"There Can Be No Other Sun in the Sky": Political myth, spirituality and legitimacy in contemporary Kazakhstan

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With the elimination of Soviet state communism in the early 1990s, the ideational foundation of politics in the five Central Asian former Soviet republics had to undergo fundamental rebuilding~~an extreme [makeover/remodelling/reshaping? in the five Central Asian former Soviet republics.~~ Instead of the defunct basis of Soviet-style Marxism-Leninism, the rulers of the suddenly independent Central Asian states urgently had to identify other ways and means of legitimizing their hold on power. The following is an analysis of how this quest has fared in the case of Kazakhstan, a resource-rich state with regional great-power aspirations. These aspirations are shared with neighbouring Uzbekistan, which, however, had a more dramatic period of introduction to post-Soviet independent statehood, characterized by stern authoritarian rule, domestic riots, and occasional bouts of militant and oppositional Islamism (Adams 2010). Even if Kazakhstan certainly has not been devoid of problems on its road to sustained independence, it is interesting to try to analyse ~~what accounts for/the reasons for?~~ the more tranquil developments in that country during the first two and a half decades of its statehood.

Several attempts at locating the ideational driving forces behind contemporary Kazakhstani politics have focused on neo-patrimonialism, clan politics and personal networks (Collins, 2006; Schatz, 2005; Murphy 2006; Franke, Gawrich et al. 2009; Isaacs 2010), which have been argued to partly ~~make up for—to fill?~~ the ideational vacuum left behind by the demise of Soviet communism. Subscribing ~~Adhering~~ to a slightly different theoretical genre~~research tradition~~, however, we believe that the perspective of political myth adds valuable understanding to the political dynamics of the newly independent post-communist and post-Soviet states in Central Asia. This is in line with and adds to previous scholarship focused on nation-building efforts of Central Asian political elites (Akbarzadeh, 1996, 1999; Akiner, 1995, 1997; Roy, 2000). Kazakhstan is a young state, and we believe that political myth plays a crucial role in shaping and establishing common perceptions and values in relation to statehood and national identity

(Cummings 2006; Mellon 2010). What makes political myth particularly relevant in this context is that it aspires to signify broad social consensus; it contains widely held and taken-for-granted truths ~~beliefs?~~ truths which are more often than not sanctioned, if not created, by those in power, as well as lived by and adhered to by the electorate (Petersson 2014; 2 Bottici and Challand 2014).

The construction of new national symbols and the preservation and recreation of old ones is prominent in contemporary narratives of nationhood in Kazakhstan. More generally, the representation of political myth is to a significant extent made through language and visual imagery. Research on such phenomena thus needs to use a methodological approach that takes symbols, imagery and other artefacts into account (Bottici and Challand 2014: 7). P~~This construction and consolidation of political myth is to a significant extent promoted through language and visual imagery. In order to investigate this process of construction, we have analysed official statements and public speeches by Kazakhstan's incumbent president, Nursultan Nazarbayev. Place observation has accordingly also been undertaken by the authors. —by one of the authorsIn the process, v, whereby visual readings have been made of newly erected monuments in the new capital city of Astana, in the former capital of Almaty, and other significant sites. This choice has been made since e rationale for choosing the latter research strategy is that —the building of new national symbols and the preservation and recreation of old ones is a prominent [theme? in contemporary narratives of nationhood in Kazakhstan.~~

However, the main source of information hasis been drawn from a series of elite interviews conducted with politicians and political analysts in Kazakhstan during field trips undertaken 2010-during 2010 and 2011.¹. The interviewees were chosen— [because because of n the basis? of t their position, either as top officials within the ruling party or other parties, for since they have extensive knowledge— on —or due to their recognized extensive knowledge of ?— nation-building and current political processes in Kazakhstan. Finally, we have also analysed a limited number of key official statements and public speeches by Kazakhstan's incumbent and perennial president, Nursultan Nazarbayev. —Most of the interviews were conducted in Russian with the assistance of an interpreter.

Kazakhstan has a history of —being a borderless land in the pre-Russian era, during the Russian Empire and during the Soviet period. Its

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¹ Mia Orange conducted the interviews for hera PhD project forthcoming dissertation— on the persistence and demise of party and elite dominance in Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Kenya and Tanzania. Most of the interviews were conducted in Russian with the assistance of an interpreter. Despite the fact that most of the persons interviewed were ethnic Kazakhs, all without exception chose to speak Russian although they were given the option to speak in Kazakh had they wished to do so. In a few cases, the interviewees had sufficient command of English, forin which case this languageEnglish to bewas used, with an interpreter present in caseif some misunderstanding should arise.—

current international borders are a Soviet construct, which bears little historical significance.

At independence in 1992, the titular people, the Kazakhs,² were not in a the majority in Kazakhstan people. However, during the 1990s a large number of Kazakhstanis of Russian descent migrated to Russia. Some other nationalities also decreased significantly in numbers due to migration. For example, in particular, many Germans moved to Germany during the years following independence (Pohl 2008). Currently the Kazakhs, the titular people, the Kazakhs,³, comprise according to estimates as of 2009 only 63.1% 59.2% of the population, whereas the 29.6% Russians make up 23.7%, and Uzbeks, Ukrainians, Uighurs, Tatars, Germans and others account for make up the remaining 13.2% (The World Factbook, 2015). In all, there are more than 140 ethnic groups in Kazakhstan (Jones 2010), which makes it almost as heterogeneous as the Russian Federation, and indeed, the former Soviet Union in its day.

Kazakhstan had a history of being a borderless land in the pre-Russian era, throughout the Russian Empire and during the Soviet period. Its current international borders are a Soviet construct, bearing little historical significance. Politically and economically, Kazakhstan is highly influenced by its powerful neighbours. Bordering China to the East and Russia to the North, as well as impacted on by Turkey and the West, it is unclear where the young nation should look for a sense of cohesive national identity and statehood.

Kazakhstan is also religiously diverse. Although Islam is the stated religion of most Kazakhs, Orthodox Christianity is, Judaism and a number of other religions are also followed by a significant number of people. Other major religions are also represented, among them Judaism.

Due to the variety of influences, it was is far from self-evident whether that the young, independent state of Kazakhstan would ill necessarily seek a national identity constructed on religious and political precepts of Islam or the collective memory of its titular people, that is, i.e. the Kazakhs. As this paper will show, the ruling cadre of Kazakhstan has been treading the path of political mythmaking carefully – there are ongoing-going processes that are

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² In this chapter, a distinction is made throughout between Kazakhs, the ethnic group, and Kazakhstanis, which is used to refer to all citizens of Kazakhstan.

³ At independence, Kazakhs were not the majority people. During the 1990s a large number of Kazakhstanis of Russian descent immigrated to Russia. Some other nationalities also decreased significantly in number due to migration. In particular, many Germans moved to Germany during the years following independence (Pohl, O. J. (2008). *Suffering in a Province of Asia: The Russian German Diaspora in Kazakhstan. German diasporic experiences: identity, migration, and loss*. M. Schulze. Waterloo, Wilfrid Laurier University Press and Waterloo Centre for German Studies.]. The figure 59.2% is the official number presented by the Bureau of Statistics. There is reason to believe, however, that this number may be inflated as a part of the “Kazakhization” process (see below). In this chapter, a distinction is made throughout between Kazakhs, the ethnic group, and Kazakhstanis, which is used to refer to all citizens of Kazakhstan.

sometimes ~~fat loggerheads with each other~~ contradictory². On the one hand, there is celebration of ethnic diversity and religious plurality; on the other hand, the young state seeks to lead society away from Russian and past Soviet influence through the promotion of Kazakh language over Russian, and by imbuing/inseribing Kazakh myths, spirituality, religion and folklore with political significance.

In addition to the introduction, this chapter consists of six sections. In the first, the theoretical perspective of political myth is introduced. In the second, Islam in Kazakhstan is explored. The third section ~~is on~~ recounts the concerns-specific myths of ethnic and religious plurality articulated after independence. Here, the long-dominant endeavour to keep Kazakhstan stable in terms of ethnic relations is discussed at some length. In the fourth section, “Kazakhization” of state and society is analysed – how new and old elites of Kazakhstan strive to differentiate and distance history and culture from Russia. The fifth section is devoted to the persona of the president Nursultan Nazarbayev himself, and how a significant part of national mythmaking builds on him personally as ~~revolves around surrounds? him as~~ a political strongman. In the sixth and final section, our general conclusions ~~about the role of political myth in Kazakhstan are~~ laid out summarized, whereby we come back to ~~presented? and discussed, whereby in the course of which~~ the absolute centrality of the president for for the construction and sustenance of these myths is again underlined political myth-making in contemporary Kazakhstan.

Political Myth⁴

For a couple of decades ~~now~~, there has been considerable a lively interest within the social sciences and ~~the humanities~~ been a lively interest in different forms of collective identity; and in the processes that serve to weld people together in their striving towards common goals. Most prominently, such processes have taken place within ideological frameworks of nationalism or religion; and ~~it is still a vital field of inquiry to~~ looking into the beliefs that bring and keep ~~unite people and bring them~~ together in abstract, imagined communities of different kinds remains a vital field of inquiry. This is where the perspective of political myth comes in. A myth is, according to Boer (2009:9), an important story. It is a story that consequently makes a difference for people, and, in its most effective form, prompts ~~pels~~ them to act on behalf of certain ideals and in certain ways.

More specifically, political myths can be understood as shared beliefs about the common past and its relation to ~~the future and the present~~ contemporary times and the future – of a society (Bar-Tal 2000; Cohen 1999). They provide a common meta-narrative into which people can fit their own life paths and find a rationale for their own decisive choices of action (Cohen 1999; Bottici and Challand 2014). On a collective level they grant “significance to the political conditions and experiences of a social group” (Bottici and Challand 2014:92).

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⁴ ~~The text under this subheading builds extensively on Petersson (2012).~~

In contrast to ~~the everyday~~ ~~everyday~~ usage of the term “myth”, ~~its everyday meaning and role?~~ the actual truth of a political myth is ~~claims of a political myth are~~ not relevant for determining its impact (Bottici 2010; Blustein 2008). Instead, what is most important is that the myth has broad popular appeal, ~~that it is actually acted on as if it were true, and that it thus~~ provides a sense of origin, identity and purpose to its ~~believers, followers, and not least that it confers legitimacy on political leaders who successfully claim credibly seem to act in accordance with the myth~~ (Petersson 2014). (Davies 1997; Tanasoiu 2005; Blustein 2008; Bottici 2010).

~~Therefore,~~ Whereas political myths play major roles for promoting intra-group cohesion, they by the same token ~~p~~Political myths are therefore stories which are believed to be true or acted on as if they were ~~so true~~ by a group of people, and hence have implications for their lived and perceived political reality. ~~By the same token, myths provide a rationale for the exclusion of groups and individuals deemed not to fit in with the basic plot offered by the myth.~~ Paraphrasing ~~As it was graphically put by~~ Hylland Eriksen (2004), political myths work ~~much~~ like inverted refrigerators, ~~–spreading warmth on the inside and projecting cold~~ ~~on to?~~ the outside. To put it differently, ~~political myths therefore comprise~~ ~~much of the webs from which that~~ narratives of nationalism and other ~~collective~~ ~~–isms,~~ ~~‘hot’ as well as banal,~~ are woven. ~~This goes for the ‘hot’ and conflict-seeking articulations in situations of acute antagonism and tension, as well as for the ‘banal’ and seemingly undramatic versions of -isms, which affect thinking, discourse and action in mundane, everyday situations~~ ~~out of~~ (Billig 1995; Petersson 2006, 2009). ~~Sic?~~

~~As mentioned above,~~ ~~p~~Political myths are by their very nature supported by the powers that be, as they, ~~if successful,~~ lend legitimacy to them and to the main directions of the policies ~~that that~~ they wish to pursue (McDonald 2010; Bottici and Challand 2014). The authorities will therefore ~~attempt and inspire endorse and encourage~~ the inscription of the myths into political practice, rituals and institutions ~~of different kinds in everyday public and everyday life~~ (della Sala 2010). ~~They will, using the seminal term launched by Hobsbawm and Ranger (1983), purport to ‘invent traditions’ and inscribe them into everyday politics.~~ If successfully constructed, ~~inscribed and sustained,~~ the ~~contents of the~~ myths ~~will be treated as common sense~~ (Kulyk 2006) ~~come to be considered as~~ ~~normal true?~~ and are taken for granted, and ~~will thus largely on many occasions~~ become shielded from critical scrutiny. At this stage, the process of ~~the~~ further entrenchment of the myths in public and private life becomes autonomous and self-reinforcing. ~~The myth becomes a self-fulfilling prophecy~~ (Bottici and Challand 2014:8).

However, in all societies there is a degree of tension between the ~~aspirations for considerations of~~ power and ~~legitimation~~ ~~legitimacy?~~ underlying the construction of myth from the top, on the one hand, and ~~potentially subversive~~ counterclaims from below, on the other. ~~Here,~~ Describing this, Duncan Bell ~~uses introduces~~ the concept of mythscape, ~~which he defines~~ as the ‘temporally and spatially extended discursive realm wherein the struggle for control of peoples’ memories and the formation of nationalist myths is debated, contested and subverted ~~incessantly~~’ (Bell 2003: 66). Both the myths ~~constructed and nurtured from above groomed by the authorities~~ and ~~the the acts of~~ potentially divergent ~~counterclaims articulation of~~

~~remembrance on~~ the part of the public ~~and by contending elites~~ compete for attention in the ~~is~~-mythscape (Persson & Petersson 2014). Successful political myths may be hegemonic and influential, but they are never without potential challengers, should their vehicles of legitimation start to fail.

We argue ~~that~~ the concept of mythscape ~~to be is~~ of central importance for the understanding of politics in any society, contemporary Kazakhstan being no exception. In keeping with this, we ~~WHowever, we will~~ ~~at the same time in the following~~ endeavour to show that at this stage of political development in Kazakhstan the myths propounded by the powers that be ~~at this stage of political development in Kazakhstan~~ stand relatively unopposed by counterclaims from below. However, as shown by political developments in the former Soviet Union, like the colour revolutions in 2003-2005 and the more recent events surrounding the Euro-Maidan in Ukraine starting in 2013, facades may crack quickly. If for some reason previously influential political myths lose their grip on people's minds, rivalling myths may gain ground fast. No doubt the— political leaders of Kazakhstan are very aware of this. Even if our field data dates a few years back, —the analysis below should therefore be read against this background.

Islam in Kazakhstan

Considering the rapidity with which the ideological, Marxist-Leninist foundation evaporated with the demise of the Soviet state, and also taking into account that there were no previous traditions of statehood to build upon when constructing the new states of Central Asia, it was not an easy task challenge that the new leaders had to face when independent statehood ~~was taken up, came into being, was realized?~~ practically fell into their laps in the early 1990s. ~~However,~~ forging a new ideational basis was necessary to garner enough legitimacy to make the state function, and, probably not least important in the ~~leaders'~~ minds, to secure enough support for their own positions at the helm of the state.

One of the conceivable routes for the Central Asian leaders to take in trying to secure fundamental legitimacy would ~~have been~~ to use Islam as a centrepiece (Roy 2000:143-149). As Islamic practices were actively discouraged during the Soviet era, building new national identities on religion would have constituted a decisive and symbolic break with the past. This was also a road initially taken by the ~~five~~ Central Asian leaders at the time. ~~As, as after the gaining of independence as each of them soon embarked on a highly publicized pilgrimages to Mecccka [hajj], and all five quickly moved to create their own national organizations for Islamic clergy [muftiyates] after the gaining of independence~~ (Hann & Pelkmans 2009: 1525).

~~In view of the Since the Soviet authorities' animosity to religion, thus generally did not generally encourage religion, it could have been is widely assumed held that the number of people who actively identified themselves as religious also decreased during the Soviet period. According to surveys conducted made in the 1970s, and with even bearing in mind all due reservations about the notorious unreliability of Soviet-era time statistics, this seems to hold true for the ethnic Russian population throughout the Soviet Union. Only 20% identified themselves as Christians, according to the survey. Muslims in Central Asia seemed, however, to deviate from this pattern. In [display? a starkly contrasting [pattern religious identity? in 1970, 80% of the native Kazakh and Kyrgyz populations actually identified themselves as Muslim (Hann & Pelkmans 2009: 1524). Incidentally, We shall return to the reasons for this difference below, but at this point suffice it to say that the percentage repotions corresponds well to the post-independence the numbers that we see today. In a study on Muslim identity conducted by R'di and Wainer in four of the Central Asian republics, almost 100% of the respondents professed to be Muslims (2009: 306). Other studies carried out on the religious identities of Kazakhs show similar results (Aydingün 2007: 79). On the other hand, R'oi and Wainer's data also indicated that the people of Kazakhstan visited the mosque less, wanted a state religion less, and to a lesser extent identified with people in other Muslim countries than did citizens in other Central Asian republics (2009). So, one might ask, how sustainable a basis basis foundation does Islamic religion actually after all offer for the construction of post-Soviet contemporary national identity in Kazakhstan?~~

In making sense of their results, it is important to note, however, that R'oi and Wainer's (2009) article concerned ~~is on~~ religious practices rather than ~~on~~ the cultural symbolism of Islam. Islamic culture and practices, which were upheld throughout the Soviet era, ~~could can?~~ actually be thought of as a form of resistance to the Soviet authorities. As such, Islam could ~~still~~ have a political ~~rather than a purely religious~~ role to play in ~~constructing forming forging? national identities post-independence rather than a purely religious one~~. Aydingün, ~~for example,~~ argues that Islam in Kazakhstan was conceived as "traditional", and as such was not a part of ~~the~~ Soviet discourse, while it has an "official" status today as part of a Kazakh nationalist project (Aydingün 2007: 69f.). ~~To what~~ The extent ~~to which~~ Islam was in conflict with the Soviet project is, however, contested. Martha Brill Olcott, for example, argues that the authorities were not wholly opposed to the practice of Islam, and that there ~~is was~~ little evidence to suggest that Islam was regarded as a political and social problem to the same extent as ~~was~~ Christianity during the Soviet years (Brill Olcott 1982: 488). This ~~—would also —then~~ consequently account for the difference in professed believers between Christians and Muslims mentioned above.

Regardless of the state of affairs in the past, Aydingün's (2007) argument is that it is difficult to ~~distinguish draw the line~~ between what is traditionally Kazakh and what is Muslim in contemporary Kazakhstan. The idea that Islam ~~can~~ be ~~thought of perceived?~~ as an ~~endemic indivisible~~ part of Kazakh identity is not new. One could, as Bruce Privratsky (2001: 65) does, argue that the ~~variety specific brand type? of~~ Islam practiced ~~esent~~ in Kazakhstan ~~in a sense is represents?~~ Kazakh culture, values and identity ~~in general~~. It is clearly distinct from Islam as ~~commonly generally~~ understood, and is as ~~much cultural as~~ spiritual, ~~as it is cultural~~. Privratsky goes on to argue:

Except for a subculture of discriminating modernists, all Kazaks think of themselves as Muslim by birth, and "Muslimness" is believed to be one of the things that makes a Kazak a Kazak. It is important to the understanding of religion as Kazak that Muslim values are believed to be innate: "Muslimness", via ancestors and saints, has "seeped into our blood". (Privratsky 2001: 239)

The distinction between the cultural and religious practices of Islam is thus not easy to make, since the two universes of signification are deeply intertwined. ~~Myet,~~ myths about the new Kazakh nation, tradition and culture are sometimes connected to Islamic rituals, monuments and practices, but rarely to religious beliefs as such. An example of this is the restoration of religious sites and monuments throughout Kazakhstan. Outside the city of Taraz, there is a mausoleum built in the ~~11th eleventh~~ or ~~twelfth-12th~~ century in honour of Aisha Bibi, a young noble ~~woman woman~~. Although the site is a Muslim place of worship, the plaque outside ~~it the site speaks mentions~~ only ~~of~~ Kazakh spiritual heritage and history, ~~making no mention of and says nothing about~~ Islam. The shrine to Aisha Bibi is an example of the symbolic function of Islam in Kazakhstan, where ~~spirituality,~~ Kazakh culture, ~~and~~ history and religion are difficult to ~~pry apart separate/ differentiate?~~ from each other.

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The more precise role of Islam and Islamic culture in newly ~~constructed or~~ re-constructed Kazakh political myths is therefore also hard to fathom. On the one hand, Ro'i and Wainer's (2009) survey thus indicates shows that Islam is less important in Kazakhstan than in other Central Asian states.⁵ On the other hand, many people argue testify that there is an innate and general ~~isense of~~ spirituality ~~into~~ the Kazakh myths, culture and literature (Serikzhan Mambetalin 2010; Mukhtar Shanakov 2010; Alikhan Baimenov 2011). In some cases it is obvious how these are connected to Islam.

I—in both Almaty and Astana, new, grand mosques have been built in recent years, signifying a revival of Islam or at least of Islamic buildings. These new religious buildings, which have all been erectedconstructed in a modern style, emphasize more form more than content of Islamic mythmaking in Kazakhstan. This suggests something different from Soviet practices. The new buildings hold symbolic significance, as they relate to the form of post-Soviet architecture seen elsewhere in Astana, but also in other major Kazakhstani cities. The new mosque in Almaty, which was in part financed by the state, is one of the largest in Central Asia, with room for 10,000 worshippers (Rorlich 2003). The funding were also for these new buildings ~~whas not provided raised emanated from within the country, but is rather an attempt to bring Kazakhstan closer to the family of Muslim states.~~ Saudi Arabia, Egypt and Turkey who have all contributed significantly to the constructionss a new form of Islamic architecture (Vertkin 2007: 439). In post-Soviet Kazakhstan, many Kazakhs go abroad to these same countries for their religious education (Rorlich 2003: 164). This surely suggests something new and different from Soviet practices, and the new buildings hold symbolic significance, as they relate to the form of post Soviet architecture seen elsewhere in Astana, but also in other major Kazakhstani cities. The new mosque in Almaty, which was in part financed by the state, is one of the largest in Central Asia, with and there is room for 10,000 worshippers (ibid.: 2003). There is a potential contradiction between relating to Islam as a nation-building project, on the one hand, and seeing it as a joint project with other Islamic states, on the other.

This new interpretation of Islam from the starting point? in the form of Mosques and modern architecture is very different from interpreting from? the spiritual Islam conveyed relayed in Kazakh myths and storytelling. The mosque-building boom thus denotes a break with former practices, and is significant on many levels. The former previous a dearth bsence of absence of a written Quran, and previously of mosques? in the land- and cityscapes scape of Kazakhstan, Kazakhstan has been described as particular to local religious practices. It also served to, and what make Kazakh Islam resilient to the Soviet state's attempts to quell it (Privratsky 2001: 240f). As it has been

⁵ Ro'i and Wainer conducted a survey study in Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Tajikistan and Uzbekistan. The respondents persons selected for the survey were classified according to ~~—[were part of belonged to? the titular ethnic belonging populations.~~ The results showed that 7.2% of Kazakhs pray five times a day, while 32 % of the Uzbeks, 41.1 % of the Uzbeks, and 8.3 % of the Kyrgyz do the same (2009: 307).

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less spatially bounded as a result. Instead, traditional forms of Islam in Kazakhstan have instead tended to rely on deeply connected to the narratives and myths related to Kazakh national identity and history. There is a contradiction between these two ways of relating to Islam as a nation-building project, *Sic?*: on the one hand, and as a joint project with as an outstretched hand to other Islamic states, and, on the other. This, as myths of Kazakhisation, which will be discussed later in this chapter. —

Myths of a multi-ethnic Kazakhstan

The main exhibition at the Central State Museum in Almaty has not been changed significantly since the 1990s. On the top floor, there is a display *representing* the various ethnic groups in Kazakhstan. A number of traditional and religious items, and a mannequin wearing folk costume, *symbolize represent* each group. There are displays for *all* large groups, such as the Russians, as well as *for* smaller *ones, groups* such as the Kyrgyz and *the* Polish *minorities*. *The space allocated for each group is almost the same, regardless of their proportion of the population. However, i* *The space allocated for each group is almost the same, regardless of their proportion of the population.* size of the group. *Every group is represented in an assembly, the “Assembly of People of Kazakhstan”, which was created by President Nazarbayev to facilitate contact and respect between the ethnic groups in the newly independent state (Jones 2010).* — It is noteworthy that *in* the museum, there is no reference to the often dark histories, which brought the various groups to Kazakhstan in the first place. Hundreds of thousands of *[Koreans Sic?*, Germans, Tatars, Chechens and others were deported to Kazakhstan from other parts of the USSR during the Stalin era.

All ethnic groups in contemporary Kazakhstan is represented in an assembly, the “Assembly of People of Kazakhstan”, which was created by President Nazarbayev to facilitate inter-ethnic contact and respect in the newly independent state (Jones 2010). A political analyst in Almaty explained the official ethnic policy in the following manner:

[...] we have the Assembly of People with representatives from different groups. For President Nazarbayev this is the main brand. Interethnic cooperation that is what they officially support. Inside of parliament, you can find people from different nationalities, inside the government. Officially, they support it (Dosym Satpayev 2010).

— The analyst, Mr. Satpayev, discusses ethnic relations as highly politicized — a practical process of *— In terms of nation- branding? —* (Kaneva 2011); *inter-ethnic concord is a main theme communicated by the present political leadership. The statement fits well with the spirit of political myth, as it indicates that the branding? is energetically supported by the powers that be. It does not, however, tell impart/provide? The catchword does not, however, tell* a comprehensive story *about* of ethnicity in Kazakhstan, nor is its connection to history very clear. Ethnic differences are made visible and are sometimes *actually* exaggerated, *like in the museum*; they are presented as static and unchanging, and are thus highly essentialized, yet peaceful

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relations are also encouraged. These official displays ~~demonstrating~~ ~~for~~ ~~conveying?~~ the importance of ethnic concord can be perceived as ~~largely~~ symbolic. Peace and cooperation between ethnic groups is ~~thus~~ framed as essential to the future prosperity and development of Kazakhstan.

All ethnic groups in contemporary Kazakhstan are represented in a parliamentary assembly, the Assembly of People of Kazakhstan, which was created by President Nazarbayev to facilitate inter-ethnic contact and respect in the newly independent state (Jones 2010). This establishment was also quite consistent with the major themes nurtured in the president's political discourse. Nazarbayev President Nazarbayev himself has as one of his most prominent themes consistently stressed often stressed the importance of inter-ethnic stability peace. In his speech at the third Congress of Leaders of World and Traditional Religions⁶—in 2010, he said:

The Kazakhstan experience of interethnic and interconfessional concord has been recognized as one of the most successful on the post-soviet space (sic) Kazakhstan's experience of interethnic and interconfessional concord has been recognized as one of the most successful in the post-Soviet space? (Nazarbayev 2010).

The President's Nazarbayev's statement thus not only relates to interethnic peace and stability, but also to religion. Pluralism is officially favoured, and religion, regardless of which, is considered to be a positive force in society. InOne could say that ~~Consequently, Consistent conformity with this, the~~ political elites ~~stresses~~ ~~emphasizes~~ spirituality rather than Islam as one of the pillars of the state. Nurlan Uteshev, chairman of Zhas Otan, the ~~youth movement of the president's p-party's?~~ ~~youth movement,~~ puts it like this:

There is spirituality, friendship and unity in everything. Probably, this is... if we talk about ideology... to see what Kazakhstan has become in the past 20 years, all these things carry the meaning of the new ideology (Nurlan Uteshev 2011).

The holding of the third Congress of Leaders of World and Traditional Religions in 2010 was another indication of the active use of political myths supporting the establishment of a multi-ethnic and multi-religious Kazakhstan. ~~There was even a venue especially built for the event. It is a giant glass triangular structure of glass, reminiscent of the Louvre pyramid and designed by Norman Foster, the British architect. Tellingly, the building itself is called the Palace of Peace and Reconciliation. The i~~deas about stability were almost omnipresent ~~in~~throughout Nazarbayev's inaugural speech at the Congress:

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⁶ ~~Kazakhstan has hosted three congresses for lLeaders of wWorld and tTraditional rReligions. The — [first? congress was initiated by the government of Kazakhstan, not on theby initiative of the religious leaders themselves. It is a bi-annual event, which is regularly held in Astana.~~

When there is no friendship, there prevails hostility. That is why it is necessary to instil eternal qualities such as humanism, charity, spirituality in people (Nazarbayev 2010).

In order to underline the importance of the event, a new conference venue was especially built for the occasion. It is a giant triangular structure of glass, reminiscent of the Louvre pyramid and designed by Norman Foster, the British architect. Tellingly, the building is called the Palace of Peace and Reconciliation. As made clear by the president's speech tThe idea here was that the Congress, and Kazakhstan's liberal attitude to freedom of religion, would ill facilitate the superior value of stability, which is thus presented as one of the most positive qualities of Kazakhstan.

Even if there is a multitude of ethnic groups in Kazakhstan, there are different conceivable alternatives for the elite with regard to how to construct and communicate political myths which appealing to the different se group ethnic groups in Kazakhstan. The museum in Almaty, as well as the constant reiteration of the concept of stability, actually indicates that there are differences between the groups, but that inter-ethnic cooperation and stability are possible. As mentioned, tThe reasons for and historical aspects of the ethnic diversity are ignored or glossed over in the museum, as are the darker sides of Kazakhstan's Soviet past. In fact, many interviewees while interviewing politicians and others, Orange found that many were reluctant to speak about the legacy of the Stalin era; above all about the millions who died in the widespread famines during the collectivization campaign in the early 1930s (Shayakhmetov 2006) and about the the whole peoples who were being deported to Kazakhstan from other parts of the USSR under conditions engendering of unimaginable suffering. There are visible signs of these sombre appalling times on the steppe outside of Astana – the ruins of old Gulag prison camps are still visible to be seen in the landscape.

Interestingly, there is in the Kazakhstani mythscape some open criticism in relation to of the extent degree of how successful the government has been success of the government in creating unity, stability and “inter-ethnic peace”. A journalist at with Kaz-Tag, the Kazakhstani new telegraph agency, thought the following about the political – policy ambition of to creating one Kazakhstani people out of a number of different ethnic and clan groups:

Well, the making of one Soviet people was never accomplished. The communists got halfway, and the president and [the presidential party] Nur Otan have been trying, but they haven't done it. The meaning of clan has changed a bit: now they are just the people around someone powerful. It's like a pyramid, the president is on top, and then there are people all the way down. Almost everyone in Kazakhstan is connected this way, but it hasn't got much to do with relatives anymore (Rassul Rysambetov 2010).

Unlike the official channels, the journalist, Mr. Rysambetov, speaks of Kazakhstan's Soviet past. Here, the failure of the Soviet Union to establish a single, strong identity is seen in relation to compared to the the ambition by implication equally formidably challenged - threatening looming manifest failure of the Kazakhstani state to make clan and ethnic identities less important in politics. Indeed, there are several important similarities between the early Kazakhstani politics of declaring and attaining ethnic concord and the official Soviet-era view on ethnic identity and nationalism. As in Kazakhstan, ethnic identities were essentialized in the Soviet Union. Whether the Kazakhstani attempts at constructing stability and concord are prone to risk developing in a similar manner as did did inter-ethnic relations in the Soviet Union is, of course, still an open question, but glossing over inter-ethnic differences, and indeed conflicts, would seem to be of little avail. By way of comparison, it is also noteworthy that during the 1990s in Russia, the Yeltsin presidential administration made a point of repeatedly stressing the concept of *rossiyane* (Ruslanders) when referring to all citizens of the Russian Federation, instead of using the term *russkie*, which connotes ethnic Russians (Petersson 2001). The use of the former concept has since then been largely discarded, which might implies that raises the question of the viability of the corresponding strategy in the case of Kazakhstan may also be questionable.

“Kazakhization”

During the early years of independence, the ideal of concord between ethnic groups thus seemed essentially uncontested within the political elite. In more recent years Recently, however, a parallel political myth or set of values has however come to the fore. This idea can be labelled Kazakhization – the promotion of the Kazakh language, culture, history, religion and myths at the expense of those of other ethnic groups (Diener 2002:637). The same actors who promote the political myths ideals of inter-ethnic peace may actually at the same time also use Kazakh political myths in a more narrow sense. President Nazarbayev's own speeches are are a good examples of this. In his inauguration speech after being re-elected president in April 2011, he said:

In a short period of time, people of the Alash have turned into a strong, rich, respected nation with great opportunities. Our country that connects the East and the West is considered a standard of the harmony of civilizations. Our capital that found itself on the banks of the Yessil River is a symbol of solid stability in Eurasia. The kind spirit of Astana is offering a noble key to peace and harmony.
In a short period of time, people of the Alash have turned into a strong, rich, respected nation with great opportunities. Our country that connects the East and the West is considered a standard of the harmony of

civilizations. Our capital that found itself on the banks of the Yessil River is a symbol of solid stability in Eurasia. The kind spirit of Astana is offering a noble key to peace and harmony to the whole world (sic) to the whole world (Nazarbayev 2011).

In this speech here, Nazarbayev promotes and propagates an overarching the primary [value/aim/goal/ambition?] which, as was alluded to above, has been almost omnipresent in recent years' political discourse, namely, stability. Unlike in the speech quoted earlier, it is not, however, not the peaceful relationship between ethnic groups, which creates stability, but instead it is the "kind spirit of Astana". Especially noteworthy is the most noteworthy part is Nazarbayev's reference to Alash, a historical concept which is ripe with references to ethnically based and secularly oriented Kazakh nationalism (cf. Galick 2014), and Alash Orda (Horde of Alash), which is the traditional Kazakh battle cry. Mentioning the Alash seems to be a way of excluding the other ethnic groups from the perceived achievements of the young state. The contradiction between inclusion and exclusion of the various ethnic groups in Kazakhstan is also also visible elsewhere in the same speech:

The election that was held was the best in terms of the organization and democracy in the history of not only the modern Kazakhstan but also, experts believe, of the whole Central Asia. Voting for the course of stability and prosperity, every citizen of Kazakhstan was voting for his future, the future of his family, his country, and the Motherland! (Nazarbayev 2011)

The point that we wish to make here is that President Nazarbayev mentioned both "his country and the Motherland" at the same time. Whereas the first reference is to statehood, the latter term could be interpreted to imply the places of origin of the ethnic groups present in Kazakhstan – which is Korea for the Korean minority, and Germany for the Germans, and so on etc – and indeed also, by extension, Kazakhstan for the Kazakhs. The reference it could also be a word used to recall member the pre-independence era, when the Soviet Union was often referred to as the Motherland. Regardless of which, and unlike in the previous quote one first meaning about the Alash, Nazarbayev is here in this paragraph addressing not only the Kazakh ethnic group, but all citizens of Kazakhstan. The implications for the idea of ethnic concord and harmony are, however, somewhat unclear.

This leads to the question of how the political myths of the Kazakh people are used by those who are in power. One of the most visible examples, which suggests suggest that a shift from political myths of ethnic concord to Kazakhization has indeed taken place, is the language policy (cf. see Bhavna 2007). The Kazakh language has been is being promoted at the expense of Russian in the civil service, as well as in politics. During the snap presidential elections in 2011, condemned as neither free nor fair by OSCE/ODIHR, language tests were carried out made in order to make sure that all of the candidates were fluent in Kazakh (OSCE/ODIHR 2011). One of the more

prominent opposition figures, Vladimir Koslov, ~~Chairman~~ of the DVK/Alga party⁷, was not allowed to run ~~for office~~ on the grounds that his Kazakh skills were ~~not~~ insufficient. This move means that very few people who ~~we~~ are not ethnic Kazakhs ~~could~~ stand for election, ~~is something~~ which above all discriminates against the ~~substantial~~ ~~izeable~~ ~~minority~~ ~~ajority?~~ of ethnic Russians ~~in the country~~.

Overall, the ~~political~~ ~~myths~~ ~~ology~~ about the Kazakh people and nation ~~haves~~ during the past years increased in importance in societal discourse and other fields of signification. This is ~~highly~~ ~~most~~ visible in the architecture and planning of the new capital city of Astana. In 1997, the decision was taken to move the capital city from Almaty, in the south of the country closer to the border with Kyrgyzstan, to the provincial capital in the northern region of Akmola (Koch 2010: 769). There has been much speculation as to why the move took place. At the time of the inauguration of the new capital, Astana was ~~by Kazakhstani standards~~ no more than a medium-sized ~~town~~ ~~city~~ ~~by Kazakhstani standards~~. In terms of climate and logistics, Astana is far from ideal. ~~The city~~ It is located on the steppe, with few ~~other~~ towns and cities in the surrounding area. During the long winters, temperatures routinely drop below -40C. The official reason for the move was that the new capital ~~of Astana~~ would provide a new beginning for the newly independent state (Yerlan Karin, 2011). Others argue, however, that the Akmola region was previously dominated by ethnic Russians, and that the capital was moved to gain a stronger hold of the border with Russia and the population in the ~~N~~north (Huttenbach 1998: 583f).

Regardless of the reasons for moving the capital, it is interesting to note how the new ~~capitl~~ city was established, which ~~political~~ myths were projected by the new monuments and buildings, and how the state envisions the new Kazakhstan. ~~to be. The city~~ Astana is ~~positively strewn~~ ~~absolutely~~ ~~chockablock~~ ~~chock-a-block~~ with monuments, spectacular modern architecture and broad avenues. One of the most striking buildings is the Baiterek ~~It~~ tower, opened in 2002. It is a 105-~~metre~~ high ~~tower~~, a metal structure, ~~topped~~ ~~erected~~ by a large ball of glass. The symbolic meaning of the Baiterek relates to a Kazakh ~~creation~~ myth. ~~From the top, inside the glass egg, visitors can enjoy a spectacular view of the new city. of the Creation.~~ The tower itself represents the tree of life, where the sacred bird Samruk lays an egg (the ~~glass~~ ball). ~~of glass~~. At the roots of the tree, the dragon Aydahar hides in waiting for an opportunity to eat the egg. Inside the Baiterek, there are additional symbols of the new state. ~~From the top, inside the glass egg, visitors can enjoy a spectacular view of the new city.~~ In the centre of the ~~room~~ ~~spspace?~~ there is

⁷ DVK/Alga has attempted, and failed, to register as a political party for many years (Koslov 2010). Vladimir Koslov has been ~~convicted~~ ~~sentenced~~ to a seven and a half years ~~in~~ prison, ~~having been found guilty of~~ ~~sentence on the charges~~ of "inciting social discord," "calling for the forcible overthrow of the constitutional order," and "creating and leading an organized group with the aim of committing one or more crimes," ~~for~~ ~~The charges stemmed from~~ his support of striking workers in Western Kazakhstan during violent clashes with police in December 2011.

a golden handprint of President Nazarbayev. The national anthem is played as VIP visitors place their hand in his.

An even more recent monument in Astana is the Khan Shatyr, an entertainment centre, which opened in July 2010 as part of the “Astana Day”, which happens to coincide with the President’s birthday celebration. It is a huge structure, with a mall containing with a wide variety of international high-street shops. At the top of the structure, there is an artificial beach, with sand, palm trees and a wave machine, where visitors can enjoy tropical temperatures. A monorail takes visitors around the top of the building, offering views of the food court and the shops below. The Khan Shatyr is built to resemble a tent;⁸ a symbol of nomadic peoples, but not necessarily of all ethnic groups in Kazakhstan. Rather, the reference to the nomadic past serves to exclude some ethnic groups, again most prominently the Russians.

In Astana, Almaty, as well as in other cities across Kazakhstan, and in conformity with developments in most places in the post-Soviet realm, street names have been changed from the former Soviet names into Kazakh ones, often provided by authors or other prominent persons from the field of culture. In many cases, authors (and other) rather recent historical figures have provided given the streets their new names. In Almaty, “Lenin” has given way to “Dostyk”, which means “Friendship”. That street crosses “Abai”, named after the poet and philosopher Abai Qunanbailuli. There is a statue nearby depicting Abai holding a dombra, a traditional Kazakh musical instrument. Not far from there, at Independence Square, stands a giant statue replicating of the Golden Man, a warrior prince⁹ found in the Turgan Valley and dating from the third or fourth century BC. The symbol of the Golden Man carries great significance, as it reiterates the notion that Kazakhstan has a long and noble history. Significantly, the Man itself is also on prominent display in the Kazakh National Museum.

Other common street names in contemporary Kazakhstan include references to the “Batyr”, or warriors. There are several such warriors who have after the breakup of the Soviet Union had their names brought back into active recall (rediscovered/resurrected after the breakup of the Soviet Union). Kabanbai Batyr is probably the most famous of these. Legend has it that he Kabanbai Batyr was a warrior who defended the Kazakhs from intruders in the eighteenth 18th-century (Aigul Soloyeva 2011). Since independence, another Batyr has become symbolically important in the imagery – Karasai Batyr. According to the myth, he belonged to the same clan as president Nazarbayev. In the village of Ush Kunyr, where Nazarbayev was born, there is a museum in his old school to the Batyr’s honour. There Inside is a huge mural – honouring/depicting the Batyr, with a snow leopard visible through the clouds. The principal of the school, who is from the same sub-clan as the President, explains:

⁸ The Khan Shatyr does not, however, not resemble a yurt, the traditional Kazakh type of tent.

⁹ Or princess, the gender of the Golden man is actually being unknown.

This is a symbol of Karasai Batyr, it's a symbol of our tribe, it's a symbol of our president, and it's a symbol of our nation. It's a rare animal, with its origin in the Tien Shan. The Kazakhs never went to war, but thanks to the warriors, they defended this land from the Jungars ~~{[Mongol Tribes from East Turkestan]}~~ (Medeurova Gulzhan Abdilachayeva 2011).

Apart from the way that a Kazakh political myth is used to promote nationalist sentiments, there are underlying values, which after all seem to connect the Kazakh myths to the multi-ethnic ones myth. After all Again, stability and peace are highly valued, and the school principal, Ms. Abdilachayeva, asserts that the Kazakhs have never gone to war, despite the contradiction that both Kabanbai and Karasai Batyr are said to have taken part in battles to defend in defence of their land.

The President: Personality Cult

The Central Asian republics are known for having leaders acting more like strongmen than as presidents elected by proper popular mandate (Brill Olcott 1997). In Uzbekistan, the longstanding president, Islam Karimov, has built a system where personal loyalty clearly is indispensable for making political careers trumps loyalty to the state (Lewis 2008: 162). In Kyrgyzstan, the former presidents Askar Akayev and Kurmanbek Bakiyev could, regardless of the different durations of their incumbencies, create regimes where family and friends controlled a large part of the economy. Most notable, however, is the rule of Saparmurad Niyazov ~~{Turkmenbashy}~~ in Turkmenistan, from the gaining of independence in 1992...? until his death in 2006. The personality cult surrounding this former president came close to being a religion, with all the itsrequisite components, parts, including a holy book, the Ruhnama, purportedly written by the ~~revered~~ revered president himself (Slavomir 2005: 308f.). Kazakhstan's president, ~~Nursultan~~ Nazarbayev, is usually not thought to go to the same extremes of personality cult as Turkmenbashy, but there are proliferating signs of that there are nation-building myths essentially connected to the president in his person.

Nazarbayev has been the leader of Kazakhstan since independence. During those tumultuous years when the Soviet Union was dissolved, he was markedly wary of steering Kazakhstan towards independence. Instead, he was for long championed ing the solution of a reconstructed, revitalized Union, along the lines proposed by the last Soviet Pp president, Mikhail Gorbachev. Trying to retain as much as possible of the old intra-Soviet {vectors? of cooperation, and also perhaps of economic support from Moscow, he was a strong proponent of tenaciousstrong and compensatory ties of bilateral and multilateral cooperation within the Commonwealth of Independent States. He has is remained a staunch supporter of institutionalised free trade agreements and a customs union with the Russian Federation. WAlso, within the framework of his interpretation of the ideology of Eurasianism (Laruelle 2008), he has tried to promote as much as possible of cooperation as possible across state borders in the former Soviet Union.

However, being a pragmatist, Nazarbayev, ~~has~~, as ~~was~~~~has been~~ suggested above, ~~has~~ also adhered to both the ideals of a multi-ethnic Kazakhstan, ~~and~~~~as well as~~ sentiments of Kazakhization as modes of securing legitimacy for his regime. Thus, it is no exaggeration to say that as a political leader, he has shown a penchant for flexibility and an ability to adapt to changing political circumstances.

~~A~~Although there have certainly been challenges to his power during his ~~various~~ terms in office, especially during the early years, very few ~~have~~ dared to ~~openly utter open~~ criticism of him ~~openly~~. In April 2015 he was re-elected for the fifth time to serve another five-year term in office, gaining close to a striking (and rather suspect) 98% of the official vote (The World Factbook 2015).

~~As elaborated on above,~~ There are manifold and increasing signs that President Nazarbayev is being used as a mythological figure in ~~the~~ Kazakhstani ~~imaginary~~. ~~There is a 2,~~ as evidenced by the. ~~There is, for example, a~~ museum to his honour in Astana, ~~a~~ A new university ~~in the capital~~ has been named after him, ~~in the capital,~~ and, as mentioned earlier, his hand ~~print~~~~print~~ features ~~resides~~ at the top of the Baiterek ~~11~~ tower. These are only a few examples of the ~~ever~~-expanding array of mythological attributes surrounding the president.

~~The individual of~~ President Nazarbayev and the state are often spoken of as being ~~indivisible, inseparable from each other,~~ and it is hard to discern where the domains of the one ends and ~~where~~ the jurisdiction of the other starts. The CEO of the state-owned mining company Kazakhmys made a panegyric speech to Nazarbayev at the Nur Otan party congress in 2011:

During the first years after independence there were hardships. Nazarbayev was the one to protect us, he was our stability. Now there has been progress in government, improvement in companies and we are reaching democratization. ~~{...}~~ Nazarbayev has the deepest love and respect of all those in Kazakhstan. ~~{...}~~ All countries need a national idea. Our current national idea is you, ~~p~~President Nazarbayev (Vladimir Kim 2011).

Consequently, Nazarbayev's supporters frequently attribute Kazakhstan's successes to the president personally. He is the one who, through his efforts, has brought about stability, and ~~he~~ is ~~also~~ the guarantor of its ~~successful~~ maintenance:

We will, thanks to him [President Nazarbayev], continue on our path of development and stability. He has shown us the way to inter-ethnic peace (anonymous deputy in the Lower House of Parliament 2011).

Indicatively, both Nurlan Uteshev, leader of the youth wing of the Nur Otan Party, and Yerlan Karin, ~~p~~party secretary of Nur Otan, argue that the meaning of the party is not independent of the president. They both ~~admit~~ ~~concede~~ ~~confirm/maintain?~~ that the party itself has no identity other than being ~~the~~

supportive-party of the president (Nurlan Uteshev 2011; Yerlan Karin 2011). This—at the very least, seems likely to generate trouble once a succession of power becomes acute takes place. As Nazarbayev has now reached the mature age of passed the age of 750 (he was born in 1940), such a time does not seem to be very distant.

In May 2010, the parliament adopted the Leader of the Nation Law, awarding the president a new title and lifetime immunity from political or criminal responsibility for himself and his family, as well as imposing penalties for any defamation of his person the president's image. Aside from these politically oppressive measures, the title "Leader of the Nation" itself implies a mythical role for Nazarbayev. One of the MPs at the 2011 Nur Otan's congress in 2011 used the new epithet:

The tasks set before us by Nazarbayev will be successfully implemented. He is truly a nationwide president. We must all help to take care of our Leader of Nation because only he can bring us forward. There can be no other sun in the sky (Vladimir Nehoroshev 2011).

Thus, the way that President Nazarbayev is spoken about – as the Leader of the Nation, the sun in the sky, as the national idea itself – implies almost god-like and other-worldly qualities. His handprint in the Baiterek tower and the alleged connection to Karasai Baityr are among the examples that indicate the emergence of a personality cult. Although, as said, these ambitions are not as clearly articulated as they once were in Turkmenistan, there are certainly elements of political myth surrounding his person. Unlike in Turkmenistan, these myths do not revolve around the physical image of the president. There are no statues of Nazarbayev gracing the streets of the major cities, at least not as yet. Instead, the budding personality cult is mostly expressed through other and slightly more subtle mechanisms and forms.

Conclusion

At first glance, there seems to be little ongoing discursive struggle over political myths, history and the definition of the state in contemporary Kazakhstan. Stability is still the key word, a societal mantra of sorts and a superior value, and on the surface this it indeed seems to be an accurate description of the situation reality. However, when subjected to closer scrutiny, this impression may not be fully borne out by social reality. The Kazakhstani mythscape is thoroughly dominated by the president and the noticeable, albeit comparatively restrained, personality cult that surrounds him. Even if the legitimacy that Nazarbayev can claim, in view of the authoritarian traits of the Kazakhstani political system, is far from the ideal type propounded in found in Western democracies, he doubtless inspires confidence and enjoys widespread popular confidence and acceptance and support, not least since he has come to be seen as a guarantor of domestic stability and peace. Thanks to the steady inflow of revenue from oil and gas in from the Caspian basin, he has been able to preside

over a period of certain manifest prosperity, at least in comparison with the more poorly endowed neighbouring countries of Central Asia.

Seen through the analytical lens of political myth, Nazarbayev has therefore been totally dominant in occupying the mythscape. He has personified the Kazakhization phase of national legitimization, just as he used to be the primary prime representative and promoter of the multi-ethnic concord constantly reiterated during the first decade of Kazakhstani independence. Toeing Adhering to Toeing the same line as his colleagues among the Central Asian leaders (he and President Karimov of Uzbekistan are now the only ones left from the original cast), Nazarbayev was in the early years quick to capitalize on a national framing of Islam to boost his own, then rather precarious, legitimacy. Similarly, when Eurasianism was in vogue in Central Asia, and while it was still seen by many to be desirable to restore as many much of the links of intra-Soviet cooperation as possible, Nazarbayev was there, too, as the major prime spokesman and inspirer. Indeed, it would seem that he has always been there; he has always personally dominated the mythscape, and it is very hard to imagine contemporary Kazakhstan without him.

The president personifies the mythscape and the shifts that have taken place therein. All the way from ethnic concord to Kazakhization, the one stable and predictable figure remains the Ppresident. He does not need to draw legitimacy from political myth, since he is the political myth personified, and therefore he is both the source and the benefactor of the legitimacy engendered by political myth. As long as the personality cult is successful, the political myths constructed around his person attain the features of self-fulfilling prophecies. And while this is the case there can truly be no other sun in the sky.

This total dominance of the Ppresident in Kazakhstan's political life, and his massive impact on the contents of the mythscape, is of course a potential problem, which will seem to grow in magnitude by the year. Since Nazarbayev has now reached far into his 70seventies, it is inevitable that the question of his succession will rather soon have to be placed on the political agenda. It is not hard to imagine that a crisis of legitimacy/cy?tion might erupt once he Nazarbayev exits from the scene. When that time comesAt that stage, it will be far from certain that the presently prevailing political myths will prove sufficient to secure popular support-legitimacy for the rulers, and societal stability in the country. Kazakhstan treads atthe fine line between inclusive myths of religion and ethnicity, and exclusive myths of Kazakhization and Kazakh spirituality. There is no guarantee that Nazarbayev's successor will be as deft in maintaining the balance.

—Kazakhstan has important choices ahead. As we have indicated, myths of ethnic concord seem to be of diminishing importance in rhetoric and in political practice. Considering an option that still seems to be open, there is also a possibility that Kazakhstan willmay steer closer to cultural and symbolic Islam to define its path to national identity.

Forming a personality cult around an ageing leader is always a risky project. Just as nature abhors a vacuum, the president's successor will, when that time comes, have to construct his (or her, which is less likely given traditional gender hierarchies in Central Asia, her) own foundation of

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legitimacy. There is a ~~limited supply array~~ of political myths to choose from, ~~but and~~ what myth is eventually chosen as the main legitimizing ~~ating~~ device will have a decisive impact on political developments in post-Nazarbayev Kazakhstan.

List of interviewees:

~~Abdilachayeva, Medeurova Gulzhan, Principle, Ush Konyr School, Ush Konyr, 18/3/2011~~
~~Baimenov, Alikhan, Chairman of the Ak Zhol Party, Ak Zhol Party Office, Astana, 9/2/2011~~
~~Karin, Yerlan, Party Secretary, Nur Otan Party, Nur Otan Party Office, Astana, 28/3/2011~~
~~Kim, Vladimir, Chairman of KazakMys, Nur Otan Party Congress, Astana 11/2/2011~~
~~Koslov, Vladimir, DVK/ALGA Party Office, Almaty, 7/7/2010~~
~~Mambetalin, Serikzhan, Chairman of Rukhaniyat Green Party, Office of Rukhaniyat Party, Almaty, 9/6/2011~~
~~Nehoroshev, Vladimir, MP for Nur Otan, Nur Otan Party Congress, Astana, 11/2/2011~~
~~Rysambetov, Rassul, Coffedelia Café, Almaty, 13/6/2010~~
~~Satpayev, Dosym, Political Analyst, Café, Almaty, 21/7/2010~~
~~Shanakov, Mukhtar, Former MP for Nur Otan Party, Former Ambassador to Kyrgyzstan, Private Office, Almaty, 20/7/2010~~
~~Soloyeva, Aigul, MP for Nur Otan, Coffedelia cCafé, Almaty, 5/2/2011~~
~~Uteshev, Nurlan, Nur Otan Party Office, Astana, 17/2/2011~~

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List of Interviewees:

Abdilachayeva, Medeurova Gulzhan, Principal, Ush Konyr School, Ush Konyr, 18/3/2011

Baimenov, Alikhan, Chairman of the Ak Zhol Party, Ak Zhol Party Office, Astana, 9/2/2011

Karin, Yerlan, Party Secretary, Nur Otan Party, Nur Otan Party Office, Astana, 28/3/2011

Kim, Vladimir, Chairman of KazakMys, Nur Otan Party Congress, Astana 11/2/2011

Koslov, Vladimir, DVK/ALGA Party Office, Almaty, 7/7/2010

Mambetalin, Serikzhan, Chairman of Rukhaniyat Green Party, Office of Rukhaniyat Party, Almaty, 9/6/2011

Nehoroshev, Vladimir, MP for Nur Otan, Nur Otan Party Congress, Astana, 11/2/2011

Rysambetov, Rassul, Coffedelia Café, Almaty, 13/6/2010

Satpayev, Dosym, Political Analyst, Café, Almaty, 21/7/2010

Shanakov, Mukhtar, Former MP for Nur Otan Party, Former Ambassador to Kyrgyzstan, private office, Almaty, 20/7/2010

Soloyeva, Aigul, MP for Nur Otan, Coffeedelia Café, Almaty, 5/2/2011

Uteshev, Nurlan, Nur Otan Party Office, Astana, 17/2/2011

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