	3,846	44.95	0.01
Other ethnic groups	166,342	203,626	81.68	1.11
No ethnic group indicated	1	119	0.84	0.000006



## Kazakhs

As we have already noted, Kazakhs constitute the majority of Kazakhstan's current population. The term "Kazak" [kazak] as a form of self-identification is first mentioned in historical sources of the sixteenth century.<sup>7</sup> It continues to be used to the present day.

Since the middle of the eighteenth century, in an effort to differentiate Kazakhs [kazak] from Russian Cossacks [kazak] Russians began to use the name Kirgiz<sup>8</sup> insofar as up until the beginning of the twentieth century, it was believed that the Kirgiz represented a constituent part of the Kazakh people.<sup>9</sup> "Kazak" as a term of self-identification [samonazvanie] and "Kazakstan" as a term for the state" was officially recognized and revived in 1925; from 1935 onward, spelled "Kazakh" ("Kazakhstan"), the term entered usage as an official designation.

The semantic pair kazak/kazakh has undergone a peculiar evolution. It originally goes back to the Turkic word "kazak," signifying a person who leads a free, Cossack manner of life, that is a nomadic life.<sup>10</sup>

As an ethnonym, the term Kazak was first established in the two-part name "Uzbek-Kazak," which is how, at the beginning of the sixteenth century, Uzbeks were called who were left in Kazakhstan's territory after a portion of Uzbek tribes, under Mukhammed Sheibani-khan, were resettled in Ma wara' al-Nahr. Later, in the second half of the sixteenth century, the terms Uzbek and Uzbek-Kazak were transformed into the ethnonym Kazak, which has become a term of self-identification by the Kazakh people.

The nature of the ethnonym Kazak is nicely illustrated by the historical sources. At the beginning of the sixteenth century, Kasym-khan, who was considered the unifier of all Uzbek-Kazak tribes, gave the concept of Uzbek-Kazak an exhaustive character. He provided a kind of ethnocultural portrait of the Kazakhs. Over several centuries — from the beginning of the sixteenth century to the beginning of the twentieth century — it has repeatedly been confirmed by countless historical sources. "We are inhabitants of the steppe; we have no rare or valuable possessions or goods; our most valuable possession is our horses. Meat and the skin from it serve as our best food and clothing; our most enjoyable drink is their milk and what we prepare

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<sup>7</sup> *Materialy po istorii kazakhskikh khanstv XV-XVIII vv.* [Alma-Ata, 1969], p. 226; V. V. Barthold, *Sochineniia*, Volume II, Part I, pp. 270; Volume V, pp. 170, 184, 212, 535.

<sup>8</sup> A. I. Levshin, "Ob imeni kirgiz-kazakskogo naroda i otlichie ego ot podlinnykh ili dikikh kirgizov," *Moskovskii vestnik*, 1827, Part IV, no. 16, pp. 432-451; A. I. Levshin, *Opisanie kirgiz-kazach'ikh ili kirgiz-kaisatskikh ord i stepei*, Part I-III [St. Petersburg, 1832].

<sup>9</sup> For further details, see E.A. Masanov, *Ocherk istorii etnograficheskogo izucheniia kazakhskogo naroda v SSSR* [Alma-Ata, 1966].

<sup>10</sup> A. Samoilovich, "O slove 'kazak,'" *Kazaki. Antropologicheskie ocherki* [Leningrad, 1927], 2d. issue, pp. 5-16; S. K. Ibragimov, "Eshche raz o termine 'kazakh,'" *Novye materialy po drevnei i srednevekovoi istorii Kazakhstana* [Alma-Ata, 1960], pp. 66-71; V. P. Iudin, "Ordy: Belaia, Siniaia, Seraia, Zolotaia..." *Kazakhstan, Sredniaia i Tsentral'naia Aziia v XVI-XVIII vv.* [Alma-Ata, 1983], pp. 159-160.

from it. We have no gardens or buildings on our land. Our place of recreation is the cattle pasture and the herding of horses. We go to the herds and take pleasure in the sight of horses.”<sup>11</sup>

“The Kirgiz,” wrote V. V. Radlov in this respect, “are a real nomadic people, wandering the whole year about the steppes... Their values, customs, way of thinking — in a word, their whole life and activities — are closely connected to these travels for the sake of animals...”<sup>12</sup> The prominent Russian ethnologist N. A. Aristov correctly noted that Kazakhs, “to a greater extent than all [other] Turkic nationalities preserved their cattle-raising and nomadic way of life...”<sup>13</sup>

As a whole, Kazakhs were those people who lived the nomadic life in the territory of Kazakhstan. Kazakhs were those people who always remained “true to the heritage of their ancestors” and did not revert to a settled form of life. They were all those people who, in the middle of the fifteenth century, left the state of Abulkhair-khan in order to live the “Kazakh” way of life, refusing to recognize state authority. They were those people who did not recognize agriculture or the settled way of life; they looked down upon them. Kazakhs considered their culture and way of life the best and the only possible one in the world. In the words of Kasym-khan, the Kazakhs were those who mainly ate meat and drank *kumys* [alcohol made from horse milk], who lived the nomadic life and who did not engage in agriculture.<sup>14</sup>

Precisely in this way, in the middle of the second millennium, a new economic and cultural community appeared in the desert steppes of Eurasia: the Kazakhs, who possessed a sharply defined group consciousness and group term of self-identification (Kazak). The term Kazakh [sic], which testifies to the priorities of the economic and cultural opposition, became a term of self-identification only in the sixteenth century. Over more than three and a half centuries, historical evidence has unambiguously established the presence of an economic and cultural community of Kazakhs. During this period, the basic means and mechanism of their integration and consolidation were through identification with the nomadic economy and the nomadic form of life. The first and most important question, therefore, that Kazakhs asked one another upon meeting was: “How is your herd doing?”

In the period from the sixteenth century to the 1930s, Kazakhs never represented a consolidated ethnic group. This is plainly illustrated by a host of historical documents, which show that Kazakhs were internally divided into several different ethnic communities. The greater part of Kazakhs — the so-called *kara-siok* (black bone) — were members of a single, though weakly, integrated ethnic community, which cited as its origin the mythic Alash-khan. These were Kazakhs of the Elder, Middle, and Younger *zhuz*.<sup>15</sup>

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11 *Materialy po istorii kazakhskikh khanstv XV-XVIII vv.*, p. 226.

12 V. V. Radlov, *Iz Sibiri. Stranitsi dnevnika* [Moscow, 1989], p. 253.

13 N. I. Aristov, “Zametki ob etnicheskom sostave tiurkskikh plemen i narodnostei i svedeniia ob ikh chislennosti,” *Zhivaia starina*, issues III-IV [St. Petersburg, 1896], p. 350.

14 N. E. Masanov, *Kochevaia tsivilizatsiia kazakhov* [Moscow-Almaty, 1995].

15 For further details, see N. E. Masanov, *Kochevaia tsivilizatsiia kazakhov*, pp. 55-64.

Besides the Alash ethnic community, there were, among Kazakhs, a host of other less numerous, but much more influential, ethnic groups: the Tore (descendants of Chingiz-khan), the Kozha (descendants of the prophet Muhammad, his close associates, and other holy figures). The permanent conflict of the “Alash tribal ethnic group” has been consistently alleviated by a recognition of their belonging to a common nomadic community (of Kazakhs), as well as the fact that the ruling elite was of a different ethnic group (Chingizid).

Beginning in the 1920s and '30s, the economic and cultural term “Kazak” was gradually transformed into the ethnic “Kazakh,” a status it never before possessed. Kazakhs have become all of those who define their group membership not in accordance with their activity, mode of enterprise, or way of life, as it has been for many past centuries, but in accordance with the record in their passports, in agreement with their parents’ ethnic affiliation. A person become a Kazakh not by way of life, traditions, and culture, but according to the system imposed by the Soviet Union that strictly obliged an individual to fix his group status by the passport record of the parents’ ethnic affiliation.

Henceforth, the traditional economic and cultural form of group identification for the individual is replaced by a complete state-passport system of ethnic identification for all of the country’s citizens, regardless of their own self-identification [samoopredelenie] or sense of identity [samooshchushchenie]. The traditional principal of “self-consciousness [samoznanie], as expressed in a term of self-identification [samozvanie],” was replaced by the state nomenklatura with ethnic terms, officially registered and entered in a single, unified list at registry office “ZAGS” [an office which registered birth, death, marriage and divorce in the former USSR].

Instead of the by no means mandatory principle of “the individual’s spontaneous self-identification,” which became established in the traditional community of Kazakhs, the imperative, fixed, and highly ideologized principle of “strictly obligatory categorization by passport and juxtaposition of all individuals [against each other] according to ethnic background” was introduced.

In Soviet times, an individual's ethnic affiliation became politically a convenient factor for determining success in life, prosperity, career advancement, etc. A strict hierarchy of ethnic communities, based on territorial locale, imperatively defined the range of rights, potential opportunities, and authority enjoyed by representatives of a particular group. If a person was "unlucky" because of place of birth or residence, then all other opportunities being equal, he would not be successful.

A Kazakh, therefore, enjoyed a very advantageous situation only in the territory of the Kazakh Soviet Socialist Republic, where Kazakhs were given clear priority with regard to the right to occupy important positions and to receive particular resources determined mainly in the distribution of significant posts and positions. A striking example of this would be the prewar policy of indigenization of the state apparatus, the significant increase, from the 1960s to 1980s, in the proportion of the Kazakh party-economic nomenklatura, and the advantage accorded to Kazakh youth in entry to state institutions of higher learning, etc.

Beyond the borders of the Kazakh SSR, however, Kazakhs would completely lose their nomenklatura privileges and would join the rank-and-file ethnic group. The situation was similar for other ethnic groups that enjoyed great privileges in the territory of their "own" republics. Hence the unalterable living conditions under which all citizens of the former Soviet Union lived, according to which a particular ethnic group had a legal, natural right to play a dominant role in the territory of its national-state formation.

Consequently, there arose false ideals regarding the fact that the rights of the individual or group based on ethnic affiliation were higher than those of a person. Hence the stereotype regarding the special right to success in life and career advancement only within the territory of one's own national-state formation.

Such privileges created distinct stereotypes in the public consciousness regarding the appropriateness and the legitimacy of the direct link between a person's success and well-being and his ethnic affiliation. By the same token, there existed a stereotype regarding the inappropriateness and illegitimacy of such a link if a person did not live in the territory of his titular ethnic group.

From the 1960s to the 1980s, one could observe an obvious tendency in Kazakhstan toward formation of the general social stereotype that Kazakhs had a natural legal right to a dominant position in Kazakhstan's territory: to occupy the highest posts; to receive higher education; to advance their values in civic consciousness; to defend their culture, language, traditions, and history. Thus Kazakhs, quite appropriately, have a privileged claim to self-realization, in all respects, in Kazakhstan's territory.

Insofar as Kazakhstan remained a constituent part of the Soviet Union in which Russians constituted the dominant ethnic group, however, Kazakhs were expected, even "at home," to coexist on an equal level with Russians. Thus they were not entirely satisfied. From the late 1980s to the mid-90s, the campaign of bilingualism (Russian and Kazakh) by the Central Committee of the Communist Party of Kazakhstan and the closing of Semipalatinsk Nuclear Testing Area [poligon](the Nevada-Semei [Semipalatinsk in Kazakh] movement) played a key role in heightening the ethnic consciousness of Kazakhs.

Kazakhstan's sovereignty facilitated a sharp rise in Kazakhs' "national" consciousness and, in fact, established and legitimated the stereotypes of their historic, natural right to political, cultural, and ethnic domination in the republic's territory. These stereotypes have taken on the status of a state ideology.

In his April 1992 policy declaration entitled "Strategy for Kazakhstan's Political and Economic Development to 2005," President Nursultan Nazarbaev stated that Kazakhstan was a state [that had been established] for the self-determination of the Kazakh nation [gosudarstvo samoopredelivsheisia kazakhskoi natsii]. This was again confirmed in the preamble of independent Kazakhstan's first constitution, promulgated in January 1993. This served as the theoretical basis of the firmly upheld principle in Kazakhstan that the rights of the Kazakh nation, the indigenous ethnos, enjoys a higher status than human rights.



Insofar as the Kazakh political elite, having managed initially to realize its dominance with respect to government employment, has at its disposal the entire might of the state machinery, including institutional structures, the powerful personnel apparatus by which practically any decision can be implemented, the mass media that can be controlled by the state, and complete dominance of the humanities: given such dominance, the elite can, without any serious opposition, implement any ethnocentric idea and foster it in the public consciousness. Naturally, therefore, the government's ethnocentrism bursts into flames like a fire on the dry steppe, overtaking the entire Kazakh population. National-populism has become the ideology of the government and, hence, of the entire Kazakh state structure.

From 1992 to 1994, the entire ideological basis necessary for creating an ethnocratic state was developed. To this end, the traditional methods favored, for example, in the Baltics and other post-communist countries were employed: all of the forceful and demagogic rhetoric about sovereignty, legislation regarding Kazakh as the state language, and so on.

In this period, in order to prove the necessity and adequacy of creating an ethnocratic state, a key role was played by pseudo- and quasi-historical research; the search for "blank spots" in Kazakhstan's history; criticism of the policies of Russification, collectivization, and "Russo-Soviet ethnocide" directed against Kazakhs; countless ethnodemographic studies; a grandiose effort to establish the ancient origins of Kazakh ethnogenesis and statehood; the search for and exaltation of national heroes in the Kazakh past; etc. The main conclusion to be drawn from all of these pseudo-scientific works is the proposition of the legitimacy and grounds for domination by the indigenous Kazakh ethnos in the historic homeland of its predecessors.

"The conception of the formation of the state identity of the Republic of Kazakhstan" asserts that the "[e]thnic center for Kazakhs is Kazakhstan. Nowhere else in the world do they possess a statehood that will concern itself with preserving and developing the Kazakhs as an ethnos, their culture, their way of life, their language, their traditions. The definition of Kazakhstan as a national state ought, first and foremost, to identify it in this regard." President Nursultan Nazarbaev goes further, saying that "all of Kazakhstan is the historico-genetic territory of the Kazakh nation"<sup>16</sup>.

"For many centuries, the Kazakh people had to struggle for their independence and sovereignty. Owing to their best qualities, their ability to unite in moments of danger, and, not least, their striving to live in peace, accord, and good-neighborly relations with other peoples, they have not vanished in the flow of history; in a matter of decades, they have managed to reestablish their statehood. The Kazakh people, having withstood the tests of time, have a rich and complex history. Today, this history ought to be of assistance to all peoples living in Kazakhstan to understand better the roots of our unity and to eliminate any historical wrongs, for, in looking back at the past, we have to see the future. It is no fault of the Kazakhs that the twentieth century proved to be an age of tragic events, transforming them into a minority in

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<sup>16</sup> N. A. Nazarbaev, *V potoke istorii* [Almaty, 1999], p. 195.

their own homeland. Those who today dare to cast doubt on the right of this people to statehood are either ignorant or do not want to know the depths of this drama. I am convinced that that the Kazakh nation is no less worthy of statehood than any other people. For the sake of statehood, it has suffered its history”<sup>17</sup>

Meanwhile, a wide-scale effort has been undertaken to create national symbols; to rename oblast, cities, streets, villages, schools, and institutions; and to devise new terms, concepts, and words. As a result, it has become an accepted stereotype in the public consciousness that Kazakhs are the state-forming and state-strengthening origin of the Kazakhstan Republic.

In this regard, President Nazarbaev has unambiguously formulated the idea that Kazakh culture ought to be an integrating factor for all the peoples of Kazakhstan. “With respect to the integrating role of Kazakh culture,” the country’s president writes, “this is genuine pragmatism; it is not some kind of nationalist exercise... This is the culture of the majority of the country. This is a culture that possesses the entire array of institutional instruments. It is a culture that has been genetically formed in this particular territory and, to a great extent, has predetermined the character of historical development of Kazakhstan the state... Therefore, it is no paradox nor is there anything politically incorrect in the assertion of the integrating role of Kazakh culture. We need to say this directly and without any ambiguity.”<sup>18</sup>

In this way, an ideology has been firmly reinforced in the social consciousness of Kazakhs, according to which Kazakhs as the indigenous ethnos have the unconditional right to political domination in the territory of Kazakhstan. Their language is to become the state language, and Kazak culture is to play the integrating role for “all ethnic groups in the country.” Consequently, representatives of the Kazakh ethnos have a “natural” and “historic” right to occupy the country’s top government posts and to receive preferential treatment with respect to higher education, career advancement, and study of their culture and history.

“The state-forming ethnos,” Nazarbaev stated on January 19, 2001, formulating “Kazakhstan’s national idea,” “is the Kazakh people... Other peoples should show understanding in relating to the self-expression of the Kazakh people, their efforts to communicate in their own language, to develop their national culture and traditions.”<sup>19</sup>

## **Clans and *zhuz***

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17 N. A. Nazarbaev, “Suverennomu Kazakhstanu – 10 let,” 1995.

<http://www.president.kz/main/mainframe.asp?lang=ru>.

18 N. A. Nazarbaev, *V potoke istorii*, p. 140.

19 *Kazakhstanskaia pravda*, January 20, 2001.

It is widely known that clan-based society is an functional outgrowth of the exchange of information and property among nomadic Kazakhs. Nomads' adaptation to the extreme living conditions in the arid zone are so complex that it is realistically possible only on the basis of the experience of several generations of nomads, over several centuries, given the ecological environment and the highest degree of professional skill required to be a nomad and a herdsman.

Therefore, survival in the harsh conditions of the arid zone was possible only through specialized knowledge gathered and transmitted to an individual by his ancestors, because the competition among nomads for pasture and water supplies was so harsh that this experience of adaptation and the knowledge of natural resources could not become universal. Such information circulated among a narrow group of nomads passed on, as a rule, to direct male descendents. As women were concerned with domestic tasks and did not participate in the herding of animals, they were excluded from the ranks of "transmitters," or, more precisely, "retransmitters" of socio-cultural information on adaptation.

Consequently, information circulated according to patriarchal channels and in no other way. Property was also circulated in this manner, passed on from generation to generation by patriarchal lineage. No one could receive, obtain, or maintain property (mainly livestock) in any other way. Hence, the genealogical system of origin [rodstvo] and genealogical organization predominated in the overall system of the social aggregation of nomadic communities.<sup>20</sup>

Kazakh nomadic society was broken down into three *zhuz*: Elder, Middle, and Younger; these are names that ought to be understood and regarded solely in the context of genealogical origin, that is, seniority. Under no circumstances should they be considered in the sense of "Big" or "Great" [bolshoi, velikii] (of the Elder *zhuz*) or Small [malyi, malenkii] of the (Younger *zhuz*) as was frequently done in Russian prerevolutionary and Western historiography. Practically all of the genealogical legends of Kazakhs (*shezhere*) interpret their origins exclusively in the context of genealogy.

There is the famous but less well-grounded view of Iu. A. Zuev, who sees a so-called triaxial organization of Kazakh society at the heart of the *zhuz*: a left flank, a center and a right flank.<sup>21</sup>

But the most debatable point of view is that of S. D. Asfendiarov, supported by M. P. Viatkin and V. P. Iudin, to the effect that the origin of the Kazakh *zhuz* was geographically conditioned: that is, by the natural division of Kazakhstan into three parts: Semirechie, Western Kazakhstan (from Mugodzhar), and Eastern Kazakhstan from (from the southern Ural hills).

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20 For further details, see N. E. Masanov, *Kochevaia tsivilizatsiia kazakhov*.

21 Iu. A. Zuev, "Istoricheskaia proektsiia kazakhskikh genealogicheskikh predanii: k voprosu o perezhitkakh triaxial'noi organizatsii u kochevykh narodov Tsentral'noi Azii," *Kazakhstan v epokhu feodalizma* [Alma-Ata, 1981], pp. 63-78.

These characteristics naturally contributed to the specific character of cultural and historical processes in the respective zones.<sup>22</sup>

The comprehension of these characteristics of historical and ethnocultural development in the form of genealogical relationship [rodstvo] led to a public consciousness of the *zhuz* organization.<sup>23</sup> The first mention of *zhuz* in sources is found at the beginning of the seventeenth century.<sup>24</sup>

Traditionally, the Elder *zhuz* occupied the territory of southeastern Kazakhstan: Semirechie — that is, the river valley Ili and its numerous tributaries, as well as the foothills of Zhungar (to the east), Zailiisk and Kyrgyz Alatau, Karatau (to the south), between the rivers of the Chu and Talas to the middle of the Syr-Daria (to the west) and to the north, up to the Betpak-Dala and Moinkumy deserts and Lake Balkhash.

The territory of the Elder *zhuz* falls within the prerevolutionary administrative borders encompassing Kopal, Dzharkent, and Vernyi *uezds* of Semirechie *oblast* and Aulie-Ata and Chimkent *uezds* of Syr-Daria *oblast*. These fall within the contemporary borders of Taldy-Kurgan, Almaty, Dzhambul, and Chimkent *oblasts*.

The approximate population of the Kazakhs of the Elder *zhuz* at the turn of the nineteenth and twentieth centuries was seven hundred thousand persons. Including Alban and Suan in China, the number was approximately seven hundred and fifty thousand persons. As of the 1989 census, within Kazakhstan's contemporary borders the population of Kazakhs of the Elder *zhuz* was no more than two million; including Kazakhs in China and Central Asia, the total is no more than two and half million. Such a significant increase in population of Elder *zhuz* Kazakhs is related to their having suffered least of all from the famine of 1931-32.

Zhalairs, numbering approximately one hundred to one hundred and ten thousand before the revolution, were considered the oldest group among Kazakhs of the Elder *zhuz*. Kazakh *shezhere* says: A boy from the Zhalair clan [rod] sits higher than an old man from any other clan. And this is so in the gerontocratic society of Kazakhs! Then came the Oshakty, with about twenty thousand. The Elder *zhuz*, which bears the general name Uisun, comprised eleven groups in all: Dulat (250,000); Suan (30,000), Alban (100,000), the Kanly and Shanyshkly groups (50,000), Sary-Uisun (10,000), Shaprashty (50-60,000), Srgeli (40,000), and the Ysty (40-45,000).<sup>25</sup>

Kazakhs of the Middle *zhuz* traditionally occupied the territory of central, northern, and eastern Kazakhstan, and they formed a belt across the middle of the Syr-Daria, wedged between southern Kazakhstan and Middle Asia [Sredniaia Aziia: Russian expression used in Soviet times to designate four Central Asian republics excluding Kazakhstan]. Nomad camps

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22 S. D. Asfendiarov, *Istoriia Kazakstana s drevneishikh vremen* [Moscow-Alma-Ata 1935], Vol. 1, p. 82; V. P. Iudin, "Ordy: Belaia, Siniia, Seraia, Zolotaia..." p. 148.

23 N. E. Masanov, *Kochevaia tsivilizatstia kazakhov*.

24 *Materialy po istorii kazakhskikh khanstv XV-XVIII vv.*, pp. 242-243.

25 N. E. Masanov, *Kochevaia tsivilizatsiia kazakhov*, pp. 56-58.

could be found throughout this area, from the west to the east – from Mugodzhär and the watershed Irgiz – Turgai – Tobol to the Western Altai, Tarbagatai, and partly Dzhungar Alatau. From the south to north, from the center of the Syr-Daria's flow, the deserts of Betpak-Dala and Moinkumy and the northern extreme of Balkhash to the southern limit of the western Siberian plain. This encompasses practically the entire Turgai plateau, central Kazakhstan's small extinct volcanoes, the basin of the middle Irtysh; the lower and middle reaches of the Isim, Turgai, and Tobol, all the way up to the Kulundy and Isim steppes.

Up until the revolution, the Middle *zhuz* within the administrative and territorial boundaries of the Russian empire occupied the following areas: Zaisan, Ust-Kamengorsk, Pavlodar, Semipalatinsk, and Karkaralinsk *uezds* (Semipalatinsk *oblast*); Omsk, Akmolinsk, Petropavlovsk, Atbasar, and Kokchetav *uezds* (Akmolinsk *oblast*); Kustanai and Turgai *uezds* (Turgai *oblast*); Lepsy and some of Kopal *uezds* (Semirechie *oblast*); and Perovsk, Chimkent and Tashkent *uezds* (Syr Daria *oblast*).

Right now, the above areas are contained within the following *oblasts*: Eastern Kazakhstan, Northern Kazakhstan, Pavlodar, Karaganda, Akmola, Kustanai, and portions of Almaty, Southern Kazakhstan, and Kzyl-Orda.

At the turn of the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, the total number of Kazakhs of the Middle *zhuz* was approximately 1.2 to 1.3 million. Including Kazakhs of China and Mongolia (mainly Kerei and Naimans), the figure is over 1.5 million. At present (as of the 1989 census), the number of Kazakhs of the Middle *zhuz* can be put at approximately 3 million; including Kazakhs of Russia, Mongolia, China, and Middle Asia, the figure is 4 million.

Before the revolution, the largest tribal grouping among Kazakhs was the Argyn: about 500,000. They were followed by the Naimans, more than 400,000; the Kypchak, 140-150,000; the Kerei, 100-110,000; the Uak, 55-60,000; the Tarakt, 10,000; and the Konrad, 40-45,000 in Kazakhstan, and more than 100,000 in Middle Asia.<sup>26</sup>

Traditionally, the Younger *zhuz* occupied the territory of western Kazakhstan from Mugodzhär and the Irgiz-Tobol-Turgai watershed, up to the eastern extreme of the Caspian Sea and from the lower reaches of the Amu Daria and the Syr Daria rivers, to Ural and Tobol. It encompasses the northern part of the Ustiurt plateau and Mangyshlak, the eastern part of the Caspian plain and heights, and the Greater [Obshchii] Syrt, Emben and western portion of the Turgai plateau, as well as the northern part of the Aral and Turan plain.

In the administrative borders of prerevolutionary Kazakhstan, this territory encompasses the following areas: Ural, Guryev, Lbishchensk, and Temir *uezds* (Ural *oblast*); Irgiz and Aktiubinsk *uezds* (Turgai *oblast*), Mangyshlak *uezd* (Caspian *oblast*); Perov and Kazalinsk *uezds* (Syr Daria *oblast* and the Interior Orda of Astrakhan *guberniia*). In contemporary terms, these are the *oblasts* of Western Kazakhstan, Guryev, Mangyshlak, and portions of Kzyl-Orda *oblast*.

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<sup>26</sup> N. E. Masanov, *Kochevaia tsivilizatsiia kazakhov*, pp. 58-61.

At the turn of the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, the total number of Kazakhs of the Younger *zhuz* numbered some 1.1 million people. At present (as of the 1989 census), this number is no greater than 1.5 million; including Kazakhs of Russia and Turkmenistan, it probably is not quite 2 million. This is indicative of huge losses to the Younger *zhuz* due to the famine of the 1930s.

The general term for Kazakhs of the Younger *zhuz* is Alshyn. They were subdivided into large tribal groupings: Alimuly, Baiuly, and Zhetyru. As the Kazakh genealogical legend (*shezhere*) states: “In Kirgiz [as mentioned above, Kazakhs were wrongly called “Kirgiz”] folk assembly (in this case, a Younger *zhuz* is clearly meant), Alimuly are the first to raise their voices, are the first to make a decision [delaiut opredeleniia], and if their tribe alone makes a decision, it gives full authority for general agreement and implementation [of it]. A proposal made by the younger tribe does not oblige the Alimuly to implement it. As the most senior in the line of the common ancestor [po pervorodstvu rodonachalnikia svoego], they are always and in every case given external preference”.<sup>27</sup>

Before the revolution, the number of Alimuly was approximately 300,000-350,000 persons: Shekty, 60-80,000; Shomekei, over 100,000; Tortkara, 50-60,000; Kete, 50-60,000; Karakesek, 20-25,000; and Karasakal, 10-15,000. The total number of Baiuly before the revolution was approximately 500-550,000. This figure includes the following: Adai, 80-90,000; Baibakty, 40,000; Bersh, 40,000; Tazlar, 20,000; Serkesh, 45,000; Maskar, 20,000; Tana, 25,000; Kyzylkurt, 40,000, Zhappas, 50,000 (frequently Zhappas are grouped together with Altyn, themselves numbering 30,000), Isyk, 20,000 (Isyk are frequently grouped with Shikhlar, themselves numbering 70,000); Esentemir, 20,000; and Alasha, 40,000.

Before the revolution, the total number of Kazakhs of the Zhetyru numbered 270-300, including 80,000 Tabyn; Zhagalbaily, 70,000; Kereit, 30-35,000; Tama, 40-45,000; Toleu, 20,000; Kerderi, 20,000; and Ramadan, 5,000.<sup>28</sup>

This is how Kazakh society was traditionally divided into three *zhuz*: Elder, Middle, and Younger. This division was based on the principle of genealogical seniority: elder, middle, and youngest brothers. In accordance with this rather complex and multifaceted system, every *zhuz* (in Kazakh, *zhuz* means hundred) was divided into ancestral groups, which were in turn divided into still smaller clan groupings. In the end, such clan differentiation extended to every specific individual from generation to generation.

According to customary law, every Kazakh should know his ancestors right down to the fortieth generation. On the basis of this or another level of genealogical patrimony, exogenous norms were established, norms for making property claims, norms for levirate [a marriage when a widow marries deceased husband’s brother], etc.<sup>29</sup>

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27 I. F. Blaramberg, *Voенно-statisticheskoe opisaniie zemli kirgiz-kaisakov Vnutrennei (Bukeevskoi) i Zaural’skoi (Maloi) ordy, Orenburgskogo vedomstva* [St. Petersburg, 1848] pp. 74-75.

28 N. E. Masanov, *Kochevaia tsivilizatsiia kazakhov*, pp. 61-63.

29 N. E. Masanov, *Kochevaia tsivilizatsiia kazakhov*.

In the prerevolutionary period, clan affiliation played a particularly important role in determining the status of individuals and various social groups. If, according to the traditional system of mutual relations, the first question that Kazakhs, as nomads, naturally asked one another was “How is your herd doing?”, then the next question would be: “What tribe do you belong to?”[Kakogo Vy roda-plemeni].

This practice was based on the traditional Kazakh mentality, which, owing to the specific manner in which information was transmitted as property and as private knowledge intended solely for one’s own people (from father to son, from son to grandson, etc.), served as a natural carrier of the “virus” of clan identity [klanovost], the position of the individual within the clan, and clan identification of social space.

Nevertheless, *zhuz*-clan in Kazakhstan never possessed the functional, organizational structures that it possessed and continues to possess in Africa, in certain Asian countries, or in medieval Scotland. In Kazakhstan, the *zhuz*-clan was first and foremost a manner of thinking and a manner of interpreting, through the prism of the genealogical extraction of a person or group of persons, the processes and phenomena that occur in space. This is a manner of explaining and regulating the processes of a society’s social consolidation.

In Soviet times, this principle of integrating social phenomena, originally indicative of an ancestral characteristic to all Kazakh traditionalists, was transformed into a universal method for comprehending and identifying the country’s political processes and for personnel advancement in Soviet and party-economic organs. Thus, a priori, Kazakhs determined a particular *zhuz*’s influence and authority through the personnel representation in government structures.

Put another way, the positions held by a *zhuz* member determined the status and influence of a particular *zhuz*. At the same time, it was widely accepted that they mythologized the figure of the leader. So, for example, in their day, Kazakhs of the Elder *zhuz* exalted the first secretary of the Central Committee of Kazakhstan’s Communist Party, Dinmukhamed Kunaev, because he was considered a member of the Ysty group of the Elder *zhuz* and was regarded as one of their own. Whereas Kazakhs of the Middle and Younger *zhuz* would never, on the level of internal ethnic relations, regard him as one of their own.

The so-called clan factor remains quite important right now in contemporary Kazakhstan, but it is hardly the single manner for integration and characterization of the socio-political processes and personnel advancement. More than anything, it is a psychological factor that influences a society’s political life and, most significantly, influences the career path of various bureaucrats and their choice of a job and chances for advancement.

This relates to the fact that people frequently regard their resources and opportunities through the prism of certain peremptory characteristics of their *zhuz*-clan affiliation. There are widespread perceptions about the role that the *zhuz* plays in Kazakh political life. These are rather simple and understood by every Kazakh. Their characteristics depend on both genealogical seniority and size. “The Elder *zhuz*, like the older brother, has the legal right to govern”; “the Middle *zhuz*, as the largest in number and the most highly educated, is also

within its rights to demand power”; “the Younger *zhuz*, like the youngest brother, is the smallest in number and has no right to demand power”; etc.

From this it follows that the clan factor defines the supposed appropriateness of an individual’s claim to a particular position. This feeds his ambitions, determines the legitimacy of his place in organs of power, and influences the possibility of his playing an independent role in political life. It is the clan factor that frequently determines, among other things, the boundaries of a bureaucrat’s authority, his power, his advancement in the civil service, his room for maneuvering, his social circle, and the limits and length of his stay in power.

It is worth noting, however, that no single *zhuz* is sufficiently consolidated. Among Kazakhs, competition not only between but also within clans is widespread. Much depends on concrete regions and persons, but the competition is quite wellknown, for example, within the Middle *zhuz* of Argyn, Naiman, and Kypchak, some of which cannot tolerate one another. In the Younger *zhuz*, the Alimuly and the Baiuly have a haughty attitude toward the Zhetyru. In the Elder *zhuz*, the Shaprashty and Dulat, who hinder the advancement of other clans, are more influential than others. In the *oblast* of Chimkent (present-day Southern Kazakhstan), there has always been competition among the Elder *zhuz* Dulat and the Middle *zhuz* Konrad.

In Kazakhstan, where President Nursultan Nazarbaev has established a personal regime, clan factor [klanovost] is extraordinarily important for manipulating social consciousness, personal positions, and assignments in the personal interests of the president so as to eliminate competition, corporative solidarity, and consolidation, as well as political opposition, in organs of state.

In this regard, A. Akishev is entirely correct when he observes that “among traditional qualities, which have recently become reified, especially characteristic has been the strengthening of tribalistic and clan relations, which have occurred as a result of a ‘regeneration’ of Medieval, and in Kazakhstan, hereditary, nomadic relations, especially in agricultural locales. Although they are nominally regarded as harmful, they are in fact legal in all Central Asian countries without exception, insofar as they maintain a comfortable environment for the regime.”<sup>30</sup>

Frequently, the clan factor becomes a means of opposing one ambition to another; it serves as a unique and traditional mechanism for restraint and balance. When D. Kunaev was the party leader of Kazakhstan (in the Central Committee Bureau of the Republic Communist Party), he staked his future on the party functionaries from the Younger *zhuz* because they could not compete with him for power and could not become his successor because of their small numbers, their insufficient influence in the capital, and their traditional place of residence in the countryside.

Kunaev always maintained his main rivals from the Middle *zhuz* in secondary, though formally important, positions: chairman of the council of ministers, secretaries of the *oblast*

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30 A. K. Akishev, “Starye plat’ia novykh khanov,” *Politicheskaiia elita Kazakhstana: istoriia, sovremennost’, perspektivy. Materialy “kruglogo stola,” Almaty, 5 fevralia 2000 g.* [Almaty, 2000], p. 101.



party committees, but he never allowed them to occupy any sort of serious representation in the Central Committee Bureau of the Kazakhstan Communist Party.<sup>31</sup> Until recently, the current president of Kazakhstan, Nursultan Nazarbaev, developed his personnel policy in pretty much the same way. After Kazakhstan achieved independence, Nazarbaev, who understood the dissatisfaction and ambition of the political elite and intelligentsia of the Middle *zhuz* (the biggest and most urbanized *zhuz*), always kept in his ranks a formal representative of the Middle *zhuz* as a public testament to the balanced character of his personnel policy.

Former Vice President Erik Asanbaev fulfilled this role effectively until 1996. He now serves merely as Kazakhstan's ambassador to Germany. Later, the formal testament to the president's idea of *zhuz*-clan balance was supposed to be Prime Minister Akezhan Kazhegeldin, who, in the eyes of the Middle *zhuz* intelligentsia and political elite, however, never represented such balance, because he was from the smallest lines of the Middle *zhuz*: the *Uak*. Put another way, the Middle *zhuz* bureaucracy, during the regimes of D. Kunaev and N. Nazarbaev, should have fulfilled the role of an obedient minion in order to symbolize to public opinion the idea of equal representation of *zhuz*-clan in the organs of high government.

In reality, however, the most important and crucial positions in the country were reserved for either representatives of the Elder *zhuz*, primarily the close relatives of Nazarbaev, or representatives of the Younger *zhuz*, whom society does not regard as legitimate or competitive candidates for power and who are incapable of playing any kind of independent political role in society. This tendency, which was less notable in the first years of Kazakhstan's sovereign development, is now receiving greater emphasis and, as power becomes concentrated in the hands of Nazarbaev, it is becoming more obvious.

At the present time, the ten or fifteen most influential persons in Kazakhstan who actually affect the making of important decisions on the state level, besides the president himself, are mainly his closest relatives and fellow-tribesmen from the Elder *zhuz*. In particular, these are S. Kalmyrzaev, chief of the presidential administration; Prime Minister K. Tokaev; Zh. Tuiakbai, speaker of the Mazhilis ([lower chamber of the] parliament); N. Abykaev, an extremely influential unofficial presidential assistant and adviser; O. Baigeldi, deputy chairman of the Senate [upper chamber of the parliament]; A. Sarsembaev, minister of information, culture, and civic accord; Z. Nurkadilov, the *akim* of Almaty *oblast*; A. Musaev, the head of the Committee for National Security (former KGB); S. Tokpakbaev, minister of defense; D. Nazarbaeva, the president's elder daughter and head of the largest media holding company; the daughter's husband, R. Aliev, the deputy chairman of the Committee for National Security; and K. Satybaldy, the president's nephew and the director of Kazakhstan's petroleum industry; T. Kulibaev, the president's second son-in-law; and so on.

Members of the Younger *zhuz* have a smaller but sufficiently significant representation in the organs of higher government. These include N. Balgimbaev, former prime minister; A.

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31 N. E. Masanov, "Kazakhskaiia politicheskaiia i intellektual'naia elita: klanovaia prinadlezhenost' i vnutrietnicheskoe sopernichestvo," *Acta Eurasica*, no. 1 (2), Moscow, 1996, pp. 46-61.

Kekilbaev, state secretary; M. Tazhin, secretary of the National Security Council; I. Tasmagambetov, vice premier; and others. The president's appointment to key government posts of civil servants from the Younger *zhuz* who do not enjoy public legitimacy serves to strengthen his influence and is an extremely effective way to eliminate potential opponents from political life.

The Middle *zhuz*, which now lacks a serious, authoritative representation in the structures of higher power, received an entirely unique and, as always, purely symbolic form of compensation with the transfer of the capital from Almaty, which is situated in the traditional territory of the Elder *zhuz*, to Akmola/Astana, situated in the traditional territory of the Middle *zhuz* Kazakhs. Another example of compensation was the appointment of O. Abdykarimov, a person loyal to the president, to chairmanship of the Senate, a position that is formally of secondary importance. A unique patronness of the Middle *zhuz* is Nazarbaev's wife, Sara.

With respect to serious personnel, political leaders from the Middle *zhuz* who are at all well-known have been dispatched to honorable "exile" as ambassadors (e.g., the president's former key opponent, O. Suleimenov, was sent to Italy; former vice president Ye. Asanbaev was sent to Germany); or they have been retired (e.g., former Prime Minister A. Kazhegeldin).

In this way, at the present time, Kazakh *zhuz* have asymmetrical and disproportionate representation in government structures, with a blatant tilt in favor of the Elder *zhuz* for higher ranks of power.

In other words, as a measure of the concentration of political power in the hands of Nazarbaev, the clan factor is increasingly undergoing a transformation from a symbolic means and manner of balanced representation of *zhuz*-clans in the upper ranks of power — a unique mechanism of checks and balances during Soviet times and the first three to four years of sovereignty — to a means of dispersing political opponents and making the president's close circle illegitimate. The purpose was to create a "desert" around the president where he could be completely dominant and there would be no room for opponents and competition.

In this connection, it should be mentioned that the clan factor is of primary importance mainly to the rural and the marginal part of the population that has moved from *aul* [village] to city. This is because they are carriers of group mentality and think only in the categories of group, clan, and ethnos. They realize themselves on a personal level only in a group, by means of a group, and not in any other way.

Civilizational marginality is the state in which an individual finds himself when he has been torn apart from his own cultural milieu, when he is situated in a state of loss of cultural symbols and stereotypes, which provide for his socialization as an individual, but he is unable to give up these symbols and stereotypes. He adjusts to the new stereotypes of city life that are alien to him, but he cannot make them his own. Inability to understand the situation adequately and to adapt in a dignified manner to changing reality lead to stress, shock, appeal to group values, and the emergence of a marginal subculture (ersatz culture). This leads to the desire to recreate a world that represents a fantastic symbiosis of values from agricultural society that

have not quite disappeared and the values of city life that the individual is attempting to understand.

Clan differentiation of the society into Elder, Middle, and Younger *zhuz* is one of the most obvious examples of Kazakh marginality. Characteristic of this marginality is the 95 percent of the Kazakh agrarian and marginal population. This is alien to the small group of Kazakh hereditary city-dwellers who maintain an individualistic manner of living and mentality.