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# Re-imagining national identity through early literacy textbooks in Kazakhstan.

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**Re-imagining national identity through early literacy  
textbooks in Kazakhstan**

By  
Olga Mun

A Thesis Presented to the Graduate and Research  
Committee of Lehigh University  
In Candidacy for the Degree of  
Master of Arts in  
Comparative and International Education

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This thesis is accepted and approved in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the Master of Arts in Comparative and International Education

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## **Abstract**

Since the independence of Kazakhstan in 1991, schools have undergone major changes in terms of curriculum content and teaching/learning process, reflecting the movement from Soviet educational ideals towards Western, democracy-oriented ones. In this context, it is important to study the changes in school textbooks on the topic of nationalism, particularly early literacy textbooks in primary schools. Building on previous research of my advisor, Professor Iveta Silova and former students in Comparative and International Education program, Michael Mead and Garine Palandijan, I analyzed texts and illustrations in early literacy textbooks used in Kazakh and Russian speaking schools on the topic of “building” a citizen of the newly independent nation-state. Using critical discourses analysis, texts and textbook illustrations were examined, revealing how school textbooks contribute to the construction of Kazakh national identity through a particular conception of (national) childhood, homeland, and symbols. Using convenience sampling, a total of 15 primers published in independent Kazakhstan were collected and analyzed. The findings of the thesis reveal that early literacy textbooks in Kazakhstan - both in Kazakh and Russian speaking schools - are increasingly Kazakhified and focus primarily on Kazakh ethnicity.

# **Re-imagining national identity through early literacy textbooks in Kazakhstan**

## **Introduction**

Since the collapse of the Soviet Union in 1991, the notion of national identity in a newly independent Central Asian country of Kazakhstan was continuously (re)thought, (re)imagined, and (re)defined. Due to historical events, Kazakhstan is a highly diverse multiethnic society, which is home to 125 ethnicities (The Agency on Statistics of the Republic of Kazakhstan (ASRK), 2011, p.19). The problem of collective national identity formation - a shared cultural perception by a group of people that they are a nation - is one of the priorities for a highly centrist government of Kazakhstan, which aims to unite the diverse Kazakhstani population in times of the post-Soviet nation building process.

One of the central mechanisms for shaping a sense of nationhood is through the educational system. Primary education is free and compulsory in Kazakhstan. The net enrolment ratio in primary school participation of both males and female is 99.4%, while the survival rate to last primary grade is 100% (UNICEF, 2014). This means that the majority of Kazakhstani children are participating in early education and all who join primary education successfully finish it. While in school, children interact with teachers, peers, and school curriculum. Textbooks constitute the major component of school curriculum. The role of early literacy textbooks is hard to underestimate, since children read and interact with primers while at school. Since an educational system is centralized in Kazakhstan, textbooks that are distributed by main publishing houses are then used in most schools across the country. Consequently, cultural and ideological messages in

primers are transmitted to every classroom in Kazakhstan, shaping national identity of young Kazakhstanis.

Acknowledging the critical role of textbooks in the process of national identity building, this study contributes to and expands the existing research on early literacy textbooks (primers that are used in the first grade) in Central Asia. The aim of this research study is to analyze how early literacy textbooks contribute to national identity formation in the context of post-Soviet transformations in Kazakhstan. In particular, the study explores whether and how national identity is formed differently in Kazakh and Russian language early literacy textbooks published in Kazakhstan. Based on critical discourse analysis, texts and illustrations of 15 Kazakh and Russian language early literacy textbooks published in Soviet and independent Kazakhstan are analyzed. While the content of children's books is full of the innocent images of animals and plants, the purpose of this study is to decipher and analyze messages that might be discriminatory or exclusivist of various ethnicities and cultures.

### **History at Glance**

Modern day Kazakhstan has historically been home to various nomadic tribes and ethnicities. Aspects of Kazakhstan's concept of 'national identity' can be traced to eras when Kazakh culture and language underwent marked change. Therefore, the national identity of Kazakhstan's peoples changed during different times, as under the influence of Mongol invasions, or during the time of Russian imperialism. In comparison with other post-Soviet states, Kazakhstan was part of the Russian Empire during the 18<sup>th</sup> century, long before it became part of the Soviet Union in 1925. The development of Kazakhstan during the Soviet era was associated with events such as the process of

forced collectivization (1929-1933), political repressions (1937-1938), The Great Patriotic War (1941-1945), and deportations of Germans, Koreans, Ukrainians, Balkars, Greeks, Georgians and other nationals (1937-1951).

These events led to Kazakhstan's current situation: a highly ethnically diverse, yet largely Russified society. When Kazakhstan gained independence in 1991, the Kazakh language was granted the status of the state language, despite the fact that only 40% of the population constituted titular ethnicity and could partially speak it. Furthermore, less than 1% of Slavic and European nationalities reported having any knowledge of Kazakh language in the 1989 census (as cited in Dave & Sinnott, 2002, p. 2). Nevertheless, keen to create its own nation-state, Kazakhstan's officials employed *jus sanguinis* nationalistic policies, and repatriated thousands of ethnic Kazakhs from China and Mongolia. The ratio of Kazakhs grew from 39.7% in 1989 to 53.5% in 1999, and 63.7% in 2009 (ASRK, 2011, p. 20). Meanwhile, a number of some ethnic minority groups significantly decreased from 1989 census compared to 2009 censuses: Russians from 37.8% to 23.7%; Ukrainians 5.4% to 2.1%; Germans 5.8% to 1.1% (ASRK, 2011, p.20). The number of schools offering Russian language curricula decreased from 29.4% in 2000 to 26.8% in 2003 (UNESCO, 2011).

Historical ties between Russian and Kazakh cultures are very complex. While some historians and sociologists consider the Russian colonization processes harmful to Kazakh language and culture, others convey that Kazakh culture found a way to exist and develop nonetheless throughout the ages (Dave, 2007). Kudaibergenova (2013) rightfully mentions that Kazakh elites always found a way to preserve Kazakh culture and identity, spreading local "nationalistic" ideas by publishing literature in the Kazakh language.

Literature on the political aspects of national identity formation in both the Soviet and post-Soviet periods has been well documented. However, little is known about the role of education in creating or re-creating national identities. The purpose of this study is to examine the role of education in national identity formation during the Soviet and post-Soviet periods in Kazakhstan. In order to better understand the role of education in post-Soviet identity- and nation-building processes, it is important to consider the following main themes: (1) the socially constructed nature of national identities and (2) the role of textbooks and school curricula (especially early literacy textbooks) in the social construction of nationhood.

### **Socially Constructed Nature of National Identities**

“Identity” is usually associated with a self-identification process, implying more on the individual agency level; ‘collective’ identity however takes place on a larger, societal level. Mandler (2006) claims: “We identify an ‘other’ and then define ourselves against it: we know what we are (in some versions, only) through what we are not – and, possibly, vice versa” (p. 272). Diener (2002) described that notions of national and patriotic identities in Kazakhstan are different because “national” refers to the Kazakh ethnicity while “patriotic” identity deals with all Kazakhstani people who live in the territory of Kazakhstan and who put their supranational identity over an ethnic one (p.632). Acknowledging the fact that many scholars use Kazakh and Kazakhstani interchangeably (Olcott, 2010), I claim that there are significant problematic aspects of such an approach, because ethnic identity cannot be equalized with civic or political one.

In this paper I will explain that in educational space national identity in Kazakhstan is being built around a single Kazakh ethnicity and that this could potentially lead to social problems, as Kazakhstani society is highly diverse. Thus, I argue that national identity should not be defined or focused solely on one ethnicity, but rather be built on a supranational level. Simply put, when people live in a territory bounded by geographical and political borders, that territory should be perceived as a nation. While these borders are typically socially and politically constructed, I believe that accepting Kazakhstani as a national identity construction is necessary for the purposes of inter-ethnic peace in Kazakhstan.

Brubaker (1996) explains the role of one core ethnicity in shaping the nation state, provides historical examples of such processes taking place in nineteenth-century “nationalizing” European states and complexity of interconnectedness between civic and ethnic identities. However, I still argue that civic identity is more inclusive since it incorporates multicultural understanding of a citizen of a nation. In broader political scene of Kazakhstan, the centrality of Kazakh culture is often emphasized. As Beachain & Kevliahan (2013) puts it: “... Kazakh claims to primordial autochthony in the national territory is a first principle of state policy in postindependence Kazakhstan” (p. 6). He further states that both civic and ethnic constructions of the nation are taking place in Kazakhstan and saying that ethnic nationalism is prevailing is an exaggeration.

When constructing political identities, the state authority “imagines” and “creates” a nation because it is not physically possible to meet every person who lives in the country and, consequently, claim that you belong to it (Anderson, 2006). Thus, nations

are created metaphorically, or they are “imagined.” Those in power create a perception of what the nation is and legitimize their vision.

National identity construction based on one ethnicity in the context of post-Soviet Kazakhstan is interesting, since the official rhetoric highlights the importance of multiethnic society of Kazakhstan in developing patriotism. In his speech on new Kazakhstan patriotism, President Nazarbayev (2014) reiterated the importance of learning Russian, English, and Kazakh languages and developing an inclusive identity: “Universal Kazakhstan identity must become the cornerstone in the minds of our people”:

We are all Kazakhstan citizens, having equal rights and equal opportunities. The new Kazakhstan patriotism is something that should unite all of society without any ethnic differences.

We are a multiethnic society there should be no double standards when it come to interethnic relations. All citizens should be equal in the eyes of the State no one should be discriminated against on the basis of ethnicity or other features.

Nevertheless the same speech emphasizes the role of Kazakh language and Kazakh culture as a central one, a unifying factor:

You know about our policy – by 2025 95% of Kazakhstan citizens should gain Kazakh language. We are creating the conditions for that. Today more than 60% of schoolchildren are educated in the state language. Education in Kazakh is being introduced in all schools. This means that if child has been enrolled into a school this year, in ten to twelve years we will have a new generation of Kazakhstan citizens all bearing Kazakh language.

Thus already by 2025 Kazakh language will lead in all spheres of life, Kazakh will become a general language. This, of course, will become the most important achievement of our state. Our sovereignty, our independence will finally gain something that binds the nation and cements it – a mother tongue. This is the crown pearl of our state’s sovereignty.



This speech emphasizes the role of education in constructing a national identity of newly independent Kazakhstan. One of the major strategies of constructing nations is to develop the image of national characteristics and then to spread those ideologies through education (Apple, 2013). History and civic education are traditionally used for these ideological experiments because history can be re-written in favor of the current politicians in power. In the Soviet era, education supported the main communist ideology and Marxist-Leninist dogmas (Kissane, 2005). Friendship between people of various ethnicities was depicted as a desired state of inter-ethnic relations during the Soviet period.

However, many scholars have argued that ethnocizing curriculum – that is enforcing the dominance of one cultural identity over the others – has become a common trend in the education of post-Soviet space (Beresniova, 2011; Janmaat, 2007; Ismailova, 2004; Michaels & Stevick; 2009; Silova, 1996). This could be a reflection of broader political agenda, as is the case of Ukraine. There, “Ukrainophiles” or nationalists (re)build history, capitalizing on the importance of Ukrainian culture. They spread their interpretation of history through the schools and in the armed forces (Kuzio, 2006). Meanwhile, in Latvia, textbooks published after the collapse of the Soviet Union were full of Latvian folksongs, Latvian tales and Latvian culture and history (Silova, 1996).

Reflecting on rising nationalism and the ties between nationalism, language policies, and education in Kazakhstan, Fierman (2006) writes that Kazakh language enjoys increasing popularity in urban schools. This is a new trend. During the Soviet era, Kazakh language as the medium of instruction was used primarily in rural schools. Fierman (2006) writes, “... in the late Soviet era a high proportion of Kazakh rural pupils

were already studying in the Kazakh medium” (p. 99). During the Soviet era, most schooling was conducted in the Russian language, which was a *lingua franca* and enjoyed a higher status. However, after the collapse of the Soviet Union, the Kazakh language has experienced growing popularity in both urban and rural schools. The issue of language in education is an important one because most of Kazakhstan’s ethnic minority population speaks Russian; with increased investment in developing the Kazakh language, ethnically Kazakh students usually benefit the most.

Using Anderson’s (2006) terminology, “language-of-state” does not coincide with the “language of population” in independent Kazakhstan. In my interpretation, this means that state policies promoting the Kazakh language do not take into account that not all citizens speak this language. State institutions mainly impose the learning of the Kazakh language in order to create a Kazakh nation, because they live in a *politically* created *Kazakh-stan* that is not “naturally” reflective of the entire population that lives in the territory. Speaking Kazakh because it is the country of *Kazakh-stan* is a flawed argument because the name of the country was largely “imagined” after the collapse of the Soviet Union. Diener (2002) identified that processes of external and internal legitimation take place in Central Asian states, whereby individuals are expected to develop a particular sense of belonging (p.633). Knowing the language and being part of the country creates a sense of belonging for ethnic Kazakhs in Kazakhstan. However, learning the Kazakh language is difficult for many citizens in Kazakhstan as it is not a native language, and the language itself and its related learning materials are in the process of constant revision.

Another emerging societal issue that is connected with language is the settlement of *oralmans* or “ethnic Kazakhs” who previously lived abroad, mainly in China and Mongolia, but who have recently returned to Kazakhstan, their “historical homeland”. Such *jus sanguinis* repatriation activities are highly contested. Using discourse analysis, Diener (2005) highlights the issue of the inability of oralmans to get a proper education. Oralman speak only Kazakh and already struggle with identity issues because they experienced dislocation. If oralman get an education in the Kazakh language without proper exposure to education in the Russian one, a societal problem may arise, because Kazakhstan is ethnically diverse but “largely russified” (Diener, 2005). Though Diener discusses “russified” Kazakhstani society, new “kazakhification” trends will be discussed below.

### **Kazakhification processes through Textbooks and School Curriculum**

Education is deeply ingrained in cultural and political life of the society it serves. Educational curriculum is one of the main channels through which particular representations of imagined “national” values are created. “Official knowledge” is created in and through the process of education (Apple, 1993). School textbooks are used as the communication channel between the state and the citizens in the formation of a particular discourse. Apple argues that curriculum is not a “neutral knowledge,” because it reflects complex interplays between power and politics (Apple & Christian-Smith, 1991). School curriculum contains carefully crafted information developed by the state agencies.

While multiple players may be involved in educational policy formation, the textbook development in Kazakhstan is still largely under the domain of the state. Since the collapse of the Soviet Union, curriculum was changed many times by the Ministry of Education in an attempt to reflect “true” history of an independent country. This is similar to other post-Soviet states where history classes usually become *de facto* spaces for ideological narratives. For example, Anderson (2007) reveals that historians in Moldova emphasize the ethnic component of the nation: “the Moldovan historians, who write the history textbooks, are not concerned with loyalty to the state but rather with loyalty to the nation – that is, an ethnic Romanian nation” (p. 280). While the issue of the writing of history textbooks is highly contested in Moldova, ethnic sentiments in developing school curricula are still present in the discourse on general history textbook creation.

In the case of Estonia and Slovakia, civic educationalists are divided in “civic” and “ethnic” nationalists (Michaels & Stevick, 2009). In both countries, there is an existing Russian and other ethnic minority population that is neither Estonian nor Slovak; not surprisingly, their discourses are similar to arguments used in Kazakhstan where titular ethnicity is presented as central in shaping the core of the nation. It is similar in a way that a country is linked to the “main” ethnicity, which has lived there longer historically. In Estonia, Slovakia, and Kazakhstan, textbooks often suggest that citizens are the ones who belong to a geographical area of the country. In this context, the ethno-cultural aspect of the nation is still being capitalized.

Kissane (2005) notes that the process of building a modern “Kazakh” state encompasses the process of ‘kazakhification’ through education. For example, the issue

of Russia's "colonialism" versus a voluntary annexation of Kazakhstan to the Russian Empire was ordered to be reevaluated in history textbooks. While previously it was taught that the annexation of Kazakhstan by Russia was voluntary, after 1991 the Kazakh Academy of Sciences asked to (re)visit and reevaluate the content of general curricula and, in particular, history textbooks (Kissane, 2005).

"Kazakhified" historical representation has a new post-Soviet name, but old Soviet era strategies in disseminating nationalistic ideology. Zajda and Zajda (2003) note that the content of history textbooks during the Soviet era was heavily influenced by Russian culture, imposing Russian national heroes and leaders: "Alexandr Nevsky, Peter the Great and Catherine the Great, to name a few..." (p. 371). The history curriculum during the Soviet era was Russo-centric and now, in independent Kazakhstan, the history curriculum is a Kazakh-centric one. This demonstrates that often the creation of new ideology is a mere (re)creation of the old strategy of promoting one ethnicity as the "core" one for nation-building purposes (Smith, 1986; Jones, 2010). Thus, the process of de-Sovietizing curricula turned into a "kazakhification" of curricula.

In addition to history and civic education curriculum in secondary education, "kazakhification" takes place at elementary and primary education levels, where children begin to conceptualize the state and the nation. It is at the earliest age that ideas such as childhood, homeland, national heroes, and role models are created in children's minds. Mead (2012) underlines the importance of studying *bukvari* because primers introduce the idea of "the nation" to "young and impressionable pupils" (p. 5). Mead and Silova (2013) describe the topic of childhood in the context of nation, state, and culture by critically analyzing the development of primary textbooks in post-socialist Latvia and

Ukraine. This article was of particular interest for the current study, as Kazakhstan, Ukraine and Latvia share a common post-Soviet legacy. The authors stated that post-socialist ideologies did not disappear in modern states, but rather “... the flows, fissures, and translations in these textbooks reveal tension, ambivalence and hybridity” (Mead & Silova, 2013. p.196).

By analyzing “pedagogies of space” in early literacy textbooks of Armenia, Latvia and Ukraine, Silova, Mead, and Palandjian (in press) touch upon the issue of the association of geographical territory and its link to national identity formation. They conclude that “educational narratives about (national) ‘homeland’ – instilling geography, location, and landscape with symbolic (national) meanings – have enduring, critical importance for identity-scapes of peoples in the former Soviet Union” (Silova & Mead & Palandjian, in press, p.18). Another study by Filippova (2009) traces ideological replacement from Soviet to Ukrainian cultural depictions in the content of *bukvari*. All of these studies analyzed national identity formation in several post-Soviet countries. However, as far as is known, similar studies have not yet conducted on the topic of early literacy textbooks in Kazakhstan.

## **Sample and Methods**

### **Sample**

A list of 15 early literacy textbooks was made, using convenience sampling (see Table 1). The Ministry of Education approved all textbooks analyzed in this study for usage in schools. An analysis is representative because school textbooks are published every four years with minimum changes to the content. Thus, the sample included the

most recently published textbooks, including those published in 2014. The sample included seven *alippe* in Kazakh language, seven *bukvari* in Russian language, and one textbook in Russian, Kazakh, and English languages. Trilingual trend is new, since the President announced a new state program, promoting the knowledge of three languages mentioned above. The textbooks and primers included in this study were printed by main publishing houses such as Mektep, Rauan, Atamura and Almatykitap. Soviet textbooks and some post-Soviet samples were collected at Knizhnaya Palata (central government book archives) in Almaty, Kazakhstan during summer 2013. Some were bought in bookstores in Almaty during the fieldwork.

In a highly centrist political context of Kazakhstan, textbooks are written by selected scholars and then are approved by the Ministry of Education (MOE). Afterwards, there is a contest between publishing houses and those publishing houses that win have the opportunity to publish school textbooks, similarly to textbook publishing processes in other post-Soviet contexts (Kovac & Sebart, 2004; Kazimzade, 2008). All school textbooks for mainstream schools are reprinted every four years. Textbooks printed in urban centers are then spread for in-class usage at schools around the country.

Textbooks are officially published in 4 languages in Kazakhstan: Kazakh (state), Russian (language of inter-ethnic communication), Uighur, and Uzbek. This study deals with primers written in Kazakh and Russian languages only because most children learn in those two languages: more than 1600 thousands study in Kazakh, around 800 thousand in Russian, while around 50 thousand in other languages (ASRK, 2014). It is very hard to acquire textbooks published in Uighur and Uzbek languages because they are not printed in large quantities and are less often reprinted.

**Table 1. Early literacy textbooks (primers, *bukvari*, *alippe*) analyzed**

No.	Pub. Date	Authors	Title	Publisher	Language
1	1968	Esenzholova, Khmelevskiy	Букварь. Учебник русского языка для 1 класса казахской школы. [Russian language primer for first grade of Kazakh school]	Мектеп	Russian
2	1971	Esenzholova, Khmelevskiy	Букварь. Учебник русского языка для 1 класса казахской школы. [Russian language primer for first grade of Kazakh school]	Мектеп	Russian
3	1996	Zhubanova	Alippe. [Primer for first grade of regular school]	Rauan	Kazakh
4	1996	Kamshilina	Букварь. Учебник для 1 класса русской школы. [Primer for first grade of Russian school]	Rauan	Russian



5	1996	Botabaeva, Baimuratova, Dauletkalieva	Alippe. [Primer for first grade of gymnasium]	Rauan	Kazakh
6	1997	Auelbaev, Nauryzbaeva, Izguttynova, Kulazhanova	Alippe. [Primer for first grade of regular school]	Atamura	Kazakh
7	2001	Pavlenko, Abenova	Букварь. Учебник для 1 класса общеобразовательной школы. [Primer for first grade of regular school]	Atamura	Russian
8	2005	Omirebekova	Alippe. [Additional primer for first grade for regular school]	Мектеп	Kazakh
9	2009	Pavlenko	Букварь. Учебник для 1 класса общеобразовательной школы. [Primer for first grade of regular school]	Almatykitap	Russian
10	2012	Auelbaev,	Alippe. [Primer for first	Atamura	Kazakh

		Nauryzbaeva, Izguttynova, Kulazhanova	grade of regular school]		
11	2012	Pavlenko, Abenova	Букварь. Учебник для 1 класса общеобразовательной школы. [Primer for first grade of regular school]	Atamura	Russian
12	2012	Auelbaev, Nauryzbaeva, Izguttynova, Tazhimbetova	Ana tili 1. [Primer for first grade of regular school]	Atamura	Kazakh
13	2012	Aimagambetova, Idilova	Dunie tanu. [Primer for second grade of regular 11 year school]	Almatykitap	Kazakh
14	2012	Aimagambetova, Idilova	Познание мира. [Primer for second grade of regular 11 year school]	Almatykitap	Russian
15	2012	Otetyleulyly	Kazakhstan, my mother country. [Pre-school poem and picture book]	Almatykitap	Kazakh, Russian, English

## Methods

*Alippe* (in Kazakh language), *bukvari* (in Russian language) and other primers, such as *ana tili I* (native Kazakh language textbook) and *dunie tanu/poznanie mira* (a word around us textbooks in both languages) are used to teach the alphabet and basic reading and writing skills to young citizens of Kazakhstan. Along with learning to read and write, children are expected to carefully memorize particular “kazakh” conceptualizations of childhood, heroes, and homeland. In these primers, language is used to vividly describe the homeland to young citizens of Kazakhstan, while pictures are used as a visual representation and reinforcement of “imagined” homeland to impressionable children. Indeed, physical pictures in particular textbooks make those visualizations very specific. This is why critical discourse analysis (Fairclough, 2013) will be used to examine how school curriculum contributes to the construction of national identity through the pictorial and textual content of early literacy textbooks in Kazakhstan

Texts are not mere words, but powerful linguistic constructions that transmit created narratives. Competing discourses create and (re)create educational practices in relation to power in broader social and political context that they are part of (Laclau, 1980). It is through school curriculum and in the case analyzed primers that children are introduced to the notions of nation, homeland, society, and citizenship. Educational experiences are a vital part of a broader socialization process of children and are interdependent with power relations embedded in the society. That is why identifying and studying education discourses in school textbooks is so important. In particular, the study will examine differences in the construction of national identities Kazakh and Russian language textbooks.

Highly qualitative in nature, methods of critical discourse analysis allow mapping central narratives in primers in relation to presence of cultural themes. More specifically, I studied the following guiding research questions associated to national identity formation:

- *“Khazakhified” Childhood? Am I “Kazakhstani” or “Kazakh”?*

How is childhood constructed in primers? Is it portrayed differently in *bukvari* and *alippe*? If so, how different? What is the role of different cultures, including Kazakh culture, in shaping of the national identity? What does it mean to be “Kazakhstani” or “Kazakh”?

- *National Symbols: Kazakh Traditions, Costumes, Yurts, and Horses*

What symbols are attributed to Kazakh culture? What is the role of traditions in shaping the national identity?

*On Homeland*

What is the role of spaces and homeland in shaping an identity? Are patriotic feelings formed in textbook? How is homeland defined? Does this definition have links to a particular culture or ethnicity?

- *On Heroes*

Finally, who are the role models for children? How and why are the heroes portrayed in primers chosen? What qualities children should aspire to have? How ethnically diverse are those heroes?

Textbook analysis was primarily conducted by the author of the thesis. I examined individually every textbook and took notes that were relevant to research questions. After that I compared the content of primers, giving special attention to variances in *bukvari*

and *alippe*. Qualitative approach through broad interpretative discourse analysis framework allowed a very detailed interpretive examination (similar to the one used by Silova et al., in press). More specifically, I looked at texts and pictures that are relevant to the topics defined in my research such as: childhood, national symbols, homeland, and heroes. I examined each textbook looking at how national identity is described, how childhood is constructed, how homeland is depicted, and what heroes are portrayed. I was intentionally looking for explicit and implicit messages that were central to the topic of the national identity construction. In order to crosscheck the content of several primers, I then came up with an overall analysis of all topics throughout all early literacy textbooks. I deconstructed messages of power and culture in textbooks through a detailed analysis of texts and illustrations by examining whether there was the language of cultural domination, as well as social and cultural exclusion. At all stages from developing research questions to the analysis of my interpretations, I consulted my academic advisor Dr. Iveta Silova, problematizing my subjective analysis of power discourses and cultural narratives. The responsibility of false interpretations is fully mine.

## **Findings**

An analysis of texts and illustrations reveals that Kazakhstan's early literacy textbooks are full of implicit and explicit political and cultural messages. Through seemingly innocent texts and pictures children are invited to imagine their idealized lifestyles, activities that they will enjoy doing, or outfits that they might like to wear. To various degrees, such ideological messages are present in all textbooks analyzed, linking particular activities, behaviors, and even appearances to the Kazakh culture. By

portraying Kazakh traditional costumes, for example, an identity is created that is “kazakhified.” A nation depicted in textbooks is that of a community based on shared (Kazakh) ancestry. Of course, there are multiple identities that are depicted: be it gender or professional roles. The purpose of current work is not to simplify the complexity of the topic of identity construction; rather, the aim is to describe how one particular version of identity construction dominates the discourse about what it means to be “kazakh” or “kazakshtani” in the post-Soviet context.

While identity construction is a multifaceted process, I will focus on analyzing how childhood, space, symbols, and heroes are portrayed in the early literacy textbooks. In particular, I will look into national versus multiethnic identities, since diversity is an important factor in multiethnic society. In regards to space, natural or urban landscapes will be analyzed as sites of ethno-national identity construction. There are many symbols that are attributed to ethnically Kazakh culture (such as yurts, national costumes, camels and horses), which will be analyzed in this research. Finally, the study will examine national heroes who serve as the role models for children.

### **“Khazakhified” childhood? Am I “Kazakhstani” or “Kazakh”?**

In the case of Soviet early literacy textbooks, children of different ethnicities play, go to school, and celebrate holidays together in peace and friendship (Esenzholova & Khmelevskiy, 1968; Esenzholova & Khmelevskiy, 1971). An example of international spirit characteristic of a Soviet-era textbook is demonstrated in the picture below (see Image 1). The text that accompanies this image describes in both Russian and Kazakh languages that all people live in peace. The image is accompanied by a text, which asks the following questions:

What does our homeland look like?  
What do we have?  
What ethnicities live in our land?  
What do we love?  
Who do we love?  
What do we say?  
(Bukvar, 1971, p.96)

And then on the next page the text says: “Viva peace! All ethnicities live in peace here [Soviet Union]” (Esenzholova & Khmelevskyi, 1971, p. 97). In the picture, you can see people wearing traditional costumes of various ethnicities, while holding red flags. The picture answers the questions posed in text, suggesting that multiple diverse ethnicities exist and, more importantly, live in peace.

Image 1: Soviet children marching for peace



(Esenzholova & Khmelevskyi, 1971, p. 97)

In some Russian *bukvari*, there are depictions of internationalism, reminiscence of Soviet idea of *druzhiba narodov* (friendship among nationalities). However, the narrative of global citizenry in the text below is still dominated by the heavy presence of signs of national cultures, whether Russian or Kazakh. In the picture supporting the text, children are wearing national costumes, while dancing together around the globe:

Image 2: Children in *bukvar*



(Kamshilina, 1996, p.159)

We live on the blue planet called Earth.  
We are children of various ethnicities and  
countries,  
From the depth of the dark cosmos our  
planet is shining like small crystal clear  
water drop in the starry ocean. We have to  
learn how to take care and love with all our  
heart our planet Earth.  
Let your knowledge nurture and save peace  
on our planet, protect our Earth.  
Go explore it, small citizen of the planet  
Earth.

(Kamshilina, 1996, p.159)

In comparison to the Soviet past, post-Soviet textbooks published in Kazakhstan reflect a strictly (ethno)nationalist curriculum, which is a design of recent history in independent Kazakhstan. As textbook analysis reveals, Soviet style “internationalism” is mostly replaced in primers by a greatly emphasizing the importance of “titular” Kazakh ethnicity and its imagined role as a “unifying” culture in a multiethnic state (for more on Kazakh culture as a unifying factor see Jones, 2010). In rare cases, when the international discourse on the “friendship of all people” remains, children wearing Kazakh national costumes occupy the central space, while the rest of the children appear on the picture’s periphery.

Image 3: Centrality of Kazakh culture in *bukvar*



(Pavlenko, 2009, p.49)



In another example of a Kazakh language textbook, diversity is represented in *ana tili 1* in relation to a specific holiday of national unity - May 1. Such presentation of multiculturalism - only in the context of specific holiday - is rather superficial, since it is not reflected across school curriculum, especially in early childhood textbooks. Ethnic, gender, age diverse members of the society are not portrayed at equal power positions in pictures and texts. Rather, they are presented a picturesque celebration, which is far from a daily lived experience.

Image 4: May 1 celebrations



(Auelbaev & Nauryzbaeva & Izguttynova & Tazhimbetova, 2012, p.174)

Diversity is very important, since primers picture and in many cases perpetuate existing visions of the centrality of Kazakh culture. Ethnical representation in textbooks is different in Russian and Kazakh language textbooks, yet has similarities in a way that Kazakh culture is represented in all early literacy textbooks analyzed. On the one hand, children depicted in *bukvari* (Russian language primers) generally have light skin and they look more like ethnic Russians. On the other hand, in *alippe* (Kazakh language

primers), children appear to be more Asian looking. Interestingly, Kazakh language primers rarely include images of children of other ethnicities, with the ethnically Kazakh children dominating the textbook space. For example, a typical picture from one of the textbooks shows children wearing Kazakh costumes and the yurt in the background:

Image 5: Kazakh costumes    Image 6: Children perform in Kazakh costumes



(Auelbaev & Nauryzbaeva & Izguttynova & Kulazhanova, 2012, p.10; p.63)

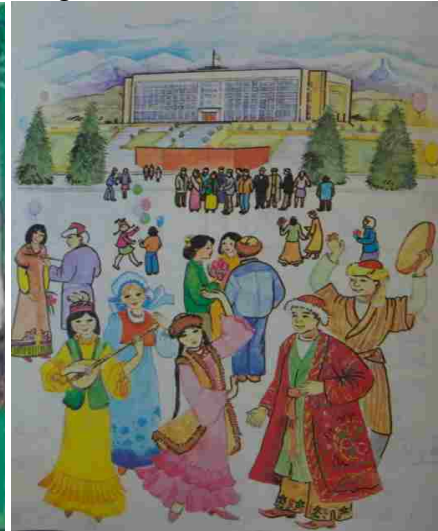
At the same time, Kazakhification narratives are present in both Russian and Kazakh language textbooks. Recognizing competing discourses of national versus international identities, one Russian language *bukvars* contains different imaginaries of childhood. In one picture, a Russian environment is depicted of girls wearing Russian costumes playing in a meadow surrounded by birch trees, which is often associated with Russian natural landscapes. In the background, children are dancing in *khorovod*, a Slavic art dance. On the following page, however, a vivid portrayal of Kazakh culture is visualized in a full-size page picture of people wearing Kazakh costumes and playing Kazakh traditional instrument, *dombyra*.

Image 7: Russian costumes and nature



(Kamshilina, 1996, p.7)

Image 8: Kazakh culture



(Kamshilina, 1996, p.28)

Typically, Russian-language *bukvari* appear to reflect more diversity compared to Kazakh language primers. This is especially visible in the inclusion of different national fairytales. For example, Russian language *bukvari* contain a Nenets fairytale about a cuckoo bird, Russian tale about a snow girl, Serbian story about a moon and a Kazakh story about Aldar-Kose, a famous fiction character (Pavlenko & Abenova, 2001). These fairytales are always accompanied by colorful illustrations featuring children in their particular national costumes.

Image 9: Nenets culture



(Pavlenko & Abenova, 2001, p.141)

Image 10: Russian house - *teremok*



(Pavlenko & Abenova, 2001, p.62)

Despite the presence of cultural diversity, Russian-language *bukvari* contain clear elements of Kazakhification. In the picture below, a girl of Russian ethnicity is shown

sitting on a camel decorated with traditional Kazakh ornaments. The camel is in the background of mountains and red tulips, a common steppe flower in Kazakhstan. Below, there is a picture of a *yurt*. It is such a combination that constructs a picture of childhood: a steppe, mountains, camel or a horse, and traditional elements such as yurt. The accompanying text reinforces the impressions gleaned from the image. The text describes how a girl named Julia loves her camel and rides in a steppe full of tulips. She feeds a camel with what is locally known as a sort of apricot, *uryuk*. Locality of the picture and its setting reinforce the image of a national identity that is directly linked to Kazakhstan.

Image 11: A girl on a camel



(Pavlenko & Abenova, 2001, p.99)

A camel.

Camel lived nearby the yurt. Julia loved a camel. She brought him apricots. Julia was riding a camel. Once she asked a camel:

- Let's go to a sea!

- Let's go, - nodded a camel. – Just close your eyes.

It was a long ride.

- Now open your eyes! – Said a camel. – Look here!

Julia opened her eyes.

- Wow, so many tulips! But where is the sea?

- It is a sea. A sea out of tulips.

(Pavlenko & Abenova, 2001, p.99)

As seen in the analysis above, Kazakh or Kazakhstani childhoods appear as two competing narratives in Russian language *bukvari*. Yet, elements of Kazakhification become more explicit and dominant in Kazakh language *alippe*, which convey very concrete monethnic and monocultural depictions of childhood. One element of



“kazakhification” is the presence of national costumes in many pictures. Many girls, especially in *alippe*, wear dresses with symbolic Kazakh decorations, while boys wear jackets and pants decorated with Kazakh ornaments. Often they perform an activity that relates to playing national musical instrument or Kazakh traditional games (*asyk*, bones of dead sheep).

Image 12: Children wearing Kazakh costumes and playing *dombyra*



(Pavlenko & Abenova, 2001, p.88)

Image 13: Boys in Kazakh costumes playing *asyk*



*Asyk* game (Auelbaev & Nauryzbaeva & Izguttynova & Kulazhanova, 2012, p.68)

Noteworthy are the power positions among various visually ethnically diverse people portrayed in pictures and texts. For example, one picture in *alippe* shows a Caucasian looking man in front of tractor, which reflects his professional position of someone working in agriculture. While there are many pictures of Kazakh looking people at various jobs, this image portrays a man of Asian looking appearance wearing a business suit, while two other workmen – perhaps a Russian and if Kazakh ethnicities - receiving flowers from children. It might signify an interesting power dynamics - a

person (Kazakh) from the city comes and attends a ceremony of appraising workers (Russian) in the village. This positioning appears to reverse the typical Soviet power dynamics where ethnically Russian population often came from the cities and ethnically Kazakh populations were associated with the rural living.

Image 14: Power positions among diverse population

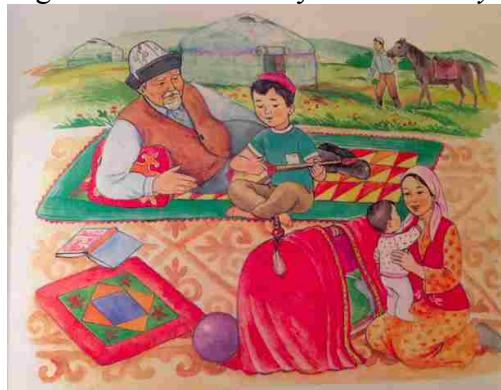


(Auelbaev & Nauryzbaeva & Izguttynova & Kulazhanova, 2012, p.51)

### **Symbols: Kazakh Traditions, Costumes, Yurts, and Horses**

Rural lifestyles, spaces, landscapes, nature, and sociocultural environment dominate the content of textbooks published both in Russian and Kazakh languages. Such a combination of national symbols creates an omnipresence of Kazakh culture in all spheres of everyone's life: daily living, clothes, home decorations or leisure. For example, a picture below shows a conglomeration of above-mentioned symbols.

Image 15: Kazakh family in front of a yurt



(Auelbaev & Nauryzbaeva & Izguttynova & Kulazhanova, 2012, p.29)

Rural depictions of mountains and steppes are often accompanied by the portrayal of Kazakh traditional homes, *yurts*, as the ideal way of living. *Yurts*, which are Kazakh traditional homes made of wool, are no longer in functional use in regular, modern-day life in Kazakhstan. They mostly fulfill roles of historical memories. During celebrations of Kazakh holidays, such as *nauryz*, symbolic New Year celebrations, public spaces might be decorated with *yurts*. However, textbooks continue to depict *yurts* as an everyday, typical dwelling of Kazakhs. For examples, one text in describes a yurt in the following way:

Image 16: A yurt



A yurt.  
White yurt stands in the steppe. Everyone  
loves it. Sun rises in the morning:  
-Hello, yurt!  
A wind came!  
-Good day, yurt!  
Tulips opening:  
-Hello to you, yurt!

(Pavlenko, 2009, p.80)

In the poem and the picture accompanying the text, the yurt almost transforms into a living creature of its own. The steppe with beautiful tulips is imagined as a natural setting for an everyday living. Representation of Kazakh traditions ranges from singing competitions to horse racing with one unifying factor: rural setting as a cultural space. For example, the text below is about *aytys*, which is a song contest performed by artists playing Kazakh musical instrument, *dombyra*.

Image 17: *Aytys*



Aytys.  
We came to aytys.  
We sit and listen.  
Tayr has a dombyra.  
Zaira has a dombyra.  
Play and sing, dombyra!  
Listen, mountains and rivers!  
Listen, steppes, to cheerful sounds of  
dombyra!

(Pavlenko, 2009, p.73)

While the text is about the song contest, the picture shows a Kazakh boy and a girl wearing traditional costumes in a mountainous area. An important element of recognizing traditional Kazakh costumes is the presence of special ornaments. In Kazakh culture, various ornaments symbolize relation to flowers or animals. The text below describes the Kazakh style decorative element – *oyu*.

Oyu.

My grandmother is decorating a small traditional blanket made of camel wool with ornaments. Ornaments look very beautiful.

Image 18: *Oyu*



(Auelbaev & Nauryzbaeva & Izguttynova & Kulazhanova, 2012, p. 97)

Traditional decorative elements are not only decorating clothes but every single page of *ana tili 1*. As it frames all pages, flipping the textbooks gives you a feeling of touching the “history”. We imagine by very concrete visualization that it is not a school textbook but a historical fairytale manuscript that transports us to the past epochs of nomads, and



batyrs. In the imagined past, Kazakh culture seems to be monoethnic and central, too. Interestingly, the omnipresence of Kazakh traditional costumes is particularly vivid in *alippe*. Usually, families are portrayed at a gathering or sharing a meal, sitting in an old-style manner. Such approach to culture and a nation tied to historical “genetic code of the nation”, in this case Kazakh, resembles with ethnonationalist imaginings of the nation prior nation-states (Smith, 1986). You can see a kettle and teacups, a hat and carpets have traditional ornaments:

Image 19: Kazakh traditional family dinner



(Auelbaev & Nauryzbaeva & Izguttynova & Kulazhanova, 2012, p.28)

Boys, girls, elderly and even animals are depicted wearing Kazakh style jackets, jewelry and accessories. Pictures below demonstrate visualizations of a fox and a frog, wearing ethnic costumes. The ornaments are seen on the images of the belt on a frog or fox’s Kazakh traditional *kamzol*, a jacket without sleeves:

Image 20: A fox in a Kazakh costume Image 21: A frog in a Kazakh outfit



(Auelbaev & Nauryzbaeva & Izguttynova & Kulazhanova, 2012, p.129-130)

While foxes and frogs might be randomly chosen as players of the stories, camels and especially horses have a detrimental role in Kazakh culture. Historically, Kazakhs were making carpets and clothes from camel and sheep wool, since those resources were at hand. We remember that based on the *oyu* example previously, a lady was making a carpet out of camel wool (see Image 18). They rode horses because of nomadic lifestyle. They even ate horses for famous Kazakh meals, such as *kazy*, which is like horse kielbasa. As myths say, Kazakhs were the first to domesticate a wild horse. So, for an unexperienced eye, depiction of horses in primers might seem as a regular picture of an animal in children's books. However, analyzed in context, horses are directly linked to the Kazakh culture. The text below is about Kazakh tradition of putting a boy on the horse:

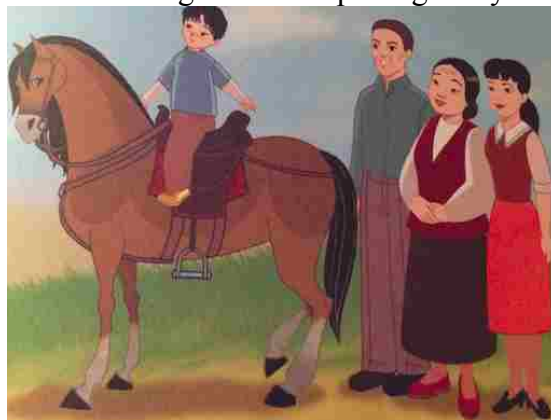
#### Interesting tradition.

Kazakh nation has an interesting tradition – seating a boy on a horse.

At five to six years, a horse and riding accessories is presented as a gift to a boy. The celebrations peak when a grandfather gives blessings to a grandson. Grandmother throws *shashu* – candies around the boy. Later on boys participate in horse racing – *bayga*.

Elderly organize a big celebration – *toi*. Tradition is a national custom, which is transmitted from generation to generation.

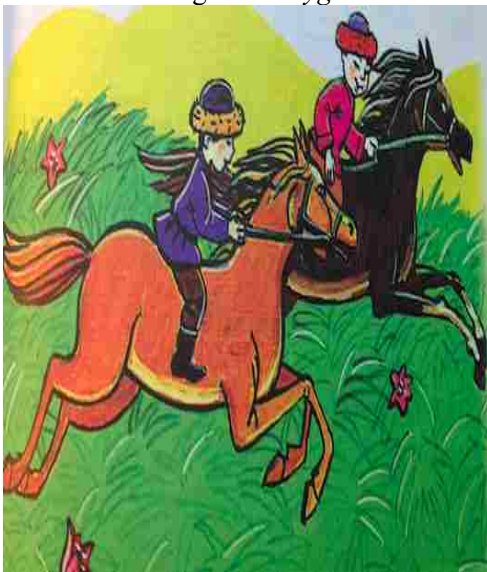
Image 22: Interesting tradition - putting a boy on a horse



(Aimagambetova & Idilova, 2012, p.81)

Through historical lenses, for Kazakhs, a horse was not only a source of transportation and food; but a basis of pride and the showcase of wealth. Best racing horses were very expensive to have and horse racing was a fun activity to be involved in and observe. *Bayga* is a traditional Kazakh game of racing horses. The picture below from *bukvar* shows two boys wearing colorful hats, which might as well be traditional Kazakh costumes. They are riding horses in a race. The accompanying text invites us to imagine that children should play Kazakh traditional games, preferably wearing traditional costumes. The role of the “horse” becomes central as it symbolizes beauty and strength:

Image 23: *Bayga*



### Bayga.

Bayga, bayga! Abai has a beautiful horse. Marat has a strong horse. Horses run faster than the wind. Who will win? Who will be first? (Pavlenko, 2009, p.75)

Another text describing a race is visually very similar to the one described above but printed in *alippe*. A group of four boys compete on horses, wearing sport outfits that look like traditional Kazakh costumes with head bands. The green grass and rural setting is depicted. The text is called “race” and describes several boys racing on horses. Again, horses are visualized and the whole description of the “race” is very similar to *bayga* analyzed above.

Image 24: A race



(Auelbaev & Nauryzbaeva & Izguttynova & Kulazhanova, 2012, p.70)

#### A Race.

A race took place in the village. Zhomart, Zhakan and Olzhas took part in the race. They finely competed. Zhomart got a prize.

(Auelbaev & Nauryzbaeva & Izguttynova & Kulazhanova, 2012, p.70)

While symbolizing national Kazakh culture, such a strong focus on horses is surprising as not many Kazakh (or Kazakhstani) children receive horses as gifts. It is very expensive to maintain a horse in urban setting, while it might be more common for rural children, since households might have domesticated horses. Moreover, many children in urban cities do not have access to riding horses or camels as described above. While there is some presence of urban scenery, textbooks are generally dominated by the rural landscapes as seen in the examples above.

### **On Homeland**

Homeland is a very strong narrative that is present in all early literacy textbooks analyzed. It matters because it creates a very strong sense of what it is to be a Kazakhstani. It is a centerpiece in creating a national identity by developing a sense of belonging. Unfortunately, in some texts the sense of “belonging” is interpreted in very narrow ways by stating that the land of Kazakhstan belongs to Kazakhs. Almost all textbooks start with the presidential address: “I believe that you will love your homeland

and will grow up as a decent citizen of your homeland” (Pavlenko & Abenova, 2012, p. 3).

A poem about the land of Kazakhs describes how various regions of Kazakhstan belong and are loved by all Kazakhs. It says that it will be forever the motherland of Kazakhs without the reference to Kazakhstanis. The poem was written in Russian, Kazakh and English languages and in all three languages failed to recognize the difference between being Kazakh or Kazakhstani:

The Land of Kazakhs.  
Atyrau,  
And Altai,  
And Arka,  
And Semirechye  
Are lovebale lands of all Kazakhs,  
Our Motherland forever.  
(Otetyeulyyly, 2012, p.31)

Not surprisingly, a picture of a Kazakh looking boy sitting on a horse accompanies this text visually. The page is decorated with images of *yurts* and traditional ornaments. This short poem is printed in three languages and the Russian language translation does not leave room for interpretations, because it clearly states: “all Kazakhs like this land” and not “Kazakhstanis” (Otetyeulyyly, 2012, p. 30). It shows how the exclusivity of language translates into the exclusion of other ethnicities from a new imaginary of the homeland that belongs exclusively to “kazakhs.” Another translation of the poem about homeland from Kazakh shows the value, which is placed on history and geography in building of the national identity. The imperative tone of the message shows that young people should or must love the homeland:

Homeland.  
Your parents, your friends and your brother mean homeland.  
Your country, your capital city,

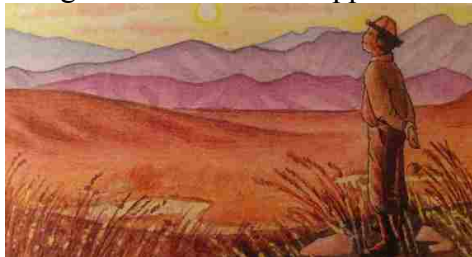
Your region and your village represent the homeland.

History is homeland.  
Strong nation means homeland.  
Homeland is a song, homeland is a poem.

Achievements of our nation bring pride to our nation.  
My friends mean homeland.  
Young people, love and value your homeland!  
B. Iskakov  
(Auelbaev, 2012, p.114)

In *bukvar*, the dramatic and emotionally charged text states that “as long as my heart is still beating” one should love homeland (Pavlenko, 2012, p.141). As Silova, Mead and Palandjan (2013) state: “educational narratives about (national) “homeland” – instilling geography, location, and landscape with symbolic (national) meanings – have enduring, critical importance for identity-scapes of peoples in the former Soviet Union” (p. 18). In the case of Kazakhstan, as shown in the example above, it is very important to define what homeland is. People are expected to defend it “till the last breath.”

Image 25: A man in a steppe



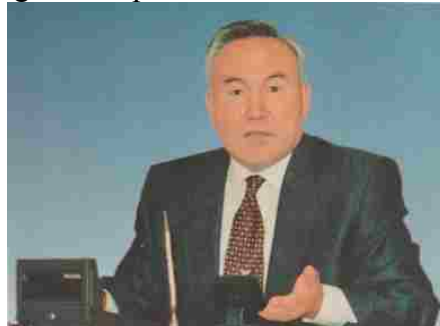
While my heart is beating.  
As I try water from the rivers in my homeland,  
I will always come back to those places.  
If I was only once in a forest,  
My soul will still bring me back.  
When I kiss our flag,  
My soul remembers the feelings,  
As long as my heart is still beating,  
I will call it my **HOMELAND**.  
M. Alimbaev  
(Pavlenko & Abenova, 2012, p.141, bold in original).

A man overlooking a steppe on the picture above is a Kazakhstani, who admires the landscapes of his homeland. It is people who are expected to protect, defend or bring pride to Kazakhstan. While some people portrayed have lesser power positions, other represented various jobs; while heroes epitomize important ideological role models to children.

### **On Heroes**

Creating role models to children has an explicit ideological meaning. The majority of primers begin with a depiction of President N.A. Nazarbayev. He is usually portrayed wearing a non-Kazakh traditional costume and having a sort of technological device in front of him; thus, creating an image of a “modern” man, wearing regular business attire. However, deconstructing the text accompanying the image, one will see a Kazakhified message, since the address starts by calling children *aynalayin*, a tender word for “dear” or “surrounded by blessings” in Kazakh language. Such a word only exists in Kazakh language and is very representative of Kazakh culture. Later the text does talk about all people in Kazakhstan though with a particular Kazakhified version of the citizenship. A role model is envisioned with combined identity of a modern looking man but cherishing Kazakh culture as the central one:

Image 26: A president N. A. Nazarbayev



Aynalayin!



You hold a wonderful book “Bukvar”, which will open new knowledge horizons.  
 I congratulate you with entering this fascinating world of knowledge!  
 Education, which you get, will be your personal wealth and will benefit all people in  
 Kazakhstan.  
 I believe you will love your homeland and will grow up a good citizen of our Homeland.  
 President of the Republic of Kazakhstan,  
 N. Nazarbayev  
 (Pavlenko & Abenova, 2012, p.3)

Pictures and descriptions of B. Momyshuly, A. Moldagulova and M. Mametova, ethnically Kazakh heroes of the World War II, are present in several primers. Poems and stories about them describe their heroism in times of war, fighting against fascists. Moldagulova was a sniper who heroically died; she was mortally wounded in the battle, defending a native land. Mametova was a machine gunner who fought till her death in 1942. Momyshuly was a lieutenant and has gone successfully through the war, achieving honorable after-war recognition. Momyshuly and Mametova received awards of Hero of Soviet Union. Mametova, Moldagulova and Momyshuly served as army members of Kazakh Soviet Socialist Republic (KSSR) as part of the Soviet Union.

Image 27, 28, 29: Momyshuly, Mametova, Moldagulova Image 30,31: Cosmonauts



(Auelbaev & Nauryzbaeva & Izguttynova & Tazhimbetova, 2012, p.186-189)  
 (Aimagambetova, 2012, p.127)

Similarly, ethnic Kazakh cosmonauts, T. Aubakirov and T. Musabaev, are presented as role models in early literacy primers, although references to the Soviet cosmonaut Y. Gagarin still persist in some texts. In one *bukvar*, a picture shows a Russian boy dressed as a cosmonaut (see picture below). However, in *alippe* a bigger emphasis is not on



Gagarin's achievement, but rather on the place of the cosmodrome Baykonur, which is located in Kazakhstan:

What is a cosmodrome?  
Cosmodrome is a place where rockets,  
satellites and big space shuttles with cosmonauts depart from.  
The first cosmic satellite of the Earth took off from Baykonur cosmodrome.  
The first cosmonaut Y. Gagarin took off from there too.  
(Aimagambetova, 2012, p.127)

Image 32: A cosmonaut



(Pavlenko, 2009, p.47)

It is curious that such a pride and emphasis is placed on Baykonur, though it was built in Soviet times. Moreover, the cosmodrome itself is rented and operated by Russian Federation up until today. An emotional attachment to physical territory inspires pride and honor that is linked to idealized past and present, divorced from reality of today. Similarly, cosmonauts that are portrayed as heroes belonged to Soviet era, reviving memories of the past, since it was KSSR. While in the case of World War II heroes, their achievements are not questionable, verifying glorified successes of *batyrs* who lived in 18<sup>th</sup> century is, to say least, hard, given nomadic nature of Kazakh culture. Nevertheless, displayed below Tole Bi, Kazybek Bi, Aiteke Bi are textually described as smart, wise and nationwide important people. They were heads of three *zhuzyses*, territorially divided parts of what is now Kazakhstan. They co-wrote Zhety Zhargy, a first of its kind book of law for Kazakhs. Kazybek Bi was one of the first to annex his zhuz to Russian Empire (to seek protection from constant attacks by *zhungarz*).

Image 33: Tole Bi, Kazybek Bi, Aiteke Bi



(Auelbaev & Nauryzbaeva & Izguttynova & Tazhimbetova, 2012, p.151)

Other ethnically Kazakh artists, painters, singers, writers and thinkers are presented as role models in early literacy primers, including Y. Altynsarin, S. Ualihanov, Abai Kunanbailuly, A. Baitursynuly, Al-Farabi, Tole bi, Kazybek bi, Ayteke bi, Mahambet, Abylay khan, Z. Zhabaev, K. Bayseitova, S. Zhienkulova, K. Satpaev, and Kasteev. To my best ability, I could not identify description of role models belonging to other ethnicities. Such a particular portrayal of national hero suggests that the whole nation of Kazakhstan is heroic. It is visualized with a picture of a male warrior, wearing Kazakh costume standing near the horse. The accompanying text says:

Image 34: A hero



Hero.

Kazakh nation is a heroic nation. Kabanbay, Bogenbay, Nauryzbay batyrs were Kazakhs. Gauhar, Aliya and Manshuk were female heroes. Boys and girls who are heroes get a special name Nation's Hero. People respect their own heroes.

(Auelbaev & Nauryzbaeva & Izguttynova & Tazhimbetova, 2012, p.100)

In fact, such attachment to the past is present across most themes (costumes, yurts, horses) and is relevant mostly for Kazakh culture. It seems that creators of these

narratives start to believe in their own lie: predominantly Kazakhs always lived in the territory of *Kazakh-stan*, it is thus belongs to Kazakhs and will always belong. Imagined and (re)imagined history obtains a physical life through texts and imaginaries of primers.

## **Conclusion**

The analysis of the of primers published in post-Soviet Kazakhstan clearly reveal that, national identity is constructed in an ethnocentric way; and, while civic identity is occasionally portrayed, Khazakhified identity dominates the majority of textbooks. The analysis of identity construction in early literacy textbooks was purposeful because children start their education and socialization process at a very early stage. In this context, school curriculum should reflect diversity that is surrounding children in their lives both inside and outside of school. The majority of post-Soviet textbooks published in Kazakhstan fail to represent the diversity of ethnic composition of the Kazakhstani society. Textbooks usually represent two main ethnicities: Russian and Kazakh. The rest of more than 100 ethnicities and cultures are left out from children's textbooks.

It is important to discuss the differences between Russian and Kazakh language primers, since the content of the Russian language textbooks was more representative of Kazakhstan's ethnic diversity as, for example, in fairytales of various ethnicities such as Russian, Nenets, and Serbian stories. Some pictures portrayed children wearing Russian traditional costumes but many wore regular casual clothes such as jeans and t-shirts. The same presence of neutral clothing was present in Kazakh language primers, too. However, *alippes* were dominated by the representation of ethnically Kazakh culture in both texts and images.

I argue that the content of early literacy textbooks in Russian and Kazakh languages is ideologically “Kazakhified” through text and pictures by popularizing heroes of only Kazakh ethnicity, as well as almost exclusively featuring century old traditional Kazakh homes (“yurts”), musical instruments (“dombyras”), clothing styles and ornaments. The textbooks presented images of national landscapes such as steppes, mountains, and valleys – representative of Kazakhstan’s nature. While there are some pictures of urban setting and children wearing “modern” clothes, Kazakhified images of childhood have been powerfully reinforced by visualizing and ascribing a combination of (national) symbols, landscapes, and heroes. Moreover, heroes of Kazakh ethnicity are generally portrayed in textbooks, ranging from Soviet to post-Soviet heroes. Cosmonauts, such as Aubakirov and Musabaev; army men, Momyshuly, Mametova, Moldagulova; a president himself, - all are ethnic Kazakhs. Even pre-Soviet heroes are linked to Kazakh culture: Tole Bi, Kazybek Bi, Aiteke Bi. Interestingly, the overwhelming majority of heroes portrayed in Kazakhstan’s textbooks are of one Kazakh ethnicity.

I further argue that ethnicized curriculum is not representative of modern multicultural societal realities. Kazakh culture is romanticized and overrepresented in the majority of early literacy textbooks analyzed. Staging Kazakh culture as the central one in Kazakhstan is problematic and can have severe negative consequences to social cohesion and stability in a multiethnic society, because Kazakh language and traditions are not native to the majority of minority representatives. The reimagining of homeland in terms of ethnonationalist vision of “the land of Kazakhs” excludes representatives of minority cultures in belonging to the country they call their home. Such

misrepresentation of reality gives a false impression of no alternative past, present, and future rather than romanticizing the dominant culture as portrayed in texts and pictures.

For the purposes of social cohesion and interethnic peace, diversity should be represented in school curriculum. Ethnonationalist spaces, national symbols such as costumes, games, houses and lifestyles should not be seen as the only option for living a happy life. School curriculum imagines and reinforces particular visions of how one should live and what he or she should do in everyday life. While constructing an ethnonationalist Kazakh identity is perceived as central to the “creation” of a citizen of Kazakhstan, it should not be done by diminishing the role of other cultures.

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## **VITA**

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