

Recruiting for the Nation: Post-Soviet Transnational Migrants in Germany and Kazakhstan*

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The collapse of the Soviet Union has resulted in large-scale movements of people within and beyond the territory of the former Soviet Union. A significant part of the motivation for these migrations was tied to transformations that were mobilized by political slogans involving “nation building projects”. Following upon radical changes in the political order, there have been enthusiastic projects of nation building in some of the successor republics. These have forced many members of post-Soviet ethnic minorities to leave their homelands with the hope that they can be incorporated into another moral community in a distant or neighboring country. The notion of return to a “historical homeland” or “titular homeland” has become one of the central pathways of migration and adoption into a new national community among post-Soviet Germans and Kazakhs. In the last fifteen years more than 2.3 million Russian Germans from Siberia and Kazakhstan, seeking a “return” to their historical *Vaterland* (“homeland”), have resettled in Germany. At the same time Kazakhstan has pronounced a new national policy of “in gathering” that invites ethnic Kazakhs (or *oralmany*) from various countries to resettle within the territory of the newly independent country and homeland of Kazakhstan. In the last decade the Kazakhstan government has granted rights of residence and Kazakhstani citizenship to more than 300.000 ethnic Kazakhs from Uzbekistan, Afghanistan, Mongolia, Iran, Russia and Turkey.¹

In this paper I will focus on two examples (Germany and Kazakhstan) of how people have used the legal opportunity to change their affiliations (a “switching” of belonging), cross international boundaries and adopt new citizenship. The two national settings differ greatly from each other in their historical circumstances, the size of populations involved, and in the qualitative experiences of the respective migrations. They are very similar, however, in terms of the logic and symbols of incorporation into new nation states, and how this produces frameworks for new transnational actors.

Previous discussion pertaining to social and cultural forms of transnational networks and connectedness has related mainly to the ideas, activities and practices that emerge when social actors are moved across national boundaries. The nation state has not generally been seen as an active participant in creating transnational social networks. In fact, it has more frequently viewed as a factor restricting the development of such processes. Where cross-border state activity is concerned, little has been

said about the involvement of the nation state itself in the process of transnationalizing belonging and creating a more flexible form of citizenship. And yet, the nation state as a legal body is quite capable of playing an active role “from above” in developing frameworks for new transnational activities and networks, and even in mobilizing efforts to produce the (trans)national categories of membership. Paradoxically, the nation state can be seen recruiting its membership across national borders even as it maintains the “role of identity container” (Wimmer and Glick-Schiller 2002, Glick-Schiller 2004) by reifying the cultural tenets of identification, such as restricted access to citizenship and the requirement of work permits for foreigners. The political need to define the criteria of national belonging is not necessarily restricted to a bounded national territory. Recent anthropological studies on citizenship in situations where there are influxes of a wide variety of immigrants, all making claims for inclusion, have questioned the spatial dimensions of citizenship (Gupta and Ferguson 1992, Appadurai 1996, Ong 1999). By rethinking the notion of territorial boundedness, this approach has revealed that the spaces in which citizenship is formed have changed from national to transnational ones (Ong 2004).

I am particularly interested here in how modern nation states “recruit” their members across borders that were originally established with reference to the “classical” notion of blood ties and ancestral heritage, and how these practices of recruitment have changed over the last forty years in Germany. With regard to the German and Kazakhstani “in-gatherings” policies, this paper focuses on the various stages of invention, production and shifts in a nation state’s “recruitment” programs that may occur as old inhabitants interact with newcomers.

Extended citizenship

Since the disintegration of the Soviet imperial state, citizenship as a membership category (Brubaker 1992), with its moral sense of belonging, has become both a crucial popular sentiment and an object of political struggle. The main principle underlying the creation of post-war and post-Soviet German citizenship has involved organizing in accordance with well-known ethno-national identities that were already cultivated in an earlier era. Referring to Hayden’s (1992) concept, “constitutional nationalism,” Verdery (2002) has rightly emphasized that, in Eastern Europe, mobilizing processes of this kind serve to reconfigure legal and constitutional structures in such a way that members of one ethnic group or ethno-nation may acquire positions of privilege over other residents.

For example, all Soviet citizens had, printed in his or her passport, certain explicitly registered ethnic and territorial (*propiska* – or right-of-residence) belongings. These made them acutely aware that two main social categories existed – titular and non-titular *natsional'nost'*.² As a result, since the collapse of the Soviet economic and social system, identities such as worker, nomenklatura, intelligentsia and peasant have declined in significance, whereas ethnicity has become one of the key criteria for sovereignty and citizenship claims. At the same time, ethnic identity has become a major determining factor in the social life of individuals, a feature that, depending on the actions of the state administration, could be (or might not be) turned into cultural, economic or political capital.³ And so, when they felt deprived of equal access to important social and material goods where they were living, many Russian Germans in Kazakhstan, and Kazakhs living in Uzbekistan, gravitated toward distant and “imagined” national homelands. Their hope was to participate as equals in conscious cooperation among co-nationals, and in so doing to preserve or improve their living standards, all assisted by the memory of certain “fundamental” symbols of Germanness or Kazakhness.

Official German policy conceptualizes the Russian Germans of Eastern Europe and the former Soviet Union as a German diasporic group, or “Volksgroupe,” one that, in the hierarchy of German belonging, falls under the rubric of “Statusdeutsche” or *Spätaussiedler*. This legal and social status has enabled adult members of the German diaspora, scattered across the territory of the former Soviet Union, to gain automatic access to the privilege of German citizenship simply by applying for it at German embassies in Kazakhstan, Uzbekistan or Russia. These *Spätaussiedler*, despite their migrant status and lack of knowledge of the German language, have enjoyed a higher social status than other non-German ethnic groups living in Germany.

Germany's *Spätaussiedler* Law was passed in 1993, and a quota of 200,000 persons per year was established. Until 1996, when a language test was introduced, German descent had to be proven by showing personal documents listing German as one's nationality along with a Germanic name. Subsequently, successful applications, leading to residence in Germany by the entire family, have usually required (in addition to language) demonstrating certain markers of cultural belonging and Germanness. This usually involves presenting evidence of ethnic and religious heritage, such as family bibles, German cooking recipes, singing German songs and documenting the observance of Christmas customs.

In Kazakhstan, ethnic Kazakhs began to “return” in 1993 within a legal structure established by the Law on Migration, which was introduced af-

ter Kazakhstan gained its independence in 1991. In September 1992 the Kazakhstan government invited members of the Kazakh diaspora from all over the world to attend the first *Qazak Qurultay* (Kazakh parliament) in Almaty. In accordance with the Kazakhstan Law on Migration, families of *oralman* – immigrants of Kazakh descent from different regions of Uzbekistan, Mongolia or Iran – have been invited by President Nasarbáyev to participate in the building of a new nation. Their status was defined as that of a primordial “owner” of the Kazakh nation state. This grants them privileges related to receiving state benefits, gaining access to the labor market and acquiring Kazakhstani citizenship, all in preference to non-Kazakh resident citizens (Russians, Uzbeks or Koreans) and new non-Kazakh immigrants.

I will first present a brief overview of the historical background of the German policy of incorporating long-distance national “members.” I will then show the logic by which a collective symbol has been constructed based on the notion of suffering and victimized identity, and what has changed in aspects of the symbol of the German “Self” during the last forty years. These essential signs of national recruitment have shifted during the last few decades as the result of interaction between newcomers and the larger receiving society. Much has been said about the impact of the receiving nation state on the identity articulation (assimilation, hybridization) of immigrants, but less attention has been paid to the impact of migrants on the nation state and its changing concepts of identity. I will argue that contradictory and contested relationships between a national homeland and its recruited ethnic diaspora challenge the core of national identity in such a way that nation states have to make the category of membership more flexible, thereby bringing it to a transnational level.

Germany and the *Spätaussiedler*

The history of the German diaspora in Russia and Kazakhstan can be traced back to second half of the 18th century, when the Russian government of Catherine the Great invited southern German farmers to colonize and cultivate free territories in the eastern part of the Russian Empire. At the beginning of 20th century, in the course of the Stolypin land reform, a significant portion of these Germans resettled from Russia to northern Kazakhstan. However, the history of the migration of Russian Germans in Kazakhstan is also associated with “deportations” during the Second World War. At that time, Stalin suspected ethnic Germans of collaborating collectively with the Nazis; hence, he deported the Russian Germans from the European part of Russia (mainly the Volga region) to Siberia and Kazakhstan.

The category of German repatriates, *Spätaussiedler*, does not represent an entirely new element in the reproduction of German national identity. There was already a post-Second World War institutional and juridical background. The recent Russian-speaking *Spätaussiedler* have been accepted by Germany under the terms of the 1953 German Federal Law on Expellees and Refugees. The idea behind this Law was to regulate the political consequences of the Second World War, in particular the expulsion of ethnic Germans from Eastern and Central Europe (Rumania, Poland, Czechoslovakia). As a result, within Germany's national discourses on identity, in national narratives and official programs, highly emotional metaphors and images of "flight" and "expulsion" were established (Müntz and Ohliger 1998). These symbols of flight and expulsion enabled post-war Germans to see themselves very differently from how much of the world saw them: not only as perpetrators, but also as genuine victims of the war.

Limits of memory on suffering, a symbol in the production of German identity

The German narratives of suffering, which describe the fates of those who had been expelled, were successfully incorporated into post-war German national identity. Moreover, the victimized national "Self" is a concept that has been promoted by displays in hundreds of *Heimatmuseums* (museums dedicated to places of birth) and in numerous memorials to the former German residents of East Prussia, Masuria, the Sudetenlands and Silesia. News and contacts have been circulated through numerous local periodicals and newspapers such as the "Heimatblätter." These invented rituals were designed to create and encourage distinct feelings of collective identity, along with a sense of having suffered discrimination. They have served to regulate social relationships and interactions between newcomers and "natives," and the social and cultural integration of *Spätaussiedler* in general. The emphasis on the rapid and successful social integration of expellees into the new West German society was based on data representing the situation in 1959, when the official rate of unemployment among newcomers corresponded to the rate among natives (Lüttinger 1986, 23).

In this way, the *Vertriebene* have positively shaped the post-war German collective identity by supplying an essential component of national identity during a period otherwise characterized by an "identity vacuum." This means that they have fulfilled their functional role in the reconstruction of a national German "Self" in positive terms through the symbolism of narratives of victimization, shared by both newcomers and homeland residents. The victimized identity of the *Vertriebene* has been successfully integrated into the programs of Germany's conservative political parties.

When comparing this logic of incorporation with that of the contemporary German immigrants, or *Spätaussiedler*, I want to emphasize that the formerly powerful symbolism of suffering as a collective sign of solidarity, one shared by expellees and natives alike, has lost its intensity. Formally, the *Spätaussiedler* are still treated as German ethno-national returnees along similar organizational lines as the *Vertriebene*. However, in today's official discourses, because of a new and emerging factor in German life, they are often perceived quite differently. Discussion of Germany's contemporary demography tends to be dominated by "fears" of a growing population imbalance, in particular the high percentage of aged people. Hence, a pragmatic viewpoint on national demography has emerged, one that sees the German immigrants, with their considerable number of young members, as a "positive national good." Not surprisingly, both statements by the German Organization of Expellees and official government documents pertaining to the *Spätaussiedler* constantly provide statistical information about the age of the Russian Germans. Such papers often begin and end by emphasizing the "positive age structure among *Spätaussiedler*," such as by showing that in "2003 among received *Spätaussiedler*, 41% are under 25 years of age and [only] 7% are older than 65".⁴

A New German – Mischa

"I am actually a German returnee," I was told by Mischa, a 28-year old video editor who corrected me when I interviewed him in November 1999 at the Berlin studio of the Russian TV network, "Fifth Channel." [Programm "5. Welle."] Misha arrived in Berlin from Moscow in 1993 as a *Spätaussiedler*, and within three months he had received both German citizenship and the usual social benefits. He is married to a Russian woman from Moscow. Born in the Siberian city of Omsk, Misha had moved with his family to Moscow when he was 14 years old. His main reasons for leaving Russia and moving to Germany were fear of being conscripted into the Russian army and his lack of the essential *propiska* (right of unlimited residence) for Moscow. In addition, his brother was already living in southern Germany, and he encouraged Misha to make the move as well. While in Moscow working for an international company, he had learned computer graphics, which later helped him to get a low-level editing job for a Russian language immigrant TV program. "Yes, I speak bad German," he told me, "but my mother and grandmother had a good command of German, and sometimes they also cooked German food. My mother was even born in Berlin, but after her birth she and my grandmother were deported to Siberia. You know, your *Heimat* (homeland) is not the place of your birth

but the land of your ancestors. Local Germans do not accept that, and say that my homeland is Russia. But they forget that an African guy will never be a German, even he was born in Germany". Misha emphasized that he retains close ties to Russia and still visits Moscow, because his mother lives there and has no intention of emigrating to Berlin until she reaches pensionable age.

In contrast to generally sympathetic reception of the post-war *Vertriebene*, reactions after 1989 toward the return of Russian-speaking Germans have been striking in their ambivalence, even hostility. The absence of ethnic solidarity between natives and newcomers is quite apparent. The hostile attitude of the native German population toward the *Spätaussiedler*, both in everyday interactions and in media discourse, goes hand in hand with an on-going redefinition and reduction by the national homeland of the "natural rights" granted to the ethnic diaspora. Thus, since 1993 the Russian-speaking Germans have been categorized as *Spätaussiedler* (late transfers) and not as *Vertriebene* (expellees), a distinction that evokes associations of displacement and migration but abandons all symbols of suffering and victimhood. More important is the fact that the *Spätaussiedler* Law (the "Kriegsfolgenbereinigungsgesetz" or "Law for the Resolution of the Consequences of the War" from 21.12.1992) at present pertains exclusively to ethnic Germans from the former Soviet Union. The earlier repatriation of Polish or Rumanian Germans living in Eastern Europe – which had been legitimized and advanced politically in terms of Cold War conflicts – was completed and terminated at the end of the 1980s.

Moreover, the *Spätaussiedler* Law envisions a terminal date for future repatriation, because only individuals born before 1992 may apply for German citizenship. This means that after 2010, when these younger ethnic Germans come of age, they will not have the right to apply for return independently. Their only chance of "returning" to Germany will then be within the context of family reunification, which will only be available to those with close relatives who are already living in the "titular" homeland, Germany.

Still, to a degree the criterion of victimization continues to apply to those claiming long-distance German-ness, but only in a negative sense and with reference to one specific social group. Not every ethnic German from the former Soviet Union has the right to be recognized as German and granted a natural right to return. The application form for the "right to return" is 18 pages long and contains 45 questions that examine an applicant's German-ness in precise terms. Russian Germans who have had successful careers in the Soviet Union (i.e., who were active members of the Communist Party, members of the Soviet police, officers in the Soviet

Army, university professors, or supervisory staff with large enterprises) are excluded from consideration on the grounds that they are not properly "German." Individuals falling into these categories have no natural right to return to the *Vaterland*, because they are presumed to be "impure," and in fact so implicated in the former totalitarian system that they cannot possess the requisite loyalty to the ancestral homeland.

A further development in the transformation of "natural rights" has been that, over the past forty years, the level of social benefits, including welfare payments and pensions, that the *Spätaussiedler* might hope to receive has been significantly reduced. Moreover, since the introduction of a German language test in 1995, nearly 30% of applicants have been refused entry visas after they failed the test, and they were not allowed to repeat it. In other ways, as well, the definition and status of the *Spätaussiedler* have been devalued, especially following German reunification, when East Germans challenged the terms of German-ness. If East Germans were, and still are, perceived by West Germans as "second class" Germans, then the status of the *Spätaussiedler* has been reduced not merely to "third class," but nearly to that of "other," in close proximity to the status of "non-German." Paradoxically, in recent specialized dictionaries relating to ethnic minorities in Germany (Schmalz-Jacobson and Hansen 1997), we find the term *Spätaussiedler*, but no mention of the *Vertriebene*, such as the East Prussians or Sudetan Germans. So, on one hand, according to their legal position, the *Spätaussiedler* are not an ethnic minority in Germany, because they enjoy all of the normal political rights of native German citizens. But "cultural othering" and the experience of migration seem to be the main practical criteria underlying the contemporary German understanding of the term "ethnic minority." Thus the *Spätaussiedler* are nevertheless perceived as existing outside the cultural boundaries of "German-ness." For example, the following is typical of statements from interviews with *Spätaussiedler*: "I have no German (native) friends. The Germans do not accept that I am also German. They say to me, how it is possible that you are German, when you were born in Russia? Russia is your *Heimat*, and you are Russian."

These examples make it clear that the collective symbol of suffering, and more specifically the experience by the *Spätaussiedler* of Stalin-era deportation, is not shared by modern native Germans. The fact that the late returnees are perceived as non-German, and marked by their "Russian" identity in everyday interactions, indicates that the prevailing sense of German-ness today is based mainly on the territorial boundedness of cultural norms and practices, i.e. those that can be absorbed or learned only through extended residence in the country. A single cultural marker –

mastery of the German language – is the most important requirement for social acceptance and the “official criterion of integration into German society.” But there is another aspect of social integration that should be mentioned. During the second half of the 20th century in the Federal Republic, German-ness became increasingly associated with economic prosperity. According to certain national surveys, modern Germans frequently identify themselves with the country’s prosperous economic system (Beyme 1999), and with symbols such as “made in Germany,” “Mercedes,” or “BMW” (Honolka 1999).⁵

In this respect, it would appear that official norms of national reconstruction based on self-images of victimization and suffering have today lost their meaning and become obsolete. And so, the term “Spätaussiedler” has semantic irrelevance for the modern definition of German national identity. This is shown both in how people have increasingly forgotten the collective suffering myth and in more recent discussions of German policy relating to dual citizenship and the naturalization of foreigners. The latter results from the introduction in 2000 of a new right to citizenship called “Geburtsrecht” (right by birth). In summary, the *Spätaussiedler* belong more to the German state but less to German society. For those seeking to achieve social and cultural recognition in modern German society, growing up within the borders of the national state can be more useful than having ancestral German roots. My point is that we deal here with a parallel pair of changes. The cultural boundaries of German-ness have become increasingly distant from the main traditional criterion of German nationhood, the blood principle. At the same time, however, these cultural boundaries have begun to correspond more closely to the actual modern territorial borders of Germany.

Born in the USSR

The *Spätaussiedlers*’ German identity has been denied by the receiving society, thereby producing strong feelings of alienation among the repatriates. It seems that the *Spätaussiedler* consistently fail to confirm the “ethnic codes” and expected cultural heritage that might ease their acceptance into a homogeneous German national “kin community,” even though this presumed kinship was, in fact, the central factor legitimizing their return. Moreover, the growing disparities between the principles that supposedly define Germany’s political programs and the actual social integration experience of the *Spätaussiedler* themselves have turned this new element of the German national “Self” decisively into an “other.” In the process, a new ethnicity has emerged for the *Spätaussiedler*: they are perceived in

Germany mainly as Russian. The contact zone between the homeland and the returning diaspora has yielded an unstable sense of national identity that challenges the purity of the German ideology of the nation state.

My main point in this context is to show the functional failure of the diasporic category, which was at one time embraced as an extension of the ethno-national German "Self." Today, with the actual "repatriation" of the diaspora, this category is no longer able to embody completely the essential principle of German national identity, that of cultural descent and blood ties. Moreover, this case points to the beginnings of a transformation in the very definition of German national identity, from an ethnic-cultural identity into a civic-territorial one.



Window display at Christmas time in a food store run by Russian Germans near Bonn, 2004 photo: T. Darieva

Seen from the other side, the newcomers' poor command of German and traditional rural patterns of behavior have led to a reactivation of their ties with the old "homeland," Russia. This finds its expression in transnational entrepreneurship, marriage patterns⁶ and prevailing modes of communication and media consumption. The Russian-language media appear increasingly to play a significant role in the social organization of information exchange and transnational communication among *Spätaussiedler*. Russian-language media, such as weekly newspapers and television programs, are now being produced in Berlin, mainly by Russian Jews. But they are presented primarily as products of a common post-Soviet immigrant experience.

What is typical of these newspapers is that they reflect the explicitly inclusive definition of a new "we-group" in Berlin, namely the "Soviet-Russian." It is based on the shared Russian language and memories of the Soviet past, thereby embracing as broad a Russian-speaking audience as possible, and without privileging any particular ethnicity or immigration status. Within this sphere, the Russian language is treated as a social resource useful for solving everyday problems, and not as a mark of ethnic identity. "Our homeland is the Russian language." That is central motto of the largest Russian-language newspaper in Berlin, *Russkij Berlin*, and it provides a successful recruiting strategy that appears to be a highly flexible

symbol for mobilizing clientele among Russian Germans, Jews, Uzbeks and Russians alike.

By incorporating a variety of ethnic and social ways of belonging – and I am referring here mainly to ethnic German *Spätaussiedler* the Russian language media offer new forms of participation within the immigrant public sphere, which is a realm of double and hyphenated identities. The once highly formalized ethnic boundaries between Russian Germans and Russian Jews, which were initially reproduced in the new German homeland, now increasingly appear to be subordinated to the metaphor “Born in the USSR;” they become, thereby, more malleable within this new sphere of identity. Since their return, the Russian Germans have begun to participate in a new public life, one that is situated beyond limits that pertain only to their German identity. Thus, the Russian language media offer migrants an identity option based on transnational bounding with the Russian language serving as the basis of a new symbolic homeland. The symbolic space inherent in newspaper information provides readers with a specific transnational order which is quite unlike that of ordinary national newspapers or ethnic newspapers. Publications like *Russkij Berlin* and *Evropa-Express* divide the world into two main zones – the old homeland and the new. This construction of a new kind of media territoriality, with dual home attachments, shapes the new and emerging concept of belonging among Russian Germans. *Russkij Berlin*, the most popular newspaper among Russian-speaking immigrants, offers a place of communication for the de-territorialized community of language.

Kazakhstan and *oralmany*

Like other post-socialist countries, Kazakhstan began its own nation-building project immediately after gaining independence. From the very beginning, the national project in Kazakhstan acquired a post-colonial character through the identification of its own “indigenous” Kazakh population following the disappearance of “big Russian brother.”⁷⁷ At the same time, along with the establishment of the nation state in official and intellectual discourses, the concept of a Kazakh “diaspora” has appeared. The Kazakh diaspora can be seen as the product of two distinct past political transformations. One occurred in the 1920s, when the Soviet national Republics were established in Central Asia, which involved introducing and demarcating new borders and pursuing a policy of “indigenization.”⁷⁸ The second development derives from the effects of the “genocidal” policy pursued toward Kazakh nomads during Stalin’s repressions and the Soviet Union’s forced collectivization of the 1930s, a time when many Kazakh families fled to Uzbekistan, Mongolia or China.

Whereas in the course of the first transformation – one of ethnic demarcation – it was primarily the borders that were moved and not the people, during the second (in the early 1930s) it was people themselves who were forced to move abroad. In 1924, following Lenin's plans for the modernization of Central Asia, which included a process of "national demarcation" (*natsional'noe razmezhevanie*), the territory of the former tsarist Russian colony was divided into five national administrative units as determined by ethnic lines and economic modes of production. Prior to the Soviet period, the territory between Kazakhstan and Uzbekistan was a single historic unit comprising the administrative district of Syrdarinskii rayon. The territory of the tsarist Russian colony was divided into two national administrative units, the Kirgiz Socialist Republic (which was seen as populated mainly by nomadic peoples) and the Uzbeki Republic (populated by sedentary agricultural Uzbeks). Nevertheless, especially in the border regions, the population remained ethnically heterogeneous. For example, on both sides of the Kazakhstan-Uzbekistan border the rural population still makes up a patchwork of neighboring Kazakh and Uzbek villages.

Ethnic Kazakhs and their family members are received under the terms of the Law on Population Migration, which was passed in 1993 and modified in 1997. The modern Kazakh term *oralman* goes back to the Kazakh word *oralu* (to turn, or return), thus *oralman* means "returner." According to the official definition, an *oralman* is a "foreign citizen or a stateless person of Kazakh origin who was permanently residing abroad at the moment when the Republic of Kazakhstan acquired its sovereignty and who repatriates to the RK in order to take up permanent residence in Kazakhstan."⁹ Persons who have proven their Kazakh identity have the right to immigrate with their families to Kazakhstan and acquire Kazakhstani citizenship. Those who immigrate under the quota are granted by the government the right to be transported to Kazakhstan free of charge, are given a house or the financial means (USD \$ 8,000) to buy one, and assistance in acquiring a residence permit and in finding employment. Today, according to official statistics of the National Department for Migration, more than 80% of all *oralmany* migrating to southern Kazakhstan come from the neighboring state of Uzbekistan.¹⁰ Historically, a large number of Kazakhs have always inhabited the Tashkent region of Uzbekistan. But ethnic Kazakhs are increasingly leaving Uzbekistan because of the economic and political advantages available in the new homeland, thereby turning their ethnic belonging into a kind of transit card.

The new “owner,” Baurzhan

Baurzhan is a 30-year-old Kazakh from Uzbekistan who now lives in Sayram, a huge settlement in southern Kazakhstan inhabited mainly by an Uzbek-speaking population. Born in the Tashkent region of Uzbekistan near the Buke district, he “returned” in 1995 to his ancestral homeland. He retained his old Soviet passport until 1998, which eased his crossing of the post-Soviet border between Uzbekistan and Kazakhstan. As registered *oralmany* Baurzhan and his parents have the right to obtain a plot of land (8 *sotok* in size, or about 0,8 hectare) and another 8 *sotok* per household in a highly populated region. The main income of many *oralman* families comes from growing strawberries. Baurzhan and most other *oralmany* have never specialized in the cultivation of strawberries before migration, not to mention marketing them as well. But there was no other opportunity to earn money in Sayram, because by the time they arrived the local collective farms had already been privatized and the land redistributed among local inhabitants.



Baurzhan near his strawberry and onion field in Sayram, 2004.
photo: J. Liebchen

Baurzhan speaks Kazakh, Uzbek and Russian well. In the middle of the 1990s he studied journalism at the Almaty University, but had to abandon his studies for economic reasons and return to his parents in rural southern Kazakhstan. Baurzhan often emphasized to me that his tribal ancestors,

or *kipchak*, are originally from southern Kazakhstan near the Kyzylorda region; they left their homeland for Uzbekistan because of Stalinist collectivization and of a big famine afterwards. He feels proud to have titular Kazakh nationality and identifies himself as a “holder” of the new young nation state. At the same time, however, he draws clear distinctions between southern Kazakhs like himself and those who live in northern and other areas of Kazakhstan. In Baurzhan’s eyes, they are too russified, and this is the reason why many *oralmany* find little acceptance among native Kazakhs. Having their status of *oralman*, Baurzhan and his parents continue to visit their kin and friends in the Tashkent region in Uzbekistan, where they still own their house in the village they left. Both local people and *oralmany* from Uzbekistan have developed a variety of strategies for managing a life that gravitates back and forth between two nation states, which guarantees that the frontier will be continually crossed, questioned and contested.

The demographic struggle of Kazakhs

The post-Soviet in-gathering policy has been conceptualized in terms of a demographic “struggle” by the Kazakhstani government, the political goal being to increase the effective number of Kazakh natives and make them a majority in the country. The former demographic makeup of Kazakhstan was one in which Kazakhs, the titular nationality, constituted only a minority of the entire population. (Officially, not until 2001 did Kazakhs reach a majority position, finally making up of 53% of the total population.)¹¹ As a result, the categorization of Kazakhstan’s population and the concept of inter-ethnic relationships have been less clearly articulated than elsewhere into the classical binary concepts of majority and minority, but mostly by division of the population into the indigenous “state-building” (*gosudarstvobrazuiushoe*) titular nationality and ethnic diaspora of Russians, of Germans, of Koreans, of Armenians, of Chechens and etc.

In this instance we are dealing with a specific hierarchical situation in which the minority is able to assert its political power and enjoy dominance over other groups by reclassifying the relationship between an individual and the Kazakhstani nation state. But the interesting point is that Kazakhs have still preserved the sense of belonging to a non-dominant minority.¹² Non-Kazakhs are supposed to share in Kazakhstani citizenship and Kazakhstani patriotism, yet they are not expected to be assimilated into the culture of the titular nation but rather to retain their own cultures and languages. For example, in 1996 new normative rules were introduced in Kazakhstan concerning the “nationalizing” of individual names. These

state that “members of the Kazakh nationality have the right to change the form of family and patronymic names to exclude suffixes that are uncommon in the Kazakh language. Instead of the Russian forms – ‘ov’, or ‘ova’ the patronymic name gets the suffix ‘uly’ for males and ‘kyzy’ for females.” People of non-Kazakh ethnicities are not expected to change their names; rather they are considered to be members of ethnic diasporas who should preserve their ethnic identity, own cultural repertoire and even the ties to their respective “historical homelands.”

A closer look at the model of relationships between individuals and their memberships in the nation state in post-Soviet Kazakhstan reveals that they are defined by an interplay of notions relating to the homeland territory and to blood ties. It appears that such an ordering is responsible for the emergence of new social hierarchies in the society of Kazakhstan, determining on the one hand those who are, or have become, “owners” or “holders” of the nation state, and on the other those who have been “disowned” of their belonging to the national state. Thus, ethnic Kazakhs living abroad have become a target for the new Kazakh government, which is pursuing a policy of including all Kazakhs in the category of those who contribute to national identification. Kazakhstan has begun to keep track of the numbers of ethnic Kazakhs living both within and outside the country’s borders, and to encourage popular awareness of the various diasporas. It turns out that 8 millions Kazakhs live within Kazakhstan, while another 4.3 million currently live abroad. The new “owners” of the nation state are actively distributed by the National Board for Migration, mainly to the northern and eastern parts of Kazakhstan, where there is a large non-Kazakh population. With the Law on Migration of 1992, Kazakhstan hoped to encourage the immigration of ethnic Kazakhs to the historical homeland by allowing them to hold dual citizenship. However, in 1997 the Law was amended to exclude permission for dual citizenship.

In modern Kazakhstani society there are two main categories of people with different access to the nation state: those who have a national homeland and live within their national territory, and those who live outside their so-called “original” and proper homeland. The concept of a national homeland is based in Central Asia on the Soviet concept of the boundedness of ethnicity and territory. The Kazakhstani leadership has reinforced this Soviet idea and turned it into a hierarchical concept of society. The titular nation, the Kazakhs, who are seen as the “state-defining” nation, are presumed to enjoy a leadership status and to support any other nations living with their domain, a role quite similar to that played by Russians in the former Soviet Union.

In other words, we are dealing here with a kind of emerging Kazakh *Leitkultur* (“leading culture”) within a hierarchical multicultural model that grants to ethnic Kazakhs unique rights to “own” the modern nation state and its cultural heritage. This concept is responsible for recent emigrations and legitimizing the practice of returning to home, for the loss and gain of homelands, as well as for the emerging notion of multiple homes and unstable conceptions of homeland on the part of local people. The privileged status afforded to ethnic Kazakhs within state institutions and the Kazakhization of the public space are factors that now inhibit the development of a common civic sense of belonging to the new territorial entity of Kazakhstan. As a result, many of the other nationalities regard Kazakhstan as little more than a “stepmother.” This feeling is reinforced by the immigration of “new Kazakhs,” the *oralmany*, from other countries.

The basic Kazakh approach to identification can be seen most strikingly in the application of the term “historical homeland.” The Russian term *istoricheskaiia rodina*, which is widely used in public discourse within Kazakhstani society, describes the newly independent Kazakhstan as a holy land within the boundaries of the modern national territory to which those who were once apparently forced to emigrate are now encouraged to return. This forced-migrant identity and expulsion metaphor among the *oralmany* is based on the adoption of a victimization identity by only that portion of the Kazakh people who were expelled and suffered from famine in the early 1930s. Much like the situation in Germany, blood ties and the descent principle have become the central legitimizing criteria for the inclusion of *oralmany* in the modern Kazakhstani nation-state. And this despite the fact that a significant percentage of them were never inhabitants of the territory and do not share the culture of modern native Kazakhs. Many *oralmany* from Iran, Afghanistan, Mongolia and Uzbekistan are perceived by the native Kazakhstani population as “traditional,” “backward,” “oriental,” and “too religious.” Officials in the regional branch of the Board of Migration in Shymkent (southern Kazakhstan) told me about their ambivalent feelings and surprise at how these “other” Kazakhs appear and behave. “You know, the Kazakhs who come from Afghanistan look like Afghans, with their beards and turbans on the head, and those who come from Turkmenistan are like Turkmens.”¹³ These *oralmany* do not share the modern values of urban educated Kazakhs, whose lives have been organized predominantly around the Russian language and European culture. Increasingly, it appears that the *oralmany* are coming to play the role of a socially marginal group with its own identity. They occupy small and separate economic niches in the post-socialist markets of Kazakhstan as construction workers, small-scale traders, streetside shoemakers, and agricultural wage-laborers.

Conclusion

Looking at these two examples from different parts of the vast territory of Eurasia, I would like to argue that, by introducing conditions allowing for “extended citizenship,” both Germany and Kazakhstan are managing to maintain their “container identities” as ethno-national states and at the same time encourage the emergence of a new transnational connectedness. We are dealing in both cases with the development and furtherance of nationalistic ideology following the disappearance of larger “imperial” units. Both Germany and Kazakhstan have recently experienced the reshaping of their geographical borders in course of political and economic changes: one because of war and a process of unification, and the other because of separation and the “granting of independence” after the collapse of a larger system.

In their active recruitment programs, Germany and Kazakhstan are pragmatic in seeing new immigrants as a demographic source that helps them to maintain and re-producing of the national body. Whereas Kazakhstan is mainly concerned about the low percentage of the state-forming group, ethnic Kazakhs, in their “own country,” Germany’s demographic “fears” relate to the growing imbalance in the population, with its high and increasing percentage of the aged. The purpose of these recruitment projects is to mobilize “extended” cultural and ethnic identities that transcend territorial affiliations and boundaries by counting in all individuals of the key ethnic group. Geographical and territorial affiliation are no longer the decisive elements of national belonging and membership. By emphasizing the logic of blood ties that stretch across their borders, political leaders in both nation states have acted similarly in their articulation of extended rights to “co-ethnics” living in distant locations. These extended rights are based on memories of collective suffering and expulsion. When it is extended beyond national geographical boundaries, citizenship becomes a function of the specific policies within which the nation state grants groups of people residence and national voting rights on the basis of kinship, genealogy and past victimization. In both cases we are dealing with people who associate their migration with the belief that their ancestors were expelled or forced to leave the ancestral territory and settle in other countries. Such symbolic stories have become standard in most returnees’ biographies.

Our juxtaposition of two very different nation states (in Western Europe and Central Asia, old and new, homogenous and multiethnic) highlights just how similar they are in how they conceptualize and practice the encouragement of national membership across borders. Both cases give us insights into a particular kind of “in-gathering” identity politics, one that involves “reactivating” blood ties between an imagined “homeland” and an ethnic “diaspora.” The chance to access a new citizenship mobilizes the

ethnic belonging of post-Soviet migrants, but once they have “returned,” it does not contribute to the maintenance of a homogeneous national homeland identity. Instead, migrants tend to build a new minority group identity or alternative ways of transnational belonging, even to the extent of revitalizing the overarching identity concept of the Soviet past. Looking at these politics in historical perspective, it is striking how the changing policy frameworks now enable large numbers of people to maintain and construct social, cultural and economic relationships across borders. By making citizenship access more flexible and providing choice among multiple options of belonging, the nation state has ended up producing an arena for new transnational actors. Baurzhan and Misha, albeit children of the same Soviet past, have experienced very different receiving lands. But they share more common experiences than differences, especially in their manner of migration and adaptation to the new environment. Each in his own respective environment, they continue to maintain cross-border relationships with the old homeland through kin structures, and contribute to the emergence of new and multiple identifications of “German-ness” or “Kazakh-ness.”

Notes

- * The results of this paper are based on extended field work in Germany (1998-2001) and Kazakhstan (2003-2004), conducted during my Ph.D. studies at the Humboldt University and my recent post-doctoral research project at the Max Planck Institute for Social Anthropology (Department of Integration and Conflict).
- 1 According to official statistics provided by the National Board of Migration and Demography in January and December 2003, in southern Kazakhstan alone 11,358 ethnic Kazakhs have been registered as *oralmany*.
- 2 The Soviet government never managed to introduce a civic variant of collective identification such as a Soviet nationality.
- 3 See Oswald 2000, Darieva 2003 and 2004.
- 4 See www.bund-der-vertriebenen.de/infopool.
- 5 In 2004 the Federal Cultural Center for Russian Germans in Moscow announced the intention to re-establish a Volga German Republic within the Russian Federation. The main motivation behind this project is to create a new Russian German city based on a production subdivision of the Daimler-Chrysler automobile company. This has led the editor-in-chief of the German language newspaper “Neues Leben” to express hopes for re-emigration of Russian Germans from Germany.
- 6 The majority of private newspaper advertisements are want ads seeking partners and potential spouses. Many of them show that ethnic identity is not necessarily a significant requirement. Where ethnicity is indicated, it more likely is mentioned to provide or elicit concrete information about the person’s legal residency status in Germany. It appears that one’s ethnic classification is seen by the “consumers” of these ads as being like any other demographic variable, such as disposable income or household size.

- 7 In the second half of the 1990s Kazakhstan, slightly ameliorated its ethnocentric policy by recognizing Kazakhstan as a multiethnic nation with a specific Kazakhstani national mentality. This is supposedly expressed through the absence of xenophobia, in the peaceful co-existence of different cultures, and in inter-ethnic harmony.
- 8 The issue of Central Asian borders has recently become one of the “hot” topics among political scientists, especially concerning the Fergana Valley, where ethnic enclaves exist. Southern Kazakhstan was identified by the International Crisis Group as a disputed territory, since both Kazakhstan and Uzbekistan have significant ethnic minorities on the opposite side of the border, and because of Uzbekistan’s unilateral action in establishing its boundaries. It is not my intention to deny these facts, but I try to deal with this issue at the level of routine negotiations and bring to bear an anthropological viewpoint that enables one generate an understanding that transcends macro-structures and undifferentiated interpretations. For more details on the history of Soviet border demarcation in Central Asia, see www.intl-crisis-group.org/projects. Central Asia: Border Disputes and Conflict Potential, ICG Asia Report No 33, 4.04.2002; Gromov 1999; Polat 2002.
- 9 Law of the Republic of Kazakhstan on Population Migration from, December 13, 1997, No 204-1.
- 10 In the period between 1991 and 2003, of 98,295 *oralmany*, 79,552 migrated from Uzbekistan to southern Kazakhstan.
- 11 According to statistical data, the total population of Kazakhstan is estimated to be 14,953,100, of which 35% are Russians, 3.7% Ukrainians, 2.7 Germans, 2.5 Uzbeks, 2.1 Tatars, etc. Source: *Narody Kazakhstana. Entsiklopedicheski spravochnik*. Almaty 2003, 59.
- 12 In June 2004 I was sitting in a train Shymkent-Almaty as a young Kazakh man entered the department. He greeted me vigorously in Kazakh: “Salamat sizbe!” and asked in Russian if the department was the proper one. He hung carefully the black plastic cover with his suite on a hook and asked me if I am Kazakh and when I answered that I am Buryat he started to explain that Kazakhs is also a small Central Asian people and their situation is similar to Buryats in Russia. “We have 15 millions of the population in our huge country, and you know we Kazakhs built only the half of the population. The reason of this small size is starvation and political repressions during the 30s as many Kazakhs died and fled from Kazakhstan”, added a young man.
- 13 A similar model of relationships between Kazakhs from Kazakhstan and Kazakhs from Turkey is observable in Germany (see Darieva 1997).

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