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Being Ethnic on the Eurasian Steppe: Civic Nation-Building Discourse in Kazakhstan and Russia

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Being Ethnic on the Eurasian Steppe: Civic Nation-Building Discourse in
Kazakhstan and Russia

by

Nathan Jones

A dissertation submitted to the Graduate Faculty in Anthropology in partial fulfillment of
the requirements for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy, The City University of New
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This manuscript has been read and accepted for the Graduate Faculty in Anthropology in satisfaction of the dissertation requirement for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy.

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THE CITY UNIVERSITY OF NEW YORK
Civic nation-building as a concept has emerged within the political discourses of various post-Soviet states, particularly in relation to the status of ethnic minorities in Russia and Kazakhstan. This dissertation investigates the institutional efforts to establish civic nations in these states among their non-titular populations. My primary ethnographic sites are the various institutions producing and serving the discourse of civic nation-building to understand how the transmission of concepts and behaviors relevant to the civic nation operate in the context of daily interactions. I demonstrate the institutional dependence upon what I identify as “ethnicness” within the discourse and procedures of civic nation-building. My inquiry into this phenomenon largely takes place among communities with significant populations of people publicly identifying as ethnic German. I analyze this community and its members’ sense of “Germanness” as a case to understand how individuals from other ethnicized communities react and coalesce with the discourse and activities of civic nation-building. I generally conclude that attempts at civic nation-building are met with tremendous ambivalence. Yet, its discourse often resonates with the targeted audiences given its partial emergence from familiar Soviet ideas and practices. In addition, civic nation-building processes occasionally offer the distribution of valuable resources to those whom they engage.
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Chapter 1
Introduction: Conceptualizing Germanness as a Site of Ethnographic Inquiry

Searching for Germanness from Kaliningrad to Kazakhstan

In the summer of 1994, I decided to lose myself in Europe for a year and eventually landed in the northern German city Rostock. A city located along the Baltic Sea, Rostock is steeped in European nautical history, from its membership in the medieval Hanseatic League to serving as the primary port for seafaring commerce in the former communist German Democratic Republic. Just years earlier, the communist state had dramatically melded into the West German Federal Republic of Germany, and its people were still struggling to acclimate to the environment of European parliamentary democracy and German capitalism. To bring the Soviet-style residential tenements up to West German standards, there was a commercial building boom occurring in East Germany at the time I arrived, and armed with a foreign student-work visa, I quickly found a construction job rebuilding apartment-bloc rooftops.

I worked in a crew of hardened members of the East German proletariat, all of whom had gobbled up work in construction since losing agriculture jobs with the several collective farms in Mecklenburg-Vorpommern, a region historically identified as “the bread basket of Germany.” My closest friend during that experience was a thirty-something former equine specialist (his primary duty apparently was to assure the farm’s horses were appropriately shod), named Dirk Ehlert. ¹ A bully of a man, crude and dishonest, and prone to thievery, Dirk took to me immediately because of my utter foreignness. As a student of German history and culture, I was

¹ Given that I conducted the bulk of my research in official, state institutions, a large set of my contacts in Russia and Kazakhstan interacted with me in their professional capacities. For those individuals, I have not changed their names, as they were fully aware that our conversations informed the contents of my dissertation. For my interlocutors unaffiliated with official state or cultural institutions (such as Dirk), I have used pseudonyms.
intensely interested in life under socialism and incessantly queried Dirk about working on the collective farm, his impressions of Communist Party General Secretary Erich Honeker, how he felt about the influence of the Soviet Union, and his feelings about becoming a citizen of the Federal Republic of Germany and joining the West.

One day, a particularly coarse coworker named Berd accused Dirk of being Russian (for East Germans at that time, a particularly harsh slight). Dirk replied defensively, “I’m not Russian, I’m from Königsberg.” “Same thing,” replied Berd. “Nein,” Dirk reacted bemused; “Königsberg was as German a place as anywhere.” The name Königsberg seemed remotely familiar to me, but was not identifiable on any map, so one night over cokes and pizza in Dirk’s home, I encouraged him to talk about the place. Dirk explained that Königsberg was once a culturally important German city, the political center of the Teutonic Knights’ medieval state, and later capital of German East Prussia. Königsberg’s storied Albertina University was even home to the philosopher Immanuel Kant. After the Soviet army took the city at the end of World War II, Soviet authorities forced the entire German population to evacuate the region. Dirk’s parents were among the refugees having to abandon their homes and eventually settle in rural Mecklenburg. The USSR annexed Königsberg and its surrounding territories constituting East Prussia in the post-war treaty of 1945 and formally renamed the city and region Kaliningrad (after the Bolshevik leader Mikhail Ivanovich Kalinin). Since the dissolution of the Soviet Union, Kaliningrad has become an exclave of the Russian Federation, physically separated from the mother country by the Baltic States and Poland.

My relationship with Dirk left me obsessed with the idea of German traces (or as I term it, “Germanness”) in geographic spaces in the former Soviet Union and Eastern Europe formally inhabited by Germans. Pursuing this passion while working on a master’s degree in Central and
East European Studies, I read every book, journal, and newspaper article I could find in English and German about Königsberg and its successor city, Kaliningrad, and prepared for an eventual visit. My first trip to Kaliningrad happened in the final weeks of 1999. I spent my birthday and the holidays that year trying not to slip and fall on the frozen alleyways of the post-Soviet city, as I searched for landmarks of its German past, including the site of Kant’s tomb at the Königsberg Cathedral, remains of the Teutonic Order’s castle now buried beneath an unfinished monster of a Soviet administration building, and the reconstructed Albertina University. I followed well-worn paths that “nostalgia tourists” from Germany had established over the last decade to rediscover their lost homeland, from which the Soviet army forced their parents to leave after the War.

This passion for the idea of Germanness in Kaliningrad led me to a research fellowship there in 2000, where I worked with a development institution intent on servicing the needs of the ethnic German population residing in the region. I found the notion of ethnic Germans living in Kaliningrad fascinatingly ironic, as their residence there was a product of the post-Soviet mass migration of Germans residing in Siberia and Central Asia to western Russia and Germany. Many of these Germans descended from peasants who had migrated from southern Germany to the plains along the Volga River in the 18th century, establishing viable agricultural communities at the request of Tsarina Catherine the Great. Two centuries later in 1941, the invading Nazi army provoked Stalin to relocate Germans residing in the Volga region and Ukraine to the Siberian and Kazakhstani steppes. Following the collapse of the Soviet Union in 1991, many Soviet citizens of German descent departed from these eastern regions, migrating to the Federal Republic of Germany or the more culturally familiar Kaliningrad.

From its Soviet beginnings, Kaliningrad became a major naval port for Stalin, providing the only warm water harbor the USSR possessed on the Baltic Sea. Soviet authorities
immediately settled Russian and Ukrainian peasants in the territory who had lost their homes to
the ravages of the Nazi invasion years earlier. Given the strategic military nature of Kaliningrad,
its borders were eventually closed to both Soviet and non-Soviet citizens. Following the collapse
of the Soviet Union, the Russian Federation maintained possession over Kaliningrad as an
exclave, but gradually opened its borders to outsiders, encouraging the arrival of thousands of
West German tourists expecting to rediscover their lost past. To their great dismay, the rubble of
the destroyed old city and the even less attractive drab, utilitarian apartment blocks and
administrative buildings devastated their nostalgic desires to reconnect with the imagined spaces
of their youth. In the early to mid-nineties, German investors initiated projects to reconstruct
Königsberg from its destroyed remains and barely standing monuments, along the lines of major
cities likewise decimated in World War II such as Dresden in Germany and Gdansk in Poland.
Some nationalists from Germany interested in reclaiming the territory yearned to reconstitute a
German East Prussia populated with ethnic Germans from the former Soviet Union. As the
former Soviet Germans (colloquially known as Russian-Germans, or in German
Russlanddeutsche) began pouring into Kaliningrad in the early ’90s and mixed with visitors from
Germany, those with such dreams began to question the cultural viability of their russified
kinsmen (Jones 2001).

While attending a conference during my fellowship period in Kaliningrad, I became
entangled in a debate between two German scholars – Sergei Henker, who was at the time the
director of the German Russian House in Kaliningrad, and Peter Wörster, a historian from the
Herder Institute in Marburg, Germany. Henker (himself a Soviet-born German) argued that
scarcely anyone maintaining a trace of German cultural identity still resided in the former Soviet
Union, and “Russian-German” should not be considered a legitimate cultural identity. Henker
contended that those who identify as Germans may certainly be of German descent, but they have no meaningful relationship with German identity and culture and are culturally just as Russian as any old “Ivan” or “Dmitri” living in Moscow. When I mentioned this position on Germanness in the former Soviet Union to Wörster, he stated that although Germans may have been russified in the Soviet period, Soviet statisticians always maintained data about the numbers of ethnic Germans and therefore Germanness has persisted as a meaningful category of identity and culture in the USSR. It is that understanding of Germanness (as a cultural category of identity that state administrators preserve and apply when necessary) that became a central interest of mine, and subsequently transformed from a fascination with Germanness imbued in geographic spaces to a concern about “ethnic nationness,” or what I refer to in this dissertation as “ethnicness,” inherent in the identities, behaviors, and actions of former Soviet people.

This new direction led me to the tiny village of Babushkina, located near Kaliningrad’s border with Lithuania. I traveled in early January to this remote part of the region, because my acquaintances at the German House claimed the village possessed a large, recently arrived, German population from Kazakhstan. Upon arrival in Babushkina, I indeed met several people of German descent, including the Rupp family, whose members gladly offered me a place in their home during my week residing in the village. Natalya, the family matriarch, took me from house to house in the village, introducing me to several Germans from Kazakhstan. The bulk of the families came from the Pavlodar region, located in the northeastern Kazakhstani steppe, and talked of entire villages there populated exclusively of Germans until the onset of perestroika, and the eventual mass exodus of Germans to the West.

As is typical of most German families from the former Soviet Union, the Rupp family is ethnically mixed. Natalya is Russian (officially identifying as Belorussian), and her husband,
Vladimir, is German. In spite of the mixture, all of Natalya and Vladimir’s children officially identify as German on their state passports. This cultural identification, however, does not necessarily imply what people from Germany (or Henker) might identify as cultural competence, as no one residing in the village I met spoke German with any degree of fluency. However, many clung to certain markers of German culture, such as attending regular meetings with a visiting German Lutheran pastor and participating in occasional activities at the village’s German Meeting Center.

One afternoon in Babushkina, I found myself alone in the Rupp household with Natalya’s elderly and quite sick mother, to whom the entire family simply referred as Babushka. I spent a chilly morning that day visiting homes and interviewing individuals who had recently moved to the region from Siberia and Central Asia. I returned with frozen limbs and bright red cheeks to a quiet house, occupied only by Babushka, who I noticed spent most of her time lying on her bed in a small, and tucked away back room. A few minutes after I entered the house, Babushka emerged and rambled into the kitchen where I was sitting at the table reviewing my interview notes. Babushka asked me if I was hungry. I replied that I was, but there was no need to trouble herself over me. She would hear none of that, and escorted me to the back room to rest while she prepared lunch. After about thirty minutes, Babushka returned to report lunch was ready.

We sat together at the kitchen table while I slurped up the potato and cabbage borscht Babushka had prepared. “Do you miss your home?” she asked. I reported that I did, but I was planning to return to the United States in just a couple of weeks. “I bet your mother worries about you,” Babushka surmised. “She does, but she knows I enjoy traveling and is happy that I have the opportunity to be here,” I replied. Following our exchange, I tried to help her clean up, but she simply shoed me away like a pesky kitten. With a warm belly, I left the house to make
some more interview visits. Later that evening, while I was playing cards with Natalya and Vladimir, Natalya brought up the meal Babushka prepared for me. “We were all amazed she did that for you,” she said. “Why?” I asked. “Because of her poor health, Babushka hasn’t been able to get out of bed and prepare food for anyone in over five years,” was her reply. I cried myself to sleep that night.

At that time, Natalya and Vladimir had several family members and close friends still residing in Kazakhstan, and we made plans for me to visit the country and meet them. I did so five years later while on a reconnaissance trip to find suitable sites for my doctoral research in Siberia and Central Asia. I travelled to several villages in the Pavlodar Oblast, but eventually settled on the village Sharbakti as the home base for my research project, due to its significant German population and the well-organized German cultural organization operating there. Two years later, in 2008, I arrived in Sharbakti (after a six month stint just across the border in a German village in Siberia) to conduct the Kazakhstan portion of my dissertation research.

**Politics of the “nation” and civic nation-building**

As might be gleaned from my autobiographical narrative, this dissertation is about the politicization of group identity attached to cultural essences (in my initial case Germanness, but I also explore the cases of other ethnic nations). Anthropologists and other social scientists have spilled gallons of ink deliberating over ethnicity, nationalism, the personal and group identities these discourses engender, and their construction for socio-political and economic purposes. Certain institutions and individuals (such as political elites) have endeavored to craft around people and territories cultural essences consisting of histories, customs, styles of material production, caches of behavioral choices, and common modes of communication. This effort
represents a remarkable undertaking of attaching supposedly familiar (and in many instances utterly foreign) vernaculars to significantly varied populations. My intent here, however, is not to explicate a case of nationalistic group mobilization in support of certain agendas, such as the West German nationalists in Kaliningrad discursively fashioning a cultural essence onto a physical landscape and people (Germanness in Kaliningrad and its Russian-German immigrant population) to establish political claims to the territory. The phenomena of my interests are much more subtle, yet nonetheless substantial in the lives of post-socialist people.

This dissertation describes my ethnographic inquiry into the idea of Germanness (and other instances of what I identify as “ethnicness”) as a cultural essence, the content the essence implies, and how/why institutions and authorities invest communities of people with the idea based on their genealogical lineage (but for whom the idea is largely unfamiliar and detached from their everyday lives) in the context of post-socialism. Since the foundational works pertaining to the constructed nature of ethnic and national groups appeared in the early 1980s, a vast literature has arisen to reveal the use of cultural essences associated with groups for an array of political objectives. However, rather than political elites employing ethnicness as the raw materials for nationalistic mobilization, I examine how their employments exist as sites for the construction of citizenship at the hands of civic nation-builders in the former Soviet Union, particularly in the context of tremendous cultural complexity and variability.

Civic nation-builders in Russia and Kazakhstan (and the specialists of Soviet nationalities’ policy before them), while using the idiom of Germanness and other varieties of ethnicness (Tatarness, Chechenness, Polishness, etc.), are not exclusively in the business of

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mobilizing their titular populations around a unified national culture (although this is certainly an
element of the political discourses in these states). Post-Soviet authorities are just as concerned
with the value their diverse subjects place on citizenship, regardless of cultural identity, and
employ ethnicity to gain allegiance to the state. Hobsbawm argued that for state subjects,
awareness of citizenship is associated with symbols, objects, and semi-ritual practices
(ceremonies, flags, music), most of which are recently invented traditions (Hobsbawm and
Ranger 1983). Civic nation-builders in the former Soviet Union also employ other sorts of
invented imagery, practices, and actual things germane to ethnicity to engender citizenship
awareness and commitment among members of non-titular groups. The tools (the actual imagery,
practices, and things) and processes of this effort represent key sites of my inquiry.

In her work in Uzbekistan, Laura Adams examines how Uzbek authorities, through
largescale, “spectacular” cultural performances, attempt to mobilize citizens to create an illusion
of collective participation, “without any actual citizen input into the process” (Adams 2010: 96).
An equally important element associated with the political implications of cultural essences I
study is how regular people objectified into categories of group identity manipulate the
discourses to address their own needs. This line of investigation connects with Hobsbawn’s
notion that we understand very little about how ordinary women and men interpret, interact, and
make choices based on their understandings of the cultural essences claiming their loyalties
(Hobsbawm 1991: 78). Rather than examining how citizens are excluded from the cultural
process, mine is an ethnographic work dedicated to investigating localized interactions (or the
lack thereof) between regular folks and the cultural essences with which they are officially
associated (i.e. their ethnicity).³

³I offer a detailed description of ethnicity in chapter two.
While respecting the canonical position of Benedict Anderson’s work on the imagined community, I recognize that alternative forces beyond the texts that signify social cohesion may successfully integrate local and national cultures into the collective consciousness of populations to transform subjects of the state into citizens. As David Kertzer shows, there exists tremendous power in the process and performance of local activities within the drive to encourage state subjects “to think of themselves as part of such a nebulous and distant concept as the state.” Kertzer suggests that some state authorities have addressed this question for its far-flung, largely unaligned subjects by staging large-scale rites (Kertzer 1989: 22). As Laura Adams would argue, this is particularly true for the non-titular, primarily rural residents of former Soviet republics.

In relation to this notion, Clifford Geertz argues that political authority requires a cultural frame in which to define itself and authenticate its claims (Geertz 1983: 143). Citing historical examples of ritualized processions of state royalty, Geertz poses examples of localized activities that encourage a blending of local, ethical inclinations and non-local conceptualizations of social organization (of which I would include citizenship). Within the context of these orchestrated events, the power center’s cultural framing may coalesce with local sensibilities and institutions to influence its members’ attitudes and behaviors. Through involvement within these arenas of local activity and the resonances they express, individuals may align themselves with the figures and institutions at the center of state power (Geertz refers to this process as the conferral of charisma, 1983: 122-23). My inquiry likewise investigates actions, processes, and behaviors inspired in part from the political center, but taking place within local settings, and their effects toward fashioning an allegiance to one’s citizenship in the state.

As an approach to managing the desired state allegiance and subsequent social integration, some post-Soviet countries have attempted to build civic nations, the actual
mechanics of which have largely seemed opaque. Similar to Bruce Grant’s engagement with the poorly understood nature of sovereignty (Grant 2009: 1), I address civic nation-building’s mystified nature by examining it in both theoretical and practical terms. At its core, civic nation-building discourse represents one policy vehicle that authorities may employ (in one form or another) to fashion an official political culture for the sake of national stability in a culturally plural state. I consider the energies of post-socialist minority policies within the frame of civic nation-building discourse and invite attention to it through theoretical considerations and detailed descriptions of its institutional employment. I also illustrate ethnographically how members of the public who the discourse targets react to its precepts and applications. I want to stress, however, that civic nation-building is just as vulnerable to the same randomness, inconsistencies, and abrupt transformations as any other political discourse. Nevertheless, in the cases I examine, state authorities and their subjects evoke it, have established entire institutions around it, and at times engage in its practice. My comprehensive inquiry into civic nation-building discourse therefore underscores its utility, variability, and unpredictability as a tool (among several) that post-socialist authorities employ to address cultural plurality in the state.

**Russian Germans as a historical Soviet people**

Given my introductory interest in a particular ethnicness (Germaness in the former Soviet Union), it seems most appropriate to explicate the origin of the essence, namely the history of Germans in the Russian Empire and Soviet Union. When discussing my work in Kazakhstan and Russia with people unfamiliar with the history of Russian nationalities, I often receive puzzled queries over why there are/were Germans living in Central Asia and Siberia to study at all. When evoking the notion of Central Asia, one might conjure the image of Genghis Khan’s invading
Mongol hordes, Tamerlane’s Turco-Mongol empire, and the trade routes upon which merchants travelling from China trekked to deliver silks and spices to Europe, but certainly not humble European peasant farmers tilling the arid Eurasian soil. To add some historical depth to that image, I offer a brief chronical of how German peasants came to reside in the Siberian and Kazakhstani steppes in the first place.

Having hungrily studied German migrations and settlements in Eastern Europe and Russia as a master’s student, the prospect of meeting contemporary descendants of this people upon my first visit in Kaliningrad brought me to a state of giddiness. I queried nearly every individual with whom I came in contact in Kaliningrad using both German and the bare amount of Russian I knew over whether he or she happened to be German (my unfortunate interlocutors included mostly waitresses, hotel clerks, and taxi drivers). Those Germans I met admitted to the identity with a sense of the unremarkable, appearing annoyed and confused with my attempts to interact with them in German. I at least managed to elicit an understandable explanation from those identifying as German regarding the regions of Siberia or Central Asia from where they came, most of whom had recently departed for Kaliningrad from a habitation zone stretching from Omsk to Novosibirsk in Russia down to a large swathe of northeastern Kazakhstan.

As with most groups associated with primordial cultural identities, the notion that people of German descent from the former Soviet Union represent a collective historical group sharing a uniform cultural vernacular is patently false. Considering that Soviet scholarship has filtered the bulk of work engaging German history in Russia, which since the 1930s dedicated itself to essentialized versions of cultural history (Martin 2000), individuals administratively attached to German identity are intimately connected to the standard narrative of German settlement in Russia. This narrative typically starts with the geographic site serving as the most iconic for the
population – the pastures extending from the segments of the Volga River near the city Saratov. Germans in Russia are so tightly associated with this region that their progenitors are often universally referred to as Volga-Germans. Yet, time and tribulation rather than territory have drawn the real boundaries discursively encapsulating those attached to this historic group.4

The presence of Germans in the Russian Empire (and later Soviet Union) represents an extraordinarily complex history of migration and settlement. Peasants and members of certain religious groups (particularly Mennonites) had migrated in various waves to the territories of the Russian Empire for centuries. In addition, sizable German-speaking populations had been living in cities along the Baltic such as Riga and Tallinn, thousands of Germans had served in the Imperial Army, and a large number of Germans numbered among the Russian nobility. By the nineteenth century, German peasant communities stretched north to St. Petersburg, south to Bessarabia (contemporary Moldova), and as far east as Sakhalin Island near Japan.

The most historically substantial surge of Germans migrating to Russia occurred in the late eighteenth century at the behest of Russian Tsarina Catherine II, who in 1763 issued a proclamation inviting all Christian foreigners to immigrate to various unpopulated regions within the Russian Empire where they would be given parcels of tax-free land. The regions within the Empire made available to settlers according to the proclamation were located along the southern shores of the Volga River, as well as in the Crimean Peninsula, the Ural Mountains, and Siberia. Thousands of families from the German-speaking areas of Central Europe answered the Empress’s call (25,000 families by 1787) and made the trek to their new homelands in Russia.

4 I attribute this point to Amitav Ghosh (1993: 95), who makes it in reference to Palestinian history.
Although the German settlers were widely dispersed throughout the Empire, the bulk of them established communities along the southern banks of the Volga and in Russia’s southern steppes.

These communities remained relatively stable until reforms introduced by Premier Stolypin after 1906 served to dispossess many German smallholders of their land, prompting them to migrate to southern Siberia and the northern Central Asian steppes (the territory of contemporary Kazakhstan) with hopes of discovering better economic opportunities. In spite of the out-migration caused by the Stolypin reforms, a sizeable German population along the Volga and southern Russia persisted and even thrived (Malinowski 2000: 6-29). After the 1917 Revolution and the establishment of Bolshevik power in Russia, Stalin’s treatise on nations and nationalism (and the policies and projects it influenced) essentialized the connection between national identity and territory, effectively cementing a lasting attachment between “Russian-Germans” and the Volga. With the emerging Soviet nationalities policies and the subsequent creation of official territorial regions for many of the USSR’s non-Russian groups, Bolshevik leaders crafted a Volga German Autonomous Socialist Soviet Republic (ASSR) in the 1920’s, administratively establishing Germans’ claim to the territory (Matis 2001: 9).

The tide turned for the German populations in western Russia in August of 1941, when the Presidium of the Supreme Soviet released an announcement to the German residents of the Volga that the Republic was to be dismantled and its 380,000 German inhabitants “resettled” to the Omsk and Novosibirsk Oblasts, as well as the Altai Border Region and Kazakh Soviet Socialist Republic. The justification of this move rested with the supposed existence of numerous German fascists and spies living within the boundaries of the Republic (Schleicher 1996: 7). One Kazakhstani scholar estimates that between 1941 and 1942, Soviet authorities expelled 1,209,403 Germans to the eastern regions of the state (Aldadzhumanov 1997: 143-47). With this move, far
eastern frozen backwaters such as the Altai and other regions in Siberia and Kazakhstan became the destination for the thousands of German families exiled there from the West.

Life for the German expellees in Siberia and Central Asia was not easy, and in most cases unbearable. Throughout the rest of World War II and for nearly a decade after, authorities forced most able-bodied men to enlist into the Soviet Service Army (тру́довая армия), for which they were taken from their families to remote Siberian locales and undertook labor intensive infrastructural projects. Soviet authorities sent approximately 400,000 people to the Service Army, most of whom were men between the ages of 15 and 55 years of age (Tegthoff 2003: 10, 56). The result of these years of hard labor in harsh environments and climates was the loss of the majority of German men expelled from the western reaches of the Soviet Union (a fraction of whom later returned). The women and children finding themselves in foreign agricultural settlements in the steppe did not have it much better. In a 1945 report, a Soviet apparatchik in Kazakhstan stated that the German population in Kazakhstan was composed of almost entirely women and children, leaving them unable to care for themselves. With the absence of German men in these settlements, Soviet officials took it upon themselves to stabilize and organize life for the wives, sisters, and children of those residing in labor camps hundreds of miles away (Aldadzhumanov 1997: 143-47). During my research period in Siberia and Kazakhstan, I interacted with dozens of people who shared their traumatic memories of the period. They talked of fathers and older brothers sent off to the service army upon arrival to eastern Russia and Central Asia, many of whom they never saw again. According to official reports and my informants, authorities gradually released the men from their labor between the years of 1946 and 1955 (Tegthoff 2003: 92-93). After the trauma they experienced through expulsion and
relocation, many members of the younger generation of Germans sought to hide all traces of their native culture, refusing to speak German and marrying into Russian families.

Unaware of these histories, I spent my time in Kaliningrad searching for people of German descent who had somehow managed to preserve their cultural heritage. The first interaction I had with someone whom I at the time considered a “genuine” Russian-German was Victor Pretzer, the director of the German National Cultural Theater in Kaliningrad. On an especially frigid late-December evening, an employee at a local German advocacy organization directed me to the Theater, thinking I might find a conversation with its director interesting. After rushing to navigate the icy streets with an oversized map of the city, I finally happened upon a standard Soviet-style building housing the theater troupe. I pounded on the door insistently, and was eventually rewarded when a young woman answered with a quizzical look and query in Russian I didn’t understand. I mumbled something back in German about wanting to meet with the director, and instantly received a knowing look as the woman escorted me to an inner office inhabited by Pretzer. To my relief, Pretzer spoke fluent German and allowed me to clarify my interest in the Germans of Russia. Pretzer explained he was born in Almaty, Kazakhstan, where he worked for the German National Theater there. He described the German minority in Almaty as a culturally thriving group holding fast to its traditions stemming from the Volga and quietly preserving them in the collective farms and urban centers of Siberia and Kazakhstan. Yet, he was quick to point out that the culture had died, as most of those well versed in the German language and cultural traditions were the first to take the opportunities presented with perestroika to move to Germany.

Beginning in the late-1980s and continuing through the 1990s, hundreds of thousands of Germans from Eastern Europe and the former Soviet Union migrated to the Federal Republic of
Germany. The privilege of immigration to Germany and obtaining citizenship status there was made possible by Article 116 in the German Constitution (Grundgesetz) of 1949 in combination with various pieces of national legislation. A key text granting people of German descent permission to migrate to Germany is the 1953 Federal Expellee and Refugee Law (Bundesvertriebenengesetz). This statute qualified persons of German descent for West German citizenship who were driven from their homes through expulsion measures during and after World War II. It also provided automatic citizenship for ethnic Germans from Eastern Europe and the former Soviet Union in the Federal Republic of Germany (Brubaker 1998). Since Soviet officials began permitting the large-scale legal immigration to the Federal Republic of Germany in 1985, Germans started to leave the Soviet and former Soviet republics, particularly Kazakhstan and Russia, in increasingly larger numbers until the late 1990s (Polian 2004: 207). According to German statistics, between 1986 and 1999 well over 2 million people of German descent or people linked to them through marriage or kinship emigrated from the former Soviet Union to the Federal Republic (Klekowski von Koppenfels 2002).

My initial foray into “the land of the Russian-Germans” occurred in the summer of 2004 on a reconnaissance trip to Omsk and Novosibirsk in preparation for my dissertation research, where I met Elvira Barbaschina (in Novosibirsk) and Tatiana Smirnova (in Omsk). At that time, those women were two of the most prominent post-Soviet ethnographic researchers writing about Russian-Germans residing in Siberia. My quest to meet Barbaschina took me to the taiga-covered campus of the Novosibirsk State University located in the remote college suburb, Akademgorodok. Barbaschina was several years past retirement, but still sprightly and full of life. We relaxed together drinking tea in the office of her daughter, Tatiana, who was a tenured professor in philosophy at the University. Although Barbaschina is Russian, we conversed in
German, and I communicated my passion to her about the topic of Germans residing in the former Soviet Union. After I explained to her my interests and preliminary research plan, Barbaschina, who had spent years travelling to Siberian villages largely populated with people of German descent, gazed at me with a wizened grin and responded: “Well, Mr. Jones (gospodin Dzhonz), I hope you find who you are looking for.”

My expedition that summer took me from those Siberian urban centers to the steppes of the Altai Border District, and finally to the villages of Kazakhstan’s Pavlodar region. What I found with this trip, and the two subsequent visits I made to the region before embarking on my actual research, was that group and individual interactions with state-based institutions often facilitated ethnic culture as an actual lived experience. The significance of institutions in relation to the exercise and maintenance of German culture struck me even when residing in Kaliningrad as I spent hours each week working in the German House there. My aforementioned reconnaissance trips to Siberia and Kazakhstan further reinforced the presence of the state in regards to ethnic identities and behaviors. As I visited German organization after German organization in Moscow, Omsk, Novosibirsk, Barnaul, Pavlodar, Semipalatinsk and Almaty, it became clear that German ethnic culture was a thing that lived in the institutions and their personnel who maintained and distributed it to the population. These cultural specialists working for the institutions I describe largely represent the true guardians of Germanness in the former Soviet Union. This dissertation represents an ethnography of those guardians, their institutional efforts, and the impact on the lives of their ethnic constituents.
An ethnography of institutions and “ethnicness” in the former Soviet Union

A primary concern of Catherine Alexander’s examination of privatization in Kazakhstan is the separation that occurred between the state and its subjects with the collapse of the Soviet Union and the influence its institutions had on the lives of most its citizens. Alexander approaches the phenomenon from the perspective of recently privatized economic institutions and the extent to which the process of privatization has impelled inequities, facilitating even greater separation between the Kazakhstani state and its citizens. This economic outcome has encouraged “a fracturing of unity, a multiplying of difference and an introduction of instability, mobility, and a new short-term temporality” (Alexander 2004). A central question I address in this dissertation is what institutional efforts have arisen to replace the vanishing socialist institutions to reignite a substantive, meaningful relationship between state and subject. A major thrust of the institutions I consider is the clamor for the successful integration of non-titular subjects through the creation and employment of certain state-based institutions, some of which are uniquely new while others reflect definite Soviet analogs. My concentration on institutionalism might suggest a “studying-up” ethnography, where I examine the work of institutional elites and their empowered associates. Although those who maintain authority over institutions and institutional decision-making certainly represent a point of analysis, I have applied the bulk of my attention to how these decisions express themselves among people in local contexts, specifically rural villages and small urban centers in Kazakhstan and Russia. I am therefore interested in the ordinary activities, social interactions, and goals of both the institutional workers and those who their programs and activities target, to contribute an everyday perspective on how post-socialist institutions endeavor to strengthen adherence to state
citizenship. The bulk of the institutional efforts I examined in my research had some substantive link to ethnicness.

The initial reception I received during my first trip to Kazakhstan emphasized for me the vast scale of institutionalized ethnicness (in this case, Germanness) as a routine political practice in the former Soviet Union. My journey to Kazakhstan took place on a bus from the provincial Siberian city Barnaul, across a recently constructed Russian-Kazakhstan border checkpoint, to the regional capital, Pavlodar. While travelling through Siberia, I was in contact via email with Olga Schneider, who worked for a German organization in Pavlodar called Rebirth. Upon my arrival at the Pavlodar bus station, Olga and a group of teenagers made up of Russians, Germans, and Kazakhs were waiting for me and holding a sign with the Russian words *Vozrozhdenie* (Rebirth). Throughout my weeklong stay in the Pavlodar region, I visited several villages in the area, whose leaders from the local offshoots of Rebirth organized meetings with some of the local German residents, as well as visits to ethnic culture-based summer camps. The attendees of these meetings, although interested in interacting with a foreigner, seemed unsurprised about my visit and their summoning, as if it were a familiar exercise. Since that initial expedition to Kazakhstan and my exposure to volumes of Soviet ethnographic literature and western anthropological work focusing on Soviet ethnography, I understand the organization of such meetings functioned as a well-worn tool for Soviet research on ethnic nations (*natsional’nosti*).\(^5\)

One might question my use of Germans as an appropriate community from which to gain any insight into the experience of post-Soviet institutionalism, because of its uniqueness stemming from the massive interventions of the Federal Republic of Germany into the affairs of

\(^5\) For a recent account of this ethnographic tradition, see Jennifer Cash’s description of participating in research expeditions in post-Soviet Moldova (2014: 105-35).
its former Soviet kin. However, the experience of Germans in the former Soviet Union has had a
great impact on the institutions governing nationalities policies in Russia, Kazakhstan, and other
former Soviet states and brings the nation-building process into sharp public relief for analysis.
For example, Germany’s aggressive engagement with the affairs of minority Germans in Eastern
Europe has provoked the host countries to respond with nationalities’ policies expressing greater
complexity than those inherited from the Soviet Union. I suggest therefore that communities
with large populations of Germans in Kazakhstan and Russia represent the ideal conditions from
which to study the institutions involved with state nationalities’ policies, as authorities often
employ those policies to evoke a sense of ethical internationalism placating not only their ethnic
Germans, but also the Federal Republic of Germany and the greater international community.

My examination of Germans and Germanness as an ethnographic site also provided
admittance to various institutional networks. As is typical of Soviet and post-Soviet
institutionalism, authorities structure public life hierarchically, with each respective institutional
level replicating the next higher stratum, albeit employing less complex arrangements and
smaller numbers of personnel. Having attached myself to the local levels of institutionalized
Germanness in Russia and Kazakhstan afforded me access to higher levels, as well as eventual
entrance into parallel institutions and even the organs of the state supervising the
institutionalization of ethnicness. In this sense, I offer an ethnography on the state, applying
specific attention to the processes and outcomes of localized post-socialist state institutionalism.
Following Edward Schatz’s accomplishments in his study of kinship in Kazakhstan by orienting
an ethnographic study to the state, my focus goes beyond the intent of state actors to understand
the actual outcomes of state action. According to Schatz, when state authorities create
institutions for strategic purposes (including the intent to influence favorable social
transformation, economic equity, and the effective administration of the populace), the institutional action should generate certain “incentives” for the targeted populations. Oftentimes, however, the incentives stretch beyond those intended by the authorities, resulting in unintended outcomes flowing across policy areas (Schatz 2004: 15-16). State-directed institutions assisting Germanness and other forms of ethnicness generate unintended outcomes and benefits, including the emigration of the very people the state intends to maintain. Having access to the levels of institutionalism afforded me the opportunity to observe the various stages of ethnic policies, from their formative conceptualization to local deployment.

The advantages of having access to these multiple institutional levels of Germanness became clear during my initial visit to Kazakhstan. After spending a week traveling to various villages in the Pavlodar Oblast, Olga invited me to participate in a German language summer camp for teenagers. I enthusiastically agreed, and the following Monday morning found myself boarding a bus with dozens of screaming teenagers on its way to the lake resort, Bayanul. Aside from the usual activities associated with youth camps (including outdoor recreation and social events), the camp’s pedagogy required training the campers in German language, culture, and history. A young professional from Germany was on staff at the camp, who supervised the transmission of German culture to these young people of mostly German descent. Having numerous conversations and participating with the campers and the institutional workers who managed their activities gave me a firsthand portrait of the local outcomes of ethnic institutional decisions and the environments they fashion for conveying ethnicness to their constituents.

After a few days in the camp, I undertook a thirty-two hour train voyage to Kazakhstan’s largest city, Almaty, in the hopes of meeting the national director of Rebirth, Alexander Dederer. Having been recommend by Olga from Rebirth’s Pavlodar office, Dederer was happy to spend
some time with me the day after I arrived in Almaty. In preparation for my research, I had met
with German cultural leaders throughout the former Soviet Union, but I soon recognized Dederer
was different. Dederer represented himself as deeply committed to remaining in his home
country, Kazakhstan, and dedicated to the Kazakhstani state discourse promising a culturally
sensitive integration of its German minority.

After my meeting with Dederer, I visited the German embassy in Almaty and received an
audience with Alfred Kopf, who at the time managed German language and culture programs for
Kazakhstan’s German population. Kopf maintained a much more pessimistic attitude than
Dederer regarding the German minority in Kazakhstan, recognizing that the population was so
far separated from their German ancestors that most lacked any substantive connection to that
cultural heritage. Kopf was candid with me, expressing incredulity at the policies of ethnic
institutionalism in Kazakhstan and Germany’s role in buttressing them. According to him,
instead of maintaining the population of German descent that has remained in Kazakhstan, the
German cultural institutions inspire the emigration to Germany among those who participate in
their activities. “Think of it this way,” he summarized. “If you learned French in school,
wouldn’t you want to visit France?” “And after eating crepes in front of the Louvre, who wants
to leave Paris?” Subsequent association with these institutions and other public institutions of
ethnicness throughout my later research period provided me with a comprehensive portrait of
state-based institutionalism, including its actors, intents, and ultimate outcomes.

**Contents of dissertation**

Through the four ethnographic chapters of this dissertation, I elaborate on Kazakhstan’s
and Russia’s attempts to create civic nations through their respective nationalities’ policies from
the perspective of some rural and urban communities in both states. I do this in each chapter by exploring a concept that informs how state authorities carry out nation-building policies and their public reception. I specifically consider the state institutions that employ these policies in my ethnographic settings and how the multiethnic public (Germans, Russians, Kazakhs, Tatars, Chechens, and others) participate and react to them. In what follows, I briefly review the individual chapters comprising this dissertation, highlighting the concepts and theoretical discussions I engage. My conceptual and theoretical discussions include a thorough investigation of civic nation-building (chapter two), the nature of ethnic identity and behavior in the post-socialist context (chapter three), ethnic territoriality (chapter four), the influence of Soviet labor on post-Soviet civic nation-building (chapter five), and transnational kinship’s influence on social networks (chapter six). My concluding chapter examines the contemporary political context of Kazakhstan and Russia in relation to civic nation-building and the means by which both states have recently redirected their approaches to nationalities’ policies.

In the following chapter, I attend to the discursive elements of the phenomenon underlying this entire dissertation – civic nation-building. I argue that as a concept occasionally arising in social science research, the notion of civic nation, and the process of civic nation-building, are grossly under theorized. This is especially true compared to multiculturalism, a concept frequently employed in post-socialist political contexts. Ultimately, my inquiry into the process of civic nation-building in Kazakhstan and Russia concerns the discourses post-Soviet authorities employ to enfranchise their non-titular, multiethnic citizens (and sometimes their titular citizens as well). Designers of state-based multiculturalist discourses are largely interested in the same level of enfranchisement for their cultural minorities as those in new post-Soviet countries aiming to build multiethnic civic nations. Although tremendous parallels exist between
the discourses of civic nation-building and multiculturalism, I argue that they fundamentally express themselves as dissimilar processes to achieve their objectives.

Given such differences and the vast amount of theoretical and empirical literature dedicated to multiculturalism, I focus chapter two on theorizing civic nation-building, especially in the context of the former Soviet Union. In order to accomplish this task, I undertake a thorough discussion of how certain theorists (such as Will Kymlicka, Michel Wieviorka, and Elizabeth Povinelli) view multiculturalism and multiculturalist discourses and the manner by which anthropologists have engaged their theories ethnographically. I then examine civic nation-building discourses and the policies they inspire in Kazakhstan and Russia to understand the conceptual and intentional differences of the two approaches. I conclude that the inherent logics of multiculturalism and civic nation-building express fundamental differences in social, political, economic, and historical orientation, rendering multiculturalist theory and thereby multiculturalism-based policies possibly inappropriate for the context of post-Soviet authorities’ attempts to manage their ethnic minorities.

Chapter three engages the various development institutions active in Russia and Kazakhstan dedicated to the well-being of the region’s ethnic German population. In addition to elucidating the circumstances surrounding these institutions, the chapter addresses the nature of ethnic culture and behavior among Germans in Russia and Kazakhstan specifically, and the political circumstances of ethnic minorities in the former Soviet Union generally. I carefully consider how individuals in these political settings exercise their ethnicity both subjectively and within the context of various institutions. I focus here on the discursive use of physical spaces and temporal periods that government authorities and development institutions have deemed “ethnic” and how the distribution of these “ethnic things” meets both institutional requirements
and the needs of individuals, whose participation in ethnic activities goes significantly beyond the desire to preserve culture to addressing personal interests and needs unrelated to ethnicity. In this formulation, I challenge Rogers Brubaker’s notion that ethnicity exists as categories of knowledge and cognitive interpretations of those categories, by considering the intentionality of ethnicity in instances when ethnic acts include an array of self-conscious behaviors possessing multiple intents performed in certain spaces and times deemed ethnic. In order to foreground my arguments about the intentionality of ethnicity, I look at the mundaneness of ethnicity through the theoretical considerations of Fredrik Barth, Michael Billig, and Benedict Anderson, and compare those to how and why behaviors become ethnic in Kazakhstan and Russia.

Chapter four considers ethnic territoriality in Russia – a concept and practice Soviet authorities practiced since the early formulations of the USSR’s nationalities’ policy. I examine specifically the Soviet origins of ethnic territoriality, how Russian officials have employed it since the demise of the Soviet Union, and the experience of German ethnic territoriality in a southwestern Siberian community. I argue that Russian leaders have attempted to instill a sense of citizenship among their ethnic minorities through Soviet-style civic nation-building discourse, often expressed with the notion of ethno-territories and autonomies. However, just as important as these attempts are from the perspective of the state are the outcomes on the populations in which they are applied. Therefore, I examine the social relations present in a German ethnic territory in Russia and refer to Douglas Rogers’ use of the Russian term khoziastvo and Caroline Humphrey’s notion of local “suzerains” to describe how local post-socialist political relations intersect with Soviet style civic-nation building to create certain advantages and disadvantages for economic and political actors.
Although I conducted the bulk of my research in Kazakhstan, my discussion of civic nation-building in the following chapters, and especially in chapter four, devotes considerable attention to Russia. I do this for two reasons. The first and most significant is that the conceptualization of the nation and ethnicity in the regions of the former Soviet Union stems fundamentally from ideas originating among notable Bolshevik leaders in the 1920s and 30s. Hence, authorities have imported ideas and practices regarding ethnicity from Russia into the non-Russian Soviet republics. Any examination of civic nation-building in the post-Soviet space, therefore, requires a description of the Soviet historical context, which I provide throughout this dissertation. In addition, the point of departure for my inquiry of civic nation-building in the former Soviet Union is ethnic Germans. Certainly Germans represent a significant political minority in Kazakhstan; however, German ethno-political activity has taken place primarily in both Soviet and post-Soviet Russia. The territorial nature of that political activity was focused on various Russian regions and is closely related to Russia’s general approach to civic nation-building. Finally, Russia has been much less explicit than Kazakhstan in managing a civic nation-building project. As a result, illuminating Russia’s efforts at managing its ethnic minority populations requires close attention to multiple institutions devoted both directly and indirectly to the project of civic nation-building.

In chapter five, I concentrate on labor and the legacies of the social and institutional patterns of Soviet labor as a dimension of contemporary civic nation-building. My primary interest is with the individual actors involved in ethnic-based organizations in Kazakhstan and how their interactions with state institutions resemble processes prevalent under socialism designed to strengthen feelings of affinity with the state. I argue here that former Soviet practices affiliated with socialist labor ideology influence how authorities design ethnic-based activities
for non-Kazakh citizens. My argument leans heavily on Caroline Humphrey’s (2002) seminal work on Siberian collective farms and its particular attention to the ritualistic nature of socialist competition and its utility as a means to create a sense of citizenship through the achievements of personal and collective labor. To support the link between the ritualistic and nationalizing nature of Soviet labor and post-Soviet efforts to create loyal citizens, I evoke Christel Lane’s (1981) study of socialist rituals together with and Katherine Verdery and Gail Kligman’s (2011) discussion of subjectivities in collectivized Romania. These contrasting views demonstrate how subjective needs and behaviors often counteracted, supported, and expressed ambivalence toward socialist institutions. With these studies in mind, I examine the multiple frameworks (including folklore and youth organizations) that institutions of socialist labor employed as integrative tools for their multiethnic peoples’ eventual adherence to Soviet citizenship.

In Kazakhstan, programs for ethnic minorities often seek to inform them about their own distinct cultural identities, but also aspire to develop their allegiances to the state. They attempt this through techniques strikingly similar to Soviet practices unrelated to ethnic culture, such as those associated with labor mobilization and the staging of socialist labor competitions. Similar to the objectives of socialist competition, Kazakhstan’s authorities have designed ethnic cultural activities to create a sense of citizenship and civic nationalism among their participants. As evidence, I show how several ethnic activities taking place among national cultural centers closely resemble the activities of labor institutions engaged in socialist competition.

My final ethnographic chapter examines the nature of kinship for people in northern Kazakhstan and their close friends and relatives residing in the Federal Republic of Germany. I carefully consider the role of intimacy between family members and friends who have both migrated to Germany and remained in Kazakhstan. By intimacy, I mean the intense intellectual
and emotional communion that can occur between human beings. These long-distance, intimate relationships with people in Germany also foster material opportunities for those who have remained in Kazakhstan. For these individuals, the reception of goods from Western Europe and occasional trips to Germany considerably influence their imaginations, daily practices, and ways of speaking and thinking. In addition, the long-distance relationships and their products generate common experiences and thereby forge intimate relationships between the beneficiaries in Kazakhstan. I dedicate the initial section of this chapter to examining anthropological and sociological understandings of kinship beginning with the classic work of Meyer Fortes and his notion of kinship amity. I also employ Arlie Hochschild’s consideration of “emotion work” and “feeling rules” and Michael Herzfeld’s idea’s about “cultural intimacy.” I share these ideas to describe the intimacy existing among transnational relations and between individuals residing in Kazakhstani communities.

With intimacy in mind, I argue that kinship for people in northern Kazakhstan with family and friends in Germany extends beyond biological and ethnic relatedness to include cultural affinities for those abroad and at home created through the collective experiences of socialism and post-socialism. Although people in Kazakhstan represent family and acquaintances living in Germany as people “over there,” whether or not these relations represent genealogical kin or members of the German ethnie, they imagine a bond between them based on their equivalent possession of the cultural experiences and nostalgic memories associated with Soviet socialism. Cultural understandings of kinship and intimacy also arise as people of German descent sense relatedness to the German state and its citizens through the acts of patronage Germany officially sponsors in Kazakhstan. These notions of relatedness exist independently from genealogical kinship and ethnic group membership, and construct a cultural intimacy
among those who possess kin and friends in Germany. I argue that this phenomenon has the effect of creating moral communities among various individuals through the modes of expression they use about their relations in Germany. These moral communities and the expressions they use become tools for their members to deal with some of the problems they encounter in the social, political, and economic circumstances of post-socialist Central Asia.

In the concluding chapter, I consider the alterations to, or shifts from, civic nation-building discourses in the light of recent political developments and trends in Russia and Kazakhstan. Occurrences such as the rising influence of Kazakh nationalism in Kazakhstan and President Putin’s need to gain domestic support for his annexation of the Crimean Peninsula have induced the need for rhetorical maneuverability among the leaders of both states. In spite of these rhetorical shifts, however, I argue that the state authorities have far from abandoned civic nation-building discourses and their affiliated institutions and programs. The proof of that assertion resides in how often political authorities continue to evoke civic nation-building as the engine of nationalities’ policies. Hence, civic nation-building represents one among several discourses to which state authorities may appeal when referencing the status of interethnic relations. The discursive choices they make often depend upon factors as diverse as the given audience, the state of the domestic economy, and various geopolitical factors.

**Launching an ethnography of Germanness**

With a very apprehensive wife and two young children (ages 2 and 4), I flew into the Barnaul airport with a truckload of bags to undertake my research in February of 2008. Barnaul serves as the capital city of the southern Siberian region, the Altai Krai. At this point in my search for Germanness, I could converse fluently in German, speak Russian at an intermediate
level, and was preparing myself to learn Kazakh (which I studied later while residing in Kazakhstan). As we drove from the airport to our hotel in two taxis packed with luggage, the snowdrifts towering over the streets of this dark, Siberian frontier town cast an ominous specter over the experience we were about to undertake. We spent a week recovering from the two days of air travel that took us from our home in New York City, through the bustling Domodedovo Airport in Moscow, and on to this provincial edge of Siberia. I spent that respite from our travel helping my wife and young children process the culture shock of this foreign place, adjust to the 14 hour time difference, and gather supplies for a trip to the frozen countryside to which we were about to embark. By the end of the week, we had hired a four-wheel drive vehicle to transport us through the roughly four hundred kilometers of snowy roads and steppeland to my initial research site, the town of Podsosnova, located in the German National District, Halbstadt.

I had chosen this corner of the Altai Krai in southwestern Siberia as the first site to conduct my research for several reasons. There was a significant concentration of investment from the Federal Republic of Germany in the region, and several years prior, Russian Federation officials established a German National Autonomous Rayon, affording the German minority some measure of cultural and political autonomy. Podsosnovo was also home to a functioning collective farm, one of the few such farms still operating in the former Soviet Union. To the northwest, in the Omsk Oblast, a similar national rayon for Germans exists in the town of Asova, representing a strong research site competitor. I ultimately chose Podsosnovo, due to its close proximity to my parallel research site, the Pavlodar Oblast in Kazakhstan, and the welcoming attitude and interest in my research among the authorities in Podsosnovo and its adjoining communities. Alexei Yermakov, the mayor of the town, exemplified this attitude, as he
personally greeted me upon my initial visit there and spent significant time with me during my stay. He even offered to help me find a place to live upon my return to the village.

We arrived into Podsosnovo in the dimming light of an early February afternoon. Our first days of residence in the village was in a small “hotel” located just off the central square. With its neatly trimmed lanes filled with homesteads backed by large plots for private agricultural production, Podsosnovo is identical to any rural town I had visited in Russia. What made it unique was the understanding and accompanying discourse of difference associated with the enormous number of close family members and friends who resided in Germany. Although many of the villages’ inhabitants could in some fashion claim German lineage, most would not assert Germanness as an active identity. What was more significant for the bulk of the people I met was maintaining those relationships with the people they dearly loved, residing so far away.

Soon Alexei introduced me to his assistant Anastasia Eriskina, who invited us to live with her elderly parents, Liubov and Nikolai Kondratev. The Kondratevs were relatively new residents of Podsosnovo and occupied a peasant-style home in which several generations of a German family had resided for nearly one hundred years before abandoning it for Germany. We lived with the Kondratev’s for six months and became part of the family. On our last day in Podsosnovo, Liubov drove us to the bus stop to begin our voyage to neighboring Kazakhstan and eventually the village Sharbakti. As we boarded the bus to the border, Liubov took me by the hand and whispered in my ear, “Natan, did you find the Germans you were searching for here in our village?” I hugged her and nodded in the affirmative, while thinking I had found much more.
Chapter 2
Civic Nations, Multiculturalism, and the Discourses of Nation-Building in Russia and Kazakhstan

Multiculturalism and civic nation-building: Competing for the soul of post-socialism

The purpose of the previous chapter was to establish a historical and contemporary cultural context necessary for the remainder of this dissertation. The primary objective of my work, however, is not to chronicle the experiences of ethnic Germans in Russia and Kazakhstan, but rather is to utilize this unique population and the greater community in which it resides to foreground issues that their experiences, as well as the experiences of other minorities of the former Soviet Union, disclose. Throughout the dissertation, I explore questions regarding how post-Soviet states enfranchise their citizens using discourses and policies, particularly directed to those citizens who for various reasons might resist enfranchisement. I also devote attention to how groups and individuals experience these attempts to capture their allegiances. Most importantly, I investigate how these integration projects create meaning and strategies for the targeted publics that their designers and supporters do not fully intend.

In the various post-Soviet regimes, Germans and other ethnic minorities experience the transition to market economies through a range of tensions. In Kazakhstan and Russia, people of German descent, and other ethnic minorities, face growing economic and political inequalities vis-à-vis the titular populations. Germans and others also suffer through the stress of watching their neighbors, close friends, and family members leaving for Germany or other parts of the former Soviet Union. Finally, the extreme political and economic transition and instability characteristic of post-socialism encourage the day-to-day hardships of life often expressed through pervasive unemployment, apathy, alcoholism, marital infidelity, criminality, and violence. Under these conditions of “post-socialist chaos,” (Nazpary 2002: 7-8) many former
Soviet regimes are attempting to secure the allegiance of their minority populations for an array of purposes, such as firmly establishing sovereignty, preventing ethnic conflict, gathering public support, creating a sense of civic responsibility, establishing political hegemony, and gaining international legitimacy. In order to accomplish their goals, state authorities have employed civic nation-building discourses as they attempt to characterize their populations as both culturally diverse and civically unified, while simultaneously maintaining mono-ethnic national identities based on their titular cultural groups.

The main concern of this chapter is to carefully consider how and why I employ or deemphasize certain conceptual and theoretical tools throughout the course of the dissertation. As my research focuses on the political implications of minority cultural groups residing in post-socialist states, the question that I initially address here is how the discourses relative to civic nation-building should be conceptualized, especially given the dearth of theoretical material dedicated to the subject in the social sciences. I use the term “discourse” here to reference the methods of communication the state employs to relay policies and programs related to civic nation-building. With this lack of attention to civic nation-building in mind, I approach my analysis of the concept by considering a strikingly similar one that has received considerably more attention – multiculturalism. The apparent resemblance between multiculturalism and civic nation-building stems from their primary utility for state authorities as potential tools to enfranchise otherwise disenfranchised citizens into allegiance with a state identified as the homeland of a single titular ethnic group (such as Kazakhstan or even the Russian Federation). Discussing civic nation-building and multiculturalism invites the risk of ambiguity, because the concepts represent to the minds of political actors and members of the public a multitude of meanings from a set of social policies to cultural behaviors. Interpretations of the concepts also
vary widely among social scientists and theorists (Werbner 2003). The first few sections of this chapter therefore examine the various understandings of multiculturalism and civic nation-building by discussing the social scientific debates and theories concerned with the models.

To a large extent, this chapter is a discussion of conceptual frameworks that customarily haunt research directed to cultural identity and to identify what I mean precisely when referencing the frameworks. These include all the usual suspects; nation, nationalism, civic nation, civic nation-building, ethnic group, ethnicity, ethnic culture. As I have already stated, I seek to prioritize one specific framework, civic nation-building, as the primary lens from which I interpret my observations. With that in mind, it is necessary to clarify my use of language concerning the terms “civic nation,” “civic nationalism,” and “civic nation-building.” So far, I employ “civic nation-building” as my primary conceptual term, which some readers may consider as a competing concept with or even analogous to “civic nationalism.” Although I discuss the concepts at length below, I provide at the outset a brief statement of how I differentiate these terms and why I ultimately prefer “civic nation-building” as the underlying concept generating the particular social interactions most meaningful to my case study.

To begin with, a “civic nation” describes an aggregate of people or “citizens,” whereas civic nationalism and civic nation-building imply a possible set of actions in which citizens might engage. I would also add that belonging to a “civic nation” requires an aggregate of individuals to place value in their status as citizens in a state going beyond simply possessing citizenship. This point about value and citizenship is extraordinarily critical to my study, as the extent to which cultural minorities value or undervalue their citizenship in the Russian or Kazakhstani states represents the engine driving the political action among state authorities under consideration here. As stated above, civic nationalism and civic nation-building both imply
certain actions that members of the civic nation undertake. The concepts may indeed coincide as analogous depending upon the social actor engaged in them. For example, a state authority designing a political project for the sake of integrating cultural minorities as citizens of the state is both undertaking an act of civic nation-building and expressing civic nationalism through that act. However, a cultural minority citizen who signifies allegiance to the state through some action or communication is not civic nation-building, but is expressing a degree of civic nationalism. Hence, the construction and execution of state-supported political projects meant to enfranchise cultural minorities constitutes civic nation-building, whereas the expression and acceptance of that enfranchisement among both cultural minority and titular state citizens constitutes civic nationalism. With these distinctions in mind, I return to my consideration of multiculturalism and civic nation-building and discuss the components of this chapter.

I carry out this exercise of comparison not to delineate the usefulness of multiculturalism for my analysis of the post-socialist societies under consideration, because I ultimately argue the core conceptual nature of multiculturalism renders itself unsuitable for my case study. Rather, my intent is to demonstrate how the primary differences between multiculturalism and civic nation-building support an understanding of the latter’s uniqueness, a thorough discussion of which is lacking in the social sciences, but also crucially necessary for my analytical purposes. In addition, given that some observers of nationalities’ policies in post-Soviet states have employed multiculturalism conceptually in their studies, I argue that asserting civic nation-building as a theoretical and conceptual tool is urgently required as a corrective to the misapplication of multiculturalism. In her fascinating study of folklore in the Republic of Moldova, Jennifer Cash

6 For some examples of academic literature attempting to apply multiculturalism to post-Soviet contexts, while ignoring socialist attempts to integrate minorities, see Vytis Čiubrinskas (2010), Nadezhda Lebedeva and Alexander Tatarko (2013), and Bill Taylor (1992).
remarks on how the discourse of multiculturalism fails to correspond to “the most local dimensions of intercultural exchange” in post-socialist states. A primary reason for this is that multiculturalist discourses and policies often fail to recognize previous efforts to manage ethnic diversity (Cash 2014: 10-11). Given the robust nature of Soviet nationalities policies and their influence in the countries of the former Soviet Union, ignoring their contributions invites a misperception of the contemporary state of post-socialist ethnic pluralism.

In drawing this comparison, I am not casting certain states as multiculturalist in nature and others as civic nations. On the contrary, I do not believe that such pure types exist in any state. What I do assume, however, is that certain states’ political discourses concerning ethnic minorities may be primarily multicultural or civic nation-building in nature. There is certainly empirical evidence demonstrating that many post-Soviet states employ civic nation-building discourse (much of which I cite in this dissertation) when communicating their nationalities policies to domestic and international audiences, while countries in the West tend to use multiculturalist discourses for similar purposes. This discursive dichotomy operating between the liberal West and the countries of post-socialist Europe may have arisen through what Kymlicka identifies as a scarcity of theoretical material demonstrating permissible forms of majority nation-building within liberal democracies. According to Kymlicka, majority nation-building in liberal democracies involves the integration of all citizens into modern society and its dominant culture, which include common academic, economic, and political institutions, in order to efficiently function. Hence, Kymlicka contends that the countries of the liberal West are “nation-builders” by nature and by necessity favor the cultural vernaculars of majority ethnic groups as the tools of maintaining and administering the affairs of the state. At the same time, as the
stewards of liberal democracies, state authorities must legitimize the nation-building longings of their ethnic minority citizens due to the ethics of modern liberalism (Kymlicka 1998).

Given this disjuncture between empirical cultural realities and challenges of Western states, and the internationalist requirement of adherence to liberal norms pertaining to treatment of minorities, Kymlicka contends that Western political theorists have failed to develop any theories describing permissible ethnic minority or majority nation-building within liberal democracies (Kymlicka 1998). I suggest that this lack of theorization of nation-building in the West, and subsequent crystallization into political discourses, may represent the niche multiculturalism has occupied in Western political discourse and subsequent policies pertaining to ethnic minorities. Evidence for this is implicit in Kymlicka’s own argument pertaining to cultural integration that ethnic minorities must undertake in Western states (in this case immigrants). Accordingly, immigrants often demand “multicultural” policies allowing them to actively maintain their ethnic cultures as they integrate into institutions operating in the majority languages and cultural vernaculars (Kymlicka 1998). I also argue later in the chapter that there are historical reasons for multiculturalism’s traction in the West. If Kymlicka is correct about majority nation-building discourses’ absence in the liberal West, one might suppose the deficiency is due to the international scrutiny majority nation-building discourse might invite, especially when authorities can represent themselves as practitioners of multiculturalism, rather than nation-building, for the benefit of their ethnic minorities. The implicit assumption Kymlicka therefore makes in terms of the differences between multiculturalism and nation-building is that multiculturalism is inherently not a nation-building exercise. What then, according to Kymlicka, is nation-building?
Kymlicka describes the nation-building approach prevalent in liberal democracies as “thin integration,” requiring institutional and linguistic integration for minorities while authorities encourage them to maintain their distinctive practices associated with custom, religion, and lifestyle. For Kymlicka, most liberal democracies have undertaken this style of “liberal nation-building,” which differentiates itself from “civic nationalism” in that it allows for a measure of thin integration, which, he argues, civic nationalism precludes. On the flipside of these supposed liberal accommodations of minority rights within Western nation-building practices are what Kymlicka identifies as the “thick nation-building” taking place in former socialist countries in Eastern Europe. Thick nation-building approaches are accordingly more exclusionary and coercive vis-à-vis ethnic minorities than what typically occurs in Western democracies (Kymlicka 1998). Through his contrast of thick and thin styles of nation-building, Kymlicka suggests that civic nation-building somewhat resembles “thickness,” given its apparent low tolerance for minority cultural traditions, which may discourage a full embrace of civic, state-based forms of culture.

I argue that while Kymlicka offers one perspective on civic nation-building, some countries in Eastern Europe and the former Soviet Union have offered a different variant, which socialist ethnic minorities’ policies have significantly informed. For example, the Soviet Union maintained a rich discursive tradition of simultaneous minority and state-based nation-building (and passed the tradition on to its successors). As a result, possessing a contemporary, liberal discourse of equitable nation-building has always been the case for the citizens of post-Soviet states. Nonetheless, political commentators (including Kymlicka) tend to cast these countries as practitioners of the thick, ethnic nationalist approach to dealing with minorities. This positionality serves to conflate Western liberalist ethics and capitalism as competitors to a joined
sense of conservatism and ethnic nationalism associated with former and post-communist countries. Certainly, there has been a fair amount of ethnic conflict in former socialist countries from the Balkans to more recent events in Ukraine and the Caucasus to seemingly justify this dichotomy (frequent and recent examples of ethnic conflict happening in the liberal West notwithstanding). Nonetheless, this liberal versus conservative casting of ethnic minorities’ policies in the West versus the post-socialist East is pervasive and has encouraged copious demands for liberal interventions from both post-socialist authorities and Western observers. Proposed interventions associate communist and post-communist nationalities policies with cultural homogenizing tendencies, which observers and practitioners conclude might be overcome with the imposition of multiculturalist models (Kymlicka 1998).

The assumptions inhabiting this West versus East dichotomy in relation to ethnic minorities’ policies represent the core problematic for the application of multiculturalist discourse in the post-socialist East. A primary purpose of this chapter’s detailed discussion of both multiculturalist and civic nation-building’s central theoretical conceits is to understand the aggregate of political philosophies, colonial interventions, ethnographic publications, and governmental actions serving to buttress the dichotomy. Ultimately, I argue a dichotomy indeed exists, which certain discourses growing out of western colonialism and Russian imperialism have historically nurtured. The dichotomy I am suggesting, however, is not represented through liberal multiculturalism of the West versus the ethnic nationalist conservatism that some observers associate with the former communist East. Rather, past socialist countries (especially those splitting from the Soviet Union) possess in their arsenals a nation-building discourse much more civic in nature than any political philosophy arising in the West. The nature and origin of the post-socialist nation-building discourse differs wildly from how Kymlicka and his colleagues
have conceptualized or considered concepts such as civic nation and civic nationalism. In spite of this steep variance, liberal advocates for employing multiculturalist policy in post-communist Europe and Eurasia often strictly associate Russia and its neighbors with ethnic nationalism. Since the introduction of civil society with the dismantling of European communism in 1990s, agents of Western civil society have engaged in numerous attempts to employ multiculturalist discourses and policies designed to counter tensions arising from supposed ethnic nationalism.

In her discussion of Western civil society’s persistent influence in the former Soviet Union, Jennifer Cash suggests that key multiculturalists, such as Kymlicka and Bhiku Parekh, have significantly directed the course of social policy reform in post-Soviet states (Cash 2014: 10). Instances of multiculturalist policies employed in the former communist world that Cash cites include various minority language policies (Kymlicka and Grin 2003), several Soros Foundation programs (Tishkov and Filippova 2003), and the work of the Canadian Center for Foreign Policy Review Program (Opalski 1998). Some Western liberal interpretations of, and prescriptions for, the recent crisis in Ukraine, and Russia’s involvement in those events, nicely illustrate the Western drive to employ multiculturalism in the former Soviet Union. To cite a recent example from early 2017, the Atlantic Council published an article entitled, “Multiculturalism is the Answer to Ukraine’s Identity Crisis.” In this publication, the author references the burgeoning sense of “civic identity” currently percolating in Ukraine, which has accordingly posed a challenge to Putin’s attempts to cast Ukraine as an ethnic nationalist society intent on disenfranchising ethnic Russians and other minorities. Ignoring decades of liberal nation-building discourses, with which the people of Ukraine have interacted since the height of the Russian Empire, the author advocates the employment of multiculturalist discourse and policy as a means to further “nurture” the growing sense of Ukrainian civic identity. What
exactly “nurturing through multiculturalism” means in a substantive sense remains, however, opaque (Dickinson 2017).

I argue that the underlying assumption of this perspective stems from the West’s festishization of a long-entrenched ethnic nationalism present in the Soviet Union and its progenies. What this perspective fails to recognize, however, is the extent to which any contemporary sense of Ukrainian civic identity might have arisen through past Russian imperial, Soviet, and post-Soviet political discourses intent on nation-building. Given the lengths to which Western civil society has attempted to introduce multiculturalism in post-socialist contexts, I interrogate the concept to understand what exactly these advocates are attempting to employ, and how their efforts differ from attempts to nation-build using other discourses. Contributing to a model of how authorities formulate and employ policy to enfranchise ethnic minorities, the materials in this chapter design a portrait of the legacy and current course of nation-building in Kazakhstan and Russia. Attempts at nation-building in these countries (and other post-socialist states), however, face simultaneous competition from Western civil society, touting “liberal practices” such as multiculturalism. Understanding the conceptual and theoretical differences between civic nation-building in the former Soviet Union and multiculturalism is therefore paramount to understanding the pressures under which the post-Soviet authorities in question engage the question of social policy.

In order to provide a thorough consideration of how the ideas of “nation” and “ethnic group” conceptually inform the processes of civic nation-building and the creation and implementation of ethnic minority social policies occurring in Russia and Kazakhstan, I employ the following section to theoretically consider nationalism and ethnicity. Terms such as nation, nationalism, ethnicity, and ethnic group possess a multiplicity of meanings depending upon one’s
field of interpretation. In order to avoid ambiguity, I explain my understanding of nations and ethnic groups using the theories of Anthony Smith. For the purpose of building a theoretical understanding of civic nations and nationalism, I then examine debates concerned with the civic nation as a political concept found in the work of Smith, Walker Connor, Hans Kohn, Will Kymlicka, and some of the major constructivist theories of nations and nationalism.

Next, I turn to multiculturalism – a concept that seemingly mirrors Soviet and post-Soviet policies regarding cultural plurality. For example, both multiculturalist and Soviet nationalities’ policies desire loyal minority citizens, while simultaneously striving for the preservation of minority cultural traditions and behaviors. Yet, discourses communicating nationalities’ policies in Russia and Kazakhstan rarely, if ever, evoke the term multiculturalism. There are several conceivable reasons for the absence of multiculturalism as a political concept among Soviet and post-Soviet nation-builders. Firstly, multiculturalism is a relatively new concept and set of political policies (especially compared to the legacy of Soviet nationalities’ policies) and is most often employed in Europe, Australia, and North America. An additional concern is that some critics and political figures in the former Soviet Union consider the adoption of multiculturalist policies a Western, neo-colonial imposition necessary to join various western-based institutions such as the European Union. A final problem with multiculturalism is the numerous interpretations applied to it. The concept usually carries multiple meanings dependent upon the

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7 For examples of Soviet nationalities’ policies, see Terry Martin (2001); Francine Hirsch (2005); Yuri Slezkine (1996). For examples of multiculturalist policies, see Fred R. Myers (2002); Elizabeth Povinelli (2002); Michel Wieviorka (2000); Giuliana B. Prato (2009: 1-19).
8 For examples of multiculturalist policies, see Fred R. Myers (2002); Elizabeth Povinelli (2002); Michel Wieviorka (2000); Giuliana B. Prato (2009: 1-19); Pnina Werbner (2003); E. San Juan, Jr. (1991); Susanne Wessendorf (2008).
9 Vladimir Putin has arisen as one of the leading critics of multiculturalism, dismissing it as a failure, especially as it has been applied in Western European contexts. For a description of Putin’s position on multiculturalism and nation building, see Helge Blakkisrud (2016).
environment within which it is used, with particular mutability between social scientists, government policy makers, and the culturally plural public. As a result, many post-socialist authorities ignore multiculturalism as a relevant political discourse (Muhic 2004). However, as I illustrate in the opening section, the devotees of multiculturalism persevere to import the concept as a political philosophy and practice into post-socialist contexts. Developing a conceptual and theoretical portrait of what exactly the agents of Western civil society are attempting to impose represents the intent of this section.

Following my discussion of multiculturalism, I consider its conceptual merits versus civic nation-building and argue that closely examining multiculturalism contributes to a richer understanding of civic nation-building. I then examine the core conceit of this chapter – a conceptual theorization of civic nation-building as employed in post-Soviet states. This line of inquiry leads into an investigation of the diverging discourses present among Western colonial efforts (mainly the British colonization of southern Africa and South Asia) and imperial Russia’s conquest of territories outside of European Russia. I argue here that colonial and imperial discourses led directly into, and are implicit within, multiculturalist and civic nation-building discourses. With this historical background in mind, I closely examine the conceptual incongruities multiculturalism (in the forms that Western civil society has attempted to impose) presents to post-Soviet political contexts. For the purpose of clarity, I reiterate the point that my explanation of civic nation-building as a discourse and set of practices applies exclusively to the countries of the former Soviet Union in so far as it differentiates itself from multiculturalism through distinct historical influences and intents.

In the chapter’s final sections, I examine the development of nationalities’ policies in the Soviet Union and its successor states by first considering the Soviet korenizatsiia program and
then turn to a general discussion about the contemporary state of civic nation-building in Russia and Kazakhstan. Developed primarily from Lenin’s and Stalin’s ideas about ethnic nations, *korenizatsiia* formed the bedrock of Soviet nationalities’ policy. Although Stalin discontinued the program in the 1930s, understandings and practices attached to it persisted up to the demise of the Soviet Union and continue to inform state policies for its successors and subsequently contemporary civic nation-building. With the legacy of *korenizatsiia* in mind, I briefly review the nature of the current nationalities’ policies present in Russia and Kazakhstan. I argue here that Kazakhstan possesses a much more coherent policy than Russia through the development of a statewide institution identified as the Assembly of the Peoples of Kazakhstan. I now turn to a broader conceptual discussion concerning nations, nationalism and ethnic groups.

**Theoretical interpretations of civic and ethnic nations and nation-building**

The urge to create and maintain a civic nation – an official state-based identity incorporating all of the citizens of the state regardless of ethnicity, race, gender, or social class – is a prominent strategy for political leaders to establish hegemony in multiethnic states. What exactly, however, is a “nation,” of any sort and what forms its constituent parts? In order to clarify the composition of nations, Anthony Smith differentiates state citizenship from ethnic membership by positing the existence of two nations in the context of the state, a civic nation and an ethnic nation. According to this formulation, people with ethnic ties emphasizing elements of kinship, customs, and languages form the components of ethnic nations, while the formation of states presupposes civic nations created through the administration of capitalism, centralized government, and the secularization of education and culture. According to Smith, therefore, membership in the civic nation relies upon citizenship in the democratic state, while ethnic
nations may exist within the civic nation composed of people linked together through culture and kinship. This perception of nations suggests that one may belong to two nations simultaneously – as both a citizen of a state and a member of an ethnic group within the state (Smith 1996).

I employ Smith’s understanding of civic and ethnic nations largely because of its resonance with the political context of my case study. Whether intentional or not, Smith’s descriptions identify a dichotomy of groups constituted either through cultural or political identity within the context of the state, reflective of the manner by which Soviet and post-Soviet officials have imagined the identities of their state’s constituents. This conceptualization has proven a more useful lens for my purposes than those ideas strictly grounded in anthropology that I explore in the discussion below. Before I engage anthropological thought regarding civic nations, I explore some notable contributions to the concept from other disciplines.

Walker Connor, for example, disputes discourses on the nation that improperly conflate its members with the citizens of states. While Connor agrees with Smith’s understanding of ethnic nations, he argues that the notion of the civic nation inaccurately associates the nation with all citizens in a state whether or not they maintain mutual cultural identifications. “Nation-building” projects among state citizens will therefore inevitably fail because the term nation applies exclusively to populations sharing deep ethno-cultural ties (as in Smith’s ethnic nations). Those cultural ties which successfully unify “true nations” are unavailable to create common feelings of togetherness among all state citizens (except of course in instances where the state and nation are truly aligned, such as in World War II Germany and Japan). As a result, civic nation builders are hard pressed to create national discourses sufficiently compelling for the population to uniformly pledge its loyalty to the state (Connor 1993: 97-99). Similarly, Will Kymlicka’s critique of civic nation-building frames national membership as entirely dependent
upon adherence to democratic principles, ignoring the problems that arise in multiethnic communities with integrating diverse publics (Kymlicka 1998). Both Connor and Kymlicka’s suggestion that ethnic and civic nations conceptually fail to cohere for state subjects certainly holds for many cases, as the fracturing of various states along cultural lines demonstrates. Numerous studies (in addition to my research) demonstrate, however, that governing strategies aiming to unify ethnically diverse state populations with civic nation-building discourses persist.10 This implies the importance of attending to discourses and institutions dedicated to civic nation-building.

While Smith imagines the complementary nature of civic and ethnic nations and Connor contests the viability of civic nations, other theorists argue that civic and ethnic nations are two distinct phenomena that exist only in separate political contexts depending upon the presence of certain social institutions in those contexts. Hans Kohn argues that the rise of nationalism in the West was always civic and transpired at the same time as concepts such as individual liberty, democracy and civic participation became established public practices in Western European states. Kohn posited that these values formed the unifying principle of the civic nation, especially in Great Britain and France, where civic institutions were strongly established. In other countries (especially in Southern and Eastern Europe) with weak civic participation and institutions, alternative unifying discourses prevailed as tools to establishing national identities. These discourses relied upon cultural forms such as folk beliefs, symbols, and cultural identities – the essential characteristics of ethnic nations (Kuzio 2002).

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10 See for example, Mary Crain (1990); Dru Gladney (1994); Elizabeth A. Povinelli (2004); Terry Martin (2001: 15).
Similar to Kohn’s view that unifying forces other than ethnic culture potentially guide the formation of nationalism, some constructivist theorists of the nation (many of whom are anthropologists) argue that modern economic and political forces firmly control the rise of nationalism and the nation. According to this body of work, the political, economic, and technological contexts of modernity represent the primary forces constructing the nation, rather than exclusively cultural factors such as languages, traditions and customs.\textsuperscript{11} Ernest Gellner, for example, suggests that the formation of nations occurs under the conditions of social mobility and instability characteristic of early capitalism. Using the industrial revolution in Western Europe as an exemplar, Gellner argues that a nation forms when agricultural societies transform into industrialized states. During the process of industrialization, the development of a highly mobile, educated, and literate society produced nationalism – the organization of human groups in a state into a large, centrally educated, and culturally homogeneous unit (Ernest Gellner 1983: 34). While this constructivist position does not explicitly argue that such modern social organization creates “civic nations,” Gellner maintains that when the culture of a society becomes standardized and homogeneous (under the conditions of industrialization and technological advance), individuals willingly and often passionately identify with the preexisting political unit. Under these conditions, nations exist through a common material culture and its convergence with the dominant political unit – the state (Ernest Gellner 1983: 54).

More recent views characterize the nation as a category of political practice rather than as a concrete community of co-ethnics with a coherent sense of collective identity. Rogers Brubaker, for example, refers to the nation not as a group, but as a category in which political

\textsuperscript{11} For the primary constructivist views on nations and nationalism in addition to Gellner, see Benedict Anderson (1983); John Breuilly (1982); Miroslav Hroch (1985); Eric Hobsbawm (1983).
actors practice possible variants of nationalism to meet political objectives (Brubaker 1996: 16-17). For Brubaker, state authorities evoke civic nationalism when attempting to assert the status and welfare of the state’s citizens for the purpose of legitimizing their authority and creating political hegemony (Brubaker 1996: 11, 27). Once hegemony is firmly established, citizens may exercise civic nationalism simply by recognizing the legitimacy of the regimes’ authority and policies. According to this conceptualization, civic nationalism exists through the naturalization of normative political acts (such as voting, or attending a special interest political meeting) instead of an explicit expression of politicized cultural identities (Brubaker 1996: 84).

Brubaker also accounts for ethnic nationalism and the multiethnic dimension of civic national states. For Brubaker, ethnic nationalism occurs when cultural minorities in the state pursue their own political interests by utilizing “nation”-oriented idioms, practices, and possibilities that are continuously available in modern cultural and political life (Brubaker 1996: 5-10). While Brubaker sees the political mobilization of cultural minorities in states as the expression of ethnic nationalisms, others totally reject ethnic nationalism as originating from homogeneous cultural communities. John Breuilly, for example views ethnic nationalism not in terms of cultural minorities, but as the actions of opposition politicians seeking to gain or maintain political privileges by making claims for subordinate groups whom they frame as members of minority cultural polities (Breuilly 1982: 375). In this view, ethnic minority nationalism exists devoid of the cultural idioms and practices Brubaker describes and is instead employed through political discourses. In any case, nations and nationalism according to these theorists arise as strategies that political elites institutionalize within the workings of the state system and utilize for the purpose of legitimizing their political authority.
Brubaker describes civic nations forming when state elites insist that both its minority and majority groups collectively belong to the “nation” of the state. In this way, state authorities recognize the political claims of ethnic nations and respect their differences, but institutionalize a more encompassing state-wide sense of national belonging requiring only citizenship (Brubaker 1996: 3, 27). According to Emil’ Pain, genuine civic nations require a pool of like cultural values beyond collective citizenship and ethnic cultural tenets to create a single civic identity, or what Elizabeth Povinelli refers to as “monoculturalism” (discussed at length below). For Pain, these collective cultural values, whatever they may be, replace folkish, ethnic cultural characteristics and supposedly transform the various minority groups in the state into one unified population of citizens (Pain 2009). Although, according to Brubaker, the architects of civic nations must insure that minority cultural characteristics are respected and recognized, the modern, liberal political and economic institutions of the state work to fashion a unifying culture (Pain 2009).

With these ideas about the civic nation and civic nation-building in mind, I now make a few conceptual statements to signify my underlying understanding and usage of these terms throughout this dissertation. As I understand it, a civic nation is a political construct, and as such exists as a style of discourse some regimes might adopt to encourage individuals, no matter what their cultural origin, to reify their allegiance to citizenship in a culturally plural state. The creation and promotion of civic national discourses to accomplish this outcome, the subsequent policies they engender, and local authorities’ attempts to carry out such policies constitute civic nation-building. What is consistent among the multiple approaches to civic nation-building is the usage of state and subsidiary institutions to both construct the messages relative to the civic nation and develop and execute state and local-level public action in support of the messages.
The perpetuation of messages and the facilitation of public actions represent therefore the process of civic nation-building.

As a necessary comparative, I offer an illustration of what I consider ethnic nation-building (versus civic nation-building). The purpose is to justify my later use of the Russian term *natsional'nost*' as an equivalent to “ethnic group” and my employment of the term ethnicness throughout this text. As I reference above, Smith identifies ethnic groups with the term “ethnic nation,” the implication of which is that the terms “ethnic group” and “ethnic nation” are equivalent in the context of the state, a political space where multiple ethnic nations potentially exist. For ethnic nations, I see two possible approaches to nation-building relative to the two positions on ethnic nationalisms that Brubaker and Breuilly take.

Brubaker prioritizes the term “national” whether referencing cultural majorities or minorities, because he sees that the use of “national” implies a demand for state power or recognition (Brubaker 1996: 6). Brubaker’s identifies these demands and political-related actions as nationalizing nationalisms and minority nationalisms. Nationalizing nationalism involves the use of state power to promote the majority nation’s political interests. In this sense, the members of majority nations consider themselves the stewards of the state, their leaders maintain political control over the state, and they may use their power of rule to provide state resources primarily for the benefit of their cultural constituents and to maintain sovereignty vis-à-vis other states (Brubaker 1996: 103-04). Hence, instances when political decisions are made, policies created, and those policies are publicly employed to support the maintenance and strengthening of power among the cultural majority for the benefit of its members constitute ethnic nation-building.

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12 The point regarding the maintenance of sovereignty is from Breuilly (1982: 374).
Minority ethnic nation-building is similarly an exercise in state identity politics but exists as a political force separate from central state mechanisms through its alignment with a minority cultural constituency (Hobsbawm 1991: 90). As Hobsbawm frames the phenomenon, individuals (often linked to institutions within states) may generalize, extend, and popularize certain group social ties and vernaculars exclusive of official state apparatuses to meet various political objectives (Hobsbawm 1991: 47). Breuilly suggests that this process represents a possible recourse for educated individuals, whom leaders of the state’s national cultural majority have excluded, by drawing upon adherents of group-based cultural generalizations to seek political support (Breuilly, 1982: 375). Hobsbawm identifies this disenfranchised group as members of the “lower middle strata,” who, due to their lower position along the social stratum of the state, are highly attracted to the precepts of ethnic nationalism (Hobsbawm 1991: 118). For these individuals, political concessions from the state made to them as representatives of an ethnic nation (whether in the form of national autonomy or independence) would elevate their political standings (Hobsbawm 1991: 122). Any politicized efforts undertaken in the context of the state to raise the social consciousness of individuals and their corresponding communities to consider themselves members of an ethnic nation unique from the cultural majority constitute the practice of minority ethnic nation-building.

A great deal of ethnographic literature exemplifies these classic ideas regarding ethnic nationalism,13 but even more recent contributions nicely reflect what I identify as ethnic nation-building with a stronger focus on how the complexities of social life become reproduced as ethnic. Keith Brown, for example, focuses on revolutionary movements among 20th Century

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13 See for example, Richard Handler (1988); Michael Herzfeld (1982); Uli Linke (1990); Viranjini Munasinghe (2001); Dru Gladney (1994).
rural Macedonians and is keen to identify the pre-existing local dispositions, roles, and practices of collective loyalty and action that revolutionary leaders directed into narratives of autonomy and liberation to create a new image of Macedonian selfhood (Brown 2013: 12). Brown’s novel approach identifies local “micro-practices” that leaders harnessed among existing circuits of mobility, communication, and the dynamics of rural life to energize insurgency against the Ottoman state (Brown 2013: 69-73). Another recent illustration of ethnic nation-building (albeit from the angle of the political majority) arises from Jennifer Cash’s work on folkloric performance in Moldova. Cash argues that authorities employ models of local “cultural authenticity” to express concepts such as kinship and neighborly relations from rural Moldova to exemplify a consistent cultural vernacular of the state. Cash insists that while establishing “authentic” ethnic folklore was a means by which Moldovan authorities culturally distinguished the state in the aftermath of the Soviet breakup, they have balanced the emphasis on ethnic culture with the primacy of rural practices (Cash 2016).

These accounts of ethnic nation-building starkly contrast with Brubaker, Feischmidt, Fox, and Grancea’s understanding of ethnic behavior, which they see to be largely unconscious and unmarked (Brubaker, Feischmidt, Fox, and Grancea 2006: 207-08). The above literature and my ethnographic observations suggest instances in which certain “micro-practices,” such as behaviors, acts, expressions, and products become marked, conscious, and replicated as ethnic. These occurrences of ethnic understanding and action happen exclusively within the context of state politics and are facilitated through various institutions and their physical spaces (whether revolutionary organizations, state commissions, or local centers). I refer to these marked, institutionally influenced micro-practices in the aggregate as “ethnicness.” Given my insistence on contextualizing ethnicness as a phenomenon transpiring in the context of the state, I argue that
the Russian term *natsional’nost’* effectively functions as an analog of ethnic group.

*Natsional’nost’* is therefore a concept that establishes a framework to understand cultural groups in the context of the state, and their behavior is reflective of interaction with institutions existing within the state. With these concepts firmly established, I briefly return to civic nation-building.

My interest in the use of civic nation-building as an analytical tool stems from the frequency with which it arises in the political discourses of post-Soviet countries. However, I find the theoretical literature engaging civic nation-building lacking in terms of fortifying the concept as an effective lens for analyzing the political discourses and practices it employs, especially compared to the significant elaboration and theoretical strength of multiculturalism. I believe we gain stronger insight into the capacity of civic nation-building theory as an analytical tool by comparing it with multiculturalism as a supporting concept and theoretical apparatus, which is likewise concerned with the challenges of cultural plurality in the context of the state.

**Multiculturalist discourses: theories, sources, and intents**

The fundamental theoretical texts in the social sciences that inform my understanding of multiculturalism stem primarily from Michel Wieviorka (2000), Terence Turner (1993), and Will Kymlicka (1995, 2002). My particular interest in these works arises from how their theoretical attentiveness expresses marginal concern for social inequities in the policy and practice of multiculturalism. These examinations consistently treat multiculturalist movements and policies concerning the social divisions between groups in a society as exclusively cultural in nature, thereby avoiding the social forces that actually maintain economic, political, and other inequities existing among sections of a given society. I argue that multiculturalism’s failure to adequately address these inequities in both theory and policy occurs in part due to western colonialist
legacies. The influences of such legacies represent a primary difference in approaches to effectively engage minority cultural communities existing between states where authorities have employed multiculturalist policies and the countries of the former Soviet Union. Given its general lack of application to addressing inequity, critics of multiculturalism devote attention to this avoidance in multiculturalist political discourse.

In her essay about difference feminism, the poet Katha Pollitt effectively reveals the weaknesses of the multiculturalist discourses. Pollitt argues that multiculturalism looks everywhere for its explanatory force (such as biology, psychology, and culture) except economics. Were multiculturalists to address the differences between groups in a society in terms of economic positions, she suggests, their discourses would move from the realm of feel-good cultural pride and into the realm of political struggle over the distribution of resources, justice, and money (Pollitt 1992). Pollitt’s argument raises the question as to why exactly the multiculturalist discourses have largely avoided that push into a more substantive discussion about economic inequalities. Instead, liberal supporters of multiculturalism tend to concentrate on the protection of cultural rights and addressing how those might conflict with universal rights (Werbner 2003). Beyond the academic debates, the fundamental forces of multiculturalism as practice do not stem from urges to rectify social inequalities (as Pollitt argues they should). Rather, they most often address the need to create loyal citizens dedicated to the processes of capitalist production among the masses in culturally diverse states. In this sense, multiculturalist discourses certainly engage economics. However, for policy makers, the implication of multiculturalism on the economy is less about addressing inequalities and more about promoting efficient economic production and a democratic society.
Whatever the significant forces and interests powering them might be, Elizabeth Povinelli argues that “multicultural discourses, apparatuses and imaginaries” usually arise as either “state, public, or capital” in nature (Povinelli 2004: 29). Following this argument, multiculturalist political policies and discourses strive “to defuse the struggle for liberation waged against the modern liberal state and recuperate these struggles as moments in which the future of the nation and its core institutions and values are ensured rather than shaken” (Povinelli 2004: 29).

Therefore, I argue that multiculturalism as a political phenomenon regularly seeks to create and sustain citizens among those the state considers minorities (and hence not “natural” or “titular” citizens of the state). In addition, the core nature of multiculturalist discourses tends to elevate the importance of cultural difference above social equity while simultaneously attempting to align the interests, behaviors, and values of ethnic minorities with those of the state and its economic production. Jonathan Friedman (2000) as well as Bourdieu and Wacquant (1999) have made a similar argument that liberal and neo-liberal concerns representing primarily a class of “globalized postcolonial elites” have driven multiculturalist policies emphasizing cultural particularism (Friedman 2000). It is members of this elite, according to Bourdieu and Wacquant, who control the forms under which individuals seek to have their collective existence and membership recognized by the state” (Bourdieu and Wacquant 1999). Multiculturalist discourses from this perspective therefore systematically draw attention away from the inequalities many ethnic minorities experience and toward elevating cultural differences (Schwartzman and Moreas Dias da Silva 2012). I provide two ethnographic examples to exemplify this argument.

The imposition of a common civic responsibility upon a minority public combined with a suspicion of minority cultures can conceivably produce tensions within societies influencing their multiculturalist discourses and policies. With such tensions in mind, Povinelli illustrates the
ethics of Australian multiculturalist discourses. On one hand, they express the state’s aversion to past misdeeds in relation to ethnic minorities and its intentions to rectify those misdeeds to benefit those who suffered under them and their descendants. On the other hand, multiculturalist discourses in Australia maintain a concern for how minority behaviors obstruct capitalist economic flows and contradict the norms of the majority culture. In such cases, state authorities engineer civic identity through multiculturalist policies and programs to produce higher levels of economic rationality and productivity, as well as deference to majority morality (Povinelli 2004: 18). Therefore, as state authorities drive to rationalize the economic and civic behaviors of their ethnic minorities, they simultaneously attempt to facilitate minorities’ loyalty to the state through celebrating those cultural values and behaviors that members of the majority find most appropriate (Povinelli 2004: 28). Povinelli shows that this position is especially pronounced in the context of land titles granted to Australian aborigines who demonstrate an acceptable style of indigenous cultural knowledge and behavior. Povinelli argues that multiculturalist legal reforms designed to provide benefits for Aborigines afflicted in the aftermath of colonialism and through the harmful effects of capitalism are riddled with contingencies that many indigenous individuals and institutions applying for these benefits cannot meet (Povinelli 2004: 38).

For example, an Australian high court ruled that native land title exists for Aborigines only in cases when they can demonstrate a genuine adherence to customary law and traditional cultural behaviors. However, what exactly constitutes “authentic” cultural behaviors and understandings is not so easily quantifiable for Aborigines, as it is often left undefined by authorities (Povinelli 2004: 45, 51-52). The inequitable nature of Australia’s multicultural policies becomes especially pronounced when the economic stakes increase for non-aboriginal authorities who then call upon indigenous persons and groups to provide impossibly detailed
accounts of local social structures and cultural beliefs. When authorities deem indigenous knowledge and behavior insufficient (which they often do), then the special benefits granted to indigenous persons give way to discourses about equal rights for all groups. The state therefore recasts its inability or unwillingness to address economic inequity for minorities as the Aborigines’ failure to demonstrate state-constructed understandings of appropriate indigenous culture (Povinelli 2004: 56-57). Povinelli paints a picture of Australia where the benefits of multiculturalist policy are contingent upon ethnic minorities’ abilities to perform the necessary cultural attributes in order to qualify for material benefits and legal concessions. Thus, authorities responsible for multiculturalist policies seek to define the nature of “genuine” native culture and portray the extent to which natives practice it in acceptable forms.

How does multiculturalism then achieve its objectives in this seemingly failed attempt to provide restitution through multiculturalist policy? This process of providing material benefits with strict contingency upon performing acceptable modes of cultural behaviors solves the tensions related to economic rationality and cultural propriety inherent in Australian multiculturalism. Through promising economic benefits contingent upon appropriate performance, this particular multiculturalist policy of land restitution becomes a didactic exercise – aboriginal Australians learn those features of aboriginal culture deemed morally appropriate and authentic, and how to perform them, in exchange for those material resources necessary for them to become rational economic actors. A great deal is at stake for Natives to adhere to the state-approved mode of aboriginalism. According to Povinelli, for example, if Aborigines perform their cultural and economic duties too much or not enough they risk losing the resources the state offers them through its multiculturalist policies (Povinelli 2004: 189). What is also important here for my purposes is how the state portrays its relationship with Aborigines for the
Australian public. For Povinelli, the state embraces an ideologically constructed image of Aboriginal “ancient laws,” as a means to produce social harmony through Natives’ contemporary adherence to those laws subsequently qualifying them for material resources from the state (Povinelli 2004: 38-39). Through this Australian discourse of multiculturalism, images arise of appropriate Aboriginal cultural practice and Natives’ subsequently reaping the benefits from it (although acquiring these benefits is often not the real outcome for Aborigines), all producing a meta-image and ideology for the public of earned restitution.

As is evident in the Australian case, multiculturalism exists as a tool authorities utilize to emphasize a common civic identity and the didactic processes necessary to achieve it, all of which authorities associate with core state institutions and appropriately expressed citizenship. The process achieves two ends – it provides cultural minorities with a pathway of morally sanctioned practices necessary to acquire material resources from the state and distracts from the systems of inequalities, disparities, and privileges often deeply entrenched within the social fabric of state society. Therefore, to idealize the core institutions of the state is to ground oneself in this civic identity, thereby expressing appropriate citizenship regardless of one’s cultural background. According then to the precepts of multiculturalism, culture is only inappropriate when it produces behavior that questions or defies the hegemony of core state institutions.

I cite one final ethnographic example demonstrating a triumph of multiculturalist interests, as I have portrayed them here, as a process of venerating state institutions and obfuscating social inequalities among cultural minorities. In her study of Swiss multiculturalist politics, Susanne Wessendorf examines how second generation Italian labor immigrants to Switzerland have mobilized to demand citizenship rights using multiculturalist discourses as an instrument for integration into Swiss society. In preparation for a Swiss national referendum
proposing wider citizenship inclusion for immigrant families, second generation Italians in Switzerland assembled and publicly circulated a discourse modeling Switzerland as a culturally diverse society strengthened by the success of its multiethnic immigrant population. Largely through electronic and printed media sources, activists employed images depicting the successful integration of second and third generation immigrants into mainstream Swiss society, including articles and photographs of economically successful ethnic minorities. The primary purpose of this campaign was to legitimize the notion that those ethnic minorities who had effectively integrated themselves into the Swiss civic culture should have access to Swiss citizenship. The campaign also intended to maintain the integrity of minority ethnic cultures and celebrate cultural diversity in Switzerland by utilizing images that demonstrated the extent to which minority cultures contribute to Swiss society (activists employed images of African hip-hop, Italian food, and Croatian masculinity to help express immigrant cultural contributions). Beyond these material characteristics, minority activists depicted members of their cultural constituencies as inherently attuned to Swiss state institutions and therefore morally prepared for full inclusion as citizens of the state.

On the face of this case, multiculturalism does not function as state-based policies or discourses, but arises organically as a discursive tool for minority activists to make a case for social inclusion in the form of citizenship. However, the discourse and the process it implies represents a highly desirable narrative for Swiss state authorities through the value it prescribes to the state, its institutions, and full incorporation into this realm for minorities. Wessendorf does point out that multiculturalism’s critics in Western Europe argue against full inclusion into the state due to the unbridgeable cultural differences existing between Europe’s minorities and majorities (as exemplified through ethnic riots and fundamentalist practitioners of Islam), which
ultimately prevent full social integration. As a counterweight to this perception, Wessendorf demonstrates how minority activists in Switzerland utilize a multiculturalist discourse celebrating core Swiss state institutions and successful minority integration into them through upward mobility and various cultural affinities existing between immigrant and Swiss culture (Wessendorf 2008). This instance of Swiss multiculturalism contributes to my broader argument about the central feature of multiculturalist discourse, policies, and practices, including referendums, legal political mobilization, and the idealized exercise of citizenship rights. As I have argued, state authorities desire ethnic minority integration into mainstream civic life that encourages the development and maintenance of “appropriate” cultural characteristics poised to smoothly facilitate efficient economic production.

It seems clear from these ethnographic considerations of Australian and European multiculturalist discourses that according to state ideology minorities naturally maintain essential differences from the majority. What’s important for the state and its multiculturalist policies is the conceptualization that cultural differences thrive, even those that may seem subversive to the majority culture, so long as they don’t interfere with proper civic behavior. I now consider two theoretical positions (Michel Foucault on power and John and Jean Comaroff on colonialism), which I argue underlie and inform the practice of multiculturalism as a public exercise undertaken through the efforts of state institutions and their authorities. I also add that Foucault’s ideas are just as relevant to civic nation-building, whereas the Comaroffs’ work denotes notable differences between multiculturalist and civic nation-building discourses and practices. I thus employ this theoretical examination to demonstrate the conceptual similarities and differences between multiculturalism and civic nation-building. Foucault’s ideas on power contribute to understanding how both modes of discourses become salient for their respective audiences.
Conversely, the Comaroffs illuminate the historical junctures at which multiculturalism diverges from civic nation-building, rendering it unique to Western styles of nation-building and most relevant to the West’s culturally plural societies.

**Theoretical underpinnings of multiculturalism and civic nation-building**

Michel Foucault suggests the core procedures of modern governance, or what he refers to as governmentality, rely upon the calculations and tactics allowing for the exercise of power among a targeted population using the apparatuses of security (Foucault 1991b). The key feature of Foucault’s principle of governmentality for my purposes arises in what he identifies as the “double movement” of state centralization occurring alongside movements of social dispersion. Foucault was thinking specifically about the social dispersion taking place through the religious dissidence of the reformation beginning in the sixteenth century (Foucault 1991b). A primary tenet of this centralization for the purpose of governing was a concern with the disposition of things among the governed, so that the outcomes necessary to meet society’s basic needs may be achieved. In this sense, the disposing of things implies employing tactics from the highest to the most local levels of governance to effectively arrange materials, institutions, people, and other resources rather than strictly imposing laws (Foucault 1991b). The social context I consider in Russia and Kazakhstan is composed of institutions, institutional workers, and their subjects, which are constantly arranging and rearranging things (and being arranged) for the sake of civic nation-building. These include the most mundane tools of culture (colored pencils, ethnic costumes, and cooking implements), as well as those things endowed with greater symbolic power such as language courses and political assemblies. In this sense, governing is primarily
focused on how to arrange and employ resources to meet the needs of a diverse population of citizens, precisely reflecting the task of civic nation-builders.

Foucault does not therefore conceptualize governmental power as a repressive mechanism, but always incorporates a process of production within the social spaces where it operates – in other words, power is inherently productive and influences the production of things among the populations it intends to control (Foucault 1984). As such, power is not simply exercised as a prohibition on those who are not in authoritative positions, but rather it invests them, is transmitted by them and through them, even as they attempt to resist it (Foucault 1991a: 26-27). This variety of authoritative power manifests itself in the cases of multicultural discourse and practice exemplified above through the forms it takes amongst the multicultural publics. As we see in both the Swiss and Australian cases, members of disenfranchised groups must embrace the discourses of power (in this case multiculturalism, but as I show in civic nation-building cases as well) to claim broader rights of citizenship within the state. In other words, they must work productively (produce things) within the structures of power imposed on them to improve their social positions and access to resources that certain sources of authority control. With Foucault’s notion of power and how its nature propagates multiculturalist discourses in mind, I consider the attraction of such discourses for sources of governmental power.

A common fallacy of multiculturalist discourse, according to Andreas Krebs, is the notion that it represents a break from the politics of exclusion inherent in late European colonialism. French and British imperial expansion undertaken from the 19th to the first few decades of the 20th centuries in Africa and Asia exemplifies the context Krebs identifies as “late colonialism (Krebs 2010).” Ideologically, according to John and Jean Comaroff, colonial social programs aimed to turn the colonized natives into the image of the colonizers for their economic
and social improvement. The ultimate outcome of such programs was the imposition of western European economic production and consumption on their colonial subjects (Comaroff and Comaroff 1992: 273-79). The Comaroffs argue that the social value European colonizers assigned the natives rested entirely on how their labor was devoted to the purpose of market production, ideally within the establishment of privatized rather than common property. In the minds of the Europeans, the value of their efforts expressed itself in the products of native labor, namely a surplus beyond which the colonized subject could consume and hence utilized as a distributable commodity in a market (Comaroff and Comaroff 1992: 246).

The notion of discursively investing colonized natives with a measure of value through a specific product of labor (namely a material surplus) is conceptually significant, as it signals what primarily divides the foundations of multiculturalism from the legacies of civic nation-building in the former Soviet Union. This colonial achievement of investing subjects with a material surplus foreshadows the discourse by which multiculturalism characterizes the value of its minority citizens. As I demonstrate with the above ethnographic examinations, the exercise of full citizenship and experience of social inclusion for cultural minorities in the West is contingent upon their successful integration with the state’s key social, political, and economic institutions. When the politics of exclusion persist in both colonial and culturally plural societies, authorities may blame (or blamed) the maintenance of inequalities on minorities’ inability or unwillingness to embrace the civic and economic values and subsequent institutions of the state (or empire). I now turn my attention in the following section to the prospects of applying multiculturalist and civic nation-building discourses to countries of the former Soviet Union.
Similar to the Western cases I discuss above, the post-Soviet societies I consider throughout this dissertation have experienced a systematic distribution of inequalities among ethnic minorities. However, unlike the West, Russian politicians have produced discourses and policies since the 1920s designed to identify and address equity for cultural minorities. Soviet and former Soviet officials have undoubtedly employed certain discourses and policies for the purpose of strengthening minorities’ sense of citizenship and bonds with the state. Lenin’s push to provide non-Russians with “national self-determination” as a strategy to facilitate their loyalty to the Soviet Union is a clear expression of one such discourse influencing what would become Soviet nationalities’ policy (Connor 1984: 30-38). The question I offer at this point is whether Soviet discourses and policies designed to address inequalities imposed on non-Russians resemble or even mirror those informed by the concepts implicit in multiculturalism. If so, do Soviet and post-Soviet attempts to enfranchise ethnic minorities and nation-build operate according to the same logic as multiculturalism and produce the same outcomes? I pose and address these questions to further demonstrate how the differences in social and historical contexts in the West and former Soviet Union illuminate the manner by which authorities employ civic nation-building in contemporary practice. This discussion is particularly relevant given the lengths to which policy influencers, such as Kymlicka, have attempted to employ multiculturalist principles to post-socialist realities.\(^{14}\) I first consider the most publically visible challenges multiculturalism presents as an application to Russia, the Soviet Union and the Commonwealth of Independent States.

\(^{14}\) See my discussion of these attempts earlier in this chapter.
Equating multiculturalism as a discourse and public policy to nationalities’ policies in the Soviet Union and its successors presents at first glance a series of problems. Until recently, Soviet and post-Soviet lawmakers and academics have only considered multiculturalism relevant to Western liberal democracies and rarely ever related it to their own political contexts, regardless of how close some post-socialist attempts to nation-build resemble Western multiculturalist efforts. Kymlicka suggests this may be the case because many post-Soviet lawmakers reject multiculturalism due to its apparent impediment to the singular cultural identity they seek to foster among their citizens (Kymlicka 2002). The dismissal of multiculturalism among post-socialist authorities is most certainly an empirical reality, however, not necessarily for the reasons Kymlicka poses. As I illustrate below, a discursive adherence to cultural pluralism has inhabited a great deal of Soviet and post-Soviet policy in Russia and Kazakhstan. The unique political and social relations, as well as historical contexts characteristic of former Soviet countries, reveal a rather distinctive set of issues regarding ethnic minorities that may not lend themselves to Western-based multiculturalist policies. For example, the Russian Empire’s colonization efforts in Siberia, the Caucasus, and Central Asia differ sharply from those undertaken by western European countries, as do the relationships Russia has historically maintained with its colonized others.

Multiculturalist policies and discourses usually assume that well-defined cultural groups exist within states with populations of ethnic minorities, and these minorities possess substantially less access to resources vis-à-vis the majority group. These assumptions, however, fail to hold within former Soviet states. For example, a significantly large number of ethnic minorities living in former Soviet countries outside of Russia are Russian, or at least what Russia

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15 For an emphatic example, see Vladimir Putin (2012).
officially identifies as “compatriots” (i.e. Russophones who are not necessarily ethnic Russians).

In the context of Russian political pressure on its less powerful neighbors, some Russians and “compatriots” find themselves in positions of power over the titular ethnic group of the state. The autonomous status and political advantages granted to ethnic Russians in Ukraine’s Crimean Peninsula (before Russia seized the territory) over other ethnic groups such as Tatars and Ukrainians represents a case in point. As Taras Kuzio argues, many Russians living in former Soviet countries outside of Russia do not consider themselves ethnic minorities at all. Rather, through the process Kuzio identifies as “empire-generated hybridity,” Russians living outside of Russia resist designation as minorities because the loss of dominance such a denigrated status would imply. In addition, a large portion of the Russian-speaking population in the former Soviet Union lacks a strong tie to any ethnic group and instead its members perceive themselves to belong to a greater Soviet-identity associated with positive sentiments about prior citizenship in the Soviet Union (Kuzio 2005). In these cases where ethnic identity is distinctly ambiguous or minority status is flatly denied, multiculturalist policies have very little chance of providing benefits for minorities or governments intent on using them to encourage citizenship.

The historical contexts creating the contemporary cultural mix in the Soviet Union likewise significantly differ from Western cases. While ethnic diversity in the West is largely a product of both historical and contemporary migration (much of which Western colonization provoked), the cultural environments in the countries of the former USSR have been produced through a large-scale mix of settler colonization, forced migration, and a long incubating period of integration through imperialism and Soviet socialism. Rather than having to integrate relatively new citizens into the old state, post-Soviet countries are faced with the problem of integrating old, established populations into new states striving to build non-Russian cultural
vernaculars. In Russia and Kazakhstan, for example, both states have already traversed through a period of cultural integration through Soviet socialism, and are less concerned with cultural integration than they are with aligning ethnic minorities to the state as citizens without being able to rely on the former, relatively effective, socialist citizenship discourse. In the absence of this discredited discourse of identity, new post-Soviet states are struggling to realize an equally effective citizenship discourse that will align their diverse populations with the state.

Finally, some post-Soviet states are much more interested in simply maintaining their ethnic minority populations, rather than integrating them into the majority culture. The reason for this is that many of these states, Kazakhstan in particular, have had to grapple with the problem of mass migration from their borders to other regions of the former Soviet Union and the West. This has proved to be a devastating “brain drain” on such countries as they have lost a large number of technical and managerial specialists, and other highly educated individuals, who could have otherwise made a significant positive impact on the economic, political, and social conditions of the countries they left behind.¹⁶

In spite of the glaring differences between the West and former Soviet Union, Western multiculturalist political discourses and Soviet/post-Soviet nationalities’ policies frequently intersect and overlap. As Povinelli points out, Western multiculturalist discourses often attempt to defuse struggles for liberation that ethnic minorities wage against the state and reemploy them as “the grounds for a new transcendental national monoculturalism” (Povinelli 2004: 29). This process of appropriating certain forms of resistance against the state to serve the needs of nation-building suggests the inherent nature of power Foucault describes, but also resembles the method

¹⁶ For a discussion of the exodus of laborers possessing valuable technical skills from CIS countries, see Joma Nazpary (2001); David D. Laitin (1998); Alexander M. Danzer (2009).
of civic nation-building that post-Soviet countries like Kazakhstan and Russia undertake. However, as Muhic argues, multiculturalism is often questioned as a legitimate political philosophy in former socialist countries because of its neo-colonial implications (Muhic 2004). I argue that misgivings among post-Soviet authorities regarding multiculturalist discourses do not preclude their potential conceptual utility in socialist and post-socialist nationalities’ policies. The question is whether we might discursively equate multiculturalism and civic nation-building – are they in fact the same thing conceptually? Is it possible to conceive of civic nation-building as a proto-version of multiculturalism existing within states that are yet to form consistent civic identities among their subjects? Conversely, is multiculturalism a strategy implicit in some forms of nation-building that are inherently civic in nature as Kymlicka argues (Kymlicka 1998)? To address these questions, I return to the Comaroffs’ discussion of European colonialism.

Among the theoretical concepts forming the foundations of multiculturalist discourse I have outlined, the one that appears most contradictory to the principles of civic nation-building in the former Soviet Union is the fundamental principles of colonialism as conceived in the Comaroffs’ arguments about the ethics of British colonialism. Instead, post-Soviet states experienced the Russian Empire’s, and later the USSR’s, unique brand of colonial subjugation. As I have argued, conceptually and practically implicit within Western colonialism (and in multiculturalism) are deeply embedded understandings of appropriate modes of citizenship and the value ascribed to groups and individuals understood to behave in a manner expressing them. This concern present in Western colonialism about appropriate citizenship set it apart from the priorities of Russian imperialism as directed towards colonized natives. My interest here revolves around the extent to which this conceptual difference influences a divergence between contemporary civic nation-building and multiculturalist discourses. To affirm this point, I
undertake a more robust discussion of the colonialist concern with citizenship arising within multiculturalism and the conceptual divide it creates with civic nation-building discourse.

While the Comaroffs do not perceive the colonialist agenda of capitalistic social development as “stages” toward modernism, they do understand it as a system of social progression, which they refer to as a “dialectic of domesticity.” This implies a process of “social reconstruction” necessarily occurring among the colonized, as well as among those in the colonial metropole who had not yet met the ideal state of domesticity (Comaroff and Comaroff 1992: 267-68). By domesticity, the Comaroffs mean the kinds of arrangements exemplifying mid-nineteenth century ideals of normative social life, including gendered division of labor based on patriarchy and understandings of the “public” and “private” spheres, the structure of the nuclear family, and its physical implication in the form of private property and the boundaries between such units. Even though this conceptualization of domesticity existed as an ideal and frequently not a reality in the metropole, colonizers nevertheless enthusiastically attempted to employ the concept (Comaroff and Comaroff 1992: 270-71). Hence, the primary social task for colonizers was to domesticate their subjects by encouraging them to create nuclear households, based on accumulation of private property, and cultivate land in order to produce an economic surplus to participate in capitalist production. Converting colonized people into domestic agricultural producers who would accumulate surpluses to be sold on the market “would place them on the universal path of progress” (Comaroff and Comaroff 1992: 274).

The colonial deference to the notion that bio-racial differences also implied a natural system of valuation across societies occurred simultaneous with the early nineteenth century ascendance of comparative anatomy and biology that reduced the physical and mental capacities of African natives to the lowest position along the human scale of being (Comaroff and
Comaroff 1992: 217-18). The devaluation of colonial natives based on racial concepts coincided with their valuation based on participation in capitalist modes of production. Although the net result of the colonialisms the Comaroffs describe is the maintenance of a politics of exclusion and ultimate native subjugation, there existed a discursive space within which to valorize colonial efforts as a noble and occasionally successful attempt to civilize and modernize the colonial other. This discourse of valuing the colonized “other” in the face of a systematic politics of exclusion and exploitation represents the conceptual connection between colonialism and multiculturalism. At their cores, multiculturalism and civic nation-building are discourses about citizenship – hence, both are meant to suggest inclusion into the body politic in the face of tremendous levels of social difference and inequalities. What differentiates multiculturalism from civic nation-building in the former Soviet Union is, in part, the value it ascribes to state minorities through their participation in the capitalist system. To further elucidate this point, I provide one more ethnographic instance of Australian multiculturalism.

In his discussion of the commercialization of Australian Aboriginal acrylic painting, Fred Myers argues that authorities do not intend the production of this artistic form for local consumption, but rather commodify it for exchange in international art markets. However, Aboriginal artists certainly value their work as embodying a level of cultural authenticity through its relation to practices, such as ceremonial design and painting as well as the exemplification of indigenous myths (Myers 1991). Such forms of cultural production that convey both marketability and cultural authenticity are precisely what create multicultural capital for ethnic minority communities and individuals.

In addition to motivating economic behaviors, multiculturalism (as does civic nation-building) seeks to invest state minorities with a sense of allegiance to the state and its public
institutions through the appropriate types of “authentic” cultural behaviors and productions. In the case of Aborigines, Myers suggests a primary setting for multiculturalist attempts to align minority groups with state institutions is found within the struggle over indigenous land rights, often in places considered authentic sites for minority cultural production. Myers argues that the artistic production of urban Aboriginal artists does not maintain the same value among critics and collectors as that which rural artists produce. Several of Myers’s interlocutors involved with the Australian indigenous art scene identify the work of urban Aboriginal artists as less culturally authentic, usually focusing on confrontational subjects that suggest colonial domination and aboriginal subjugation, about which one white Australian art specialist characterizes as “accusatory art” (Myers 1991). Implicit therefore within the value ascribed to aboriginal artistic production as commodities is at least a tacit adherence to the current state of land distribution for Aborigines. Spaces legally granted to Aboriginal peoples also function as sites where minority artists may produce culturally authentic and thereby internationally marketable commodities. Whereas critics and other members of the art community may deem aboriginal art expressing displacement from Australian territories or the imposition of other inequalities culturally inauthentic, and hence a more problematic unit of exchange in international art markets.

Meyers’s conclusions about Aboriginal art showcase a major difference with the politics of value between multiculturalism and civic nation-building. As I argue above, multiculturalist discourses ascribe value to minority cultural groups based on their participation in the capitalist economy, allegiance to state institutions, and production of cultural authenticity. As Turner argues, these discourses and subsequent policies have also arisen as a reaction to the delegitimization of the state and the erosion of its dominant cultures in advanced capitalist countries, especially in the context of “transnational labor, commodity and capital markers, and
corporate structures” that have reduced the influence of traditional political and social structures (Turner 1993). The primary divide existing between contemporary multiculturalism and civic nation-building in the former Soviet Union is therefore intrinsically related to the differences in past colonial projects and modern economic and social assemblages those projects enabled. Hence, contemporary attempts at civic nation-building in Kazakhstan and Russia follow a whole different set of logics being much less informed by discourses of capitalist production (a major emphasis among western European colonizers and their post-colonial progenies) than they are with those of ethnic nationalism (a primary concern of the Russian Empire and Soviet Union). In this sense, the analogue to European missionary efforts to “colonize the consciousness” of their subjects into private property owning market producers and consumers is the Soviet ethnographers’ (and before them imperial orientologists’) attempts to create and impose ethnic/national categories on their cultural minorities. In order to fully illustrate this point, I undertake a discussion of the conceptual underpinnings of Russian imperial, Soviet, and post-Soviet nationalities policies, and how they form the bedrock of civic nation-building discourses.

**The Russian imperial legacies of civic nation-building**

Just as the early Soviet authorities before them, leaders of contemporary post-Soviet states have much to accomplish in order to create a general sense of cultural commonality among extraordinary diversity. Similar to how the West employs multiculturalism and its colonialist legacies as a tool to encourage the integration of cultural minorities, many former Soviet states have opted for an integrative model rich in relation to Russian imperialism and Soviet colonialism. The contemporary impetus driving the employment of historical discourses informing civic nation-building stems not from the desire to spread capitalist production and
consumption (as Western colonization in African attempted), but rather from the need to counter ethnic nationalism. Hirsch, as an example, argues that the social exclusion Soviet authorities ultimately executed against minorities represented a reaction to the threat of nationalism among its constituent minority populations (Hirsch 2002). However, Russian imperial practices from the late 18th century until the Revolution established the precedent for such reactions.

As Grant notes, not all forms of imperial rule operated by the same logics (Grant 2009, 43). Certainly, the scale and scope of Russian imperialism is just as broad and complicated as that of Western Europe. On the one hand, the similarities with Western Europe’s push into Africa and South Asia related to the obvious desire for commercial expansion, the exploitation of natural resources, and the drive to “civilize the backward natives” inhabiting the colonized spaces (Sunderland 2004: 102). Yet, on the other hand, the Russian Empire was mostly connected to the territories it annexed and whose people it colonized. The implication of which was the need to create a buffer against rival empires, such as the Ottomans, Austrians, and British, but also against the nomadic steppe peoples who had presented a threat to Russia since the Mongol invasions. Hence, for the Russian Empire, colonizing land and people was just as much about internal state security and integrity as it was about economic expansion and development (Sunderland 2004: 112). In addition to security concerns, Russian authorities also felt pressure to accommodate the needs of its peasantry to exploit the natural resources of the vast, unsettled land within the steppe (Sunderland 2004: 178-82).

Imperial authorities operating in Central Asia were likewise interested in securing its frontier from “the provocations of unstable neighbors, the fear of being excluded from the area [by] England, and the temptations of diplomatic leverage, economic profit, and military glory (Becker 2004: 23).” However, a significant aspect of the 19th Century imperial agenda in Central
Asia was the stabilization of reliable caravan routes for consistent transport of raw cotton from Bukhara and Khiva and manufactured items exported to the khanates (such as finished metal products, clothing, and grain) from Russia (Becker 2004: 70-71). In order to stem nomadic Kazakh attacks on trade caravans, Russian imperial leaders coercively pushed for these steppe-dwellers to become sedentary, agricultural producers (Brill Olcott 1987: 58-58). Russian peasant settlement in the Kazakh steppe facilitated several of these objectives in Central Asia. Russian authorities occasionally planned peasant settlements to obstruct nomadic herders from traditional migratory pathways and water supplies. These efforts drove nomadic Kazakhs from the region, forced them to become sedentary and agricultural, and freed up land for peasant migration and agricultural production (Brill Olcott 1987: 123-25).

In the midst of these colonial efforts arose distinct academic and political discursive devices, serving decades later as models for Soviet nationalities policies and subsequent political strategies for addressing the challenges of cultural diversity in the contemporary former Soviet Union. These discourses also illuminate the difference in how western Europeans conceptualized their colonialist projects in Africa and Asia versus those in the Russian Empire, suggesting the divergent trajectories of contemporary post-Soviet civic nation-building and Western multiculturalism. Willard Sunderland argues that the Russian colonialist discourses derived from late 19th and early 20th imperialist practices sought to recast colonized spaces as domestically Russian. Thus, authorities conceptualized Russian colonization of the Eurasian steppe primarily as the process of agricultural development of “interior spaces,” rationally distributing peasant populations and sedentarizing nomads (Sunderland 2004: 194-95, 224, 227-28). In addition to the discursive emphasis of the Empire as essential Russian territory requiring economic development, an academic corollary devised through the work of imperial orientologists framed
Russian culture as a “space” where peoples of the East and West coalesced and discovered commonalities.\textsuperscript{17} From this perspective, Russian society and culture did not pose a dichotomous portrait to which its conquered cultures should aspire (as Western colonial discourse suggested), rather it functioned as a site of communication where the aims of empire and its subjects supported the flourishing of non-Russian culture (Tolz 2011: 11, 24).

This approach, inspired by the ideas and work of a community of scholars associated with the Imperial Academy of Sciences, most notably Vasilii Grigor’ev, Viktor Rozen, and Vasilii Bartol’d, imagined the world along the lines of the German Romantic tradition, divided into culturally distinct \textit{narody}, or ethnic nations (Tolz 2011: 31). As a way to identify the essential nature of the Empire’s \textit{narody} and their commonalities with Russian culture, imperial orientologists borrowed liberally from the ideas of Johann Gottfried von Herder, who perceived folklore (folk tales, songs, legends, proverbs, and customs of a people) to be the purest manifestation of the \textit{Volsgeist} or national spirit (Knight 2000).\textsuperscript{18} Eighteenth century German anthropologists and folklorists (practitioners of \textit{Völkerkunde} and \textit{Volkskunde} respectively) adopted Herder’s philosophical approach by collecting various forms of peasant folklore, mining it for historical/cultural essences to bolster their political claims for the essential unity of the German \textit{Volk}. More pragmatic German ethnographers studied folklore as a useful tool for governance, utilizing information gathered to most effectively govern the population of what would become the German state (Linke 1990). Both approaches to ethnography and folklore found their way into the understandings and practices of 19\textsuperscript{th} century imperial Russian orientologists (many of whom were German and educated in central Europe). With the arsenal of

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\textsuperscript{17} Vera Tolz (2011) consistently employs the term “orientologist” in reference to this group of Russian scholars. For this reason, I also use it here.
\textsuperscript{18} Tolz also makes this argument (Vera Tolz 2011: 24).
German romanticism in their discursive toolkit, orientologists devoted themselves to the management of the Empire’s cultural diversity, and in so doing, they attempted to service the Empire’s economic and political aspirations in non-Russian territories (Tolz 2011: 25-26).

Arising within the juncture where Herderian devotion to the Volksgeist met the pragmatism of imperial expansion, a uniquely Russian concept of cultural hybridity arose, which would work its way into Soviet nationalities policy and eventually form the backbone of contemporary civic nation-building. Reaching beyond their German romanticist inspirations, Russian orientologists embraced the notion that the historical interactions of various cultural groups within and around the borders of the Empire constituted the building blocks of Russian imperial culture coalescing into an overarching pan-Russian identity. According to this view, there need not be conflict between a pan-Russian identity and identities reflecting local, non-Russian cultures, as imperial subjects would achieve a complimentary fusion of the two identities. In fact, according to the purveyors of this theory, Russian national culture itself was a product of historical interactions between different nationalities (Tolz 2011: 34-37). From the orientological perspective, expressed most strongly in the writings of Vasilii Bartol’d, the maintenance of local cultural awareness and practice among non-Russian groups would facilitate their smooth integration into the pan-Russian state-framed community ultimately forming an all-inclusive imperial culture. This “pan-Russianism” implied, however, fluency in both the local cultural vernacular and the political culture of the state (Tolz 2011: 34, 40).

On the face of it, encouraging the exploration and maintenance of minority/local culture as a remedy to integrate and consolidate the diverse populations of the Empire seems at best paradoxical, especially given the potential threat of nationalist mobilizations resisting imperial power. Why, then, did orientologists (and eventually imperial administrators) adopt the position
that integrating minorities into state society was achievable through an engagement with their native cultures? Toward the end of the 19th century, Russian orientologists became attracted to the notion of the “small native homeland,” which suggested the Russian Empire was far too large and diverse for its own subjects to easily identify with the imperial state. Advocates of this position encouraged the Empire’s citizens to establish strong identifications with their native localities. After all, the most logical site to fashion identities and loyalties associated with “place” was an individual’s homeland, potentially overlapping into an association with a broader political entity, such as the imperial state.

Using the “small native homeland” approach, orientologists sought to create a sense of “local identity” through employing their ethnographic research into the cultural lives of the people they studied and rhetorically connected the allegiance to territory with a wider pan-Russian identity. If non-Russians became fluent with their own histories and cultural peculiarities arising within a certain territory, the orientologists reasoned, they would be in a stronger position to develop a feeling of loyalty to the pan-Russian state-framed community, prohibiting the potential for nationalist political mobilizations with separatist agendas (Tolz 2011: 37-43). Particularly for transient populations of the steppe, fostering a sense of homeland was the first step in sedentarizing the nomads, facilitating their affiliation with greater territorial units, and establishing the structures of authority that governed them. Hence, non-Russians living within the imperial boundaries became susceptible to orientologist discourses about territory and cultural identity in a manner similar to those subjects of western European colonial efforts (although the Russian discourses maintained significantly different intents).

Many of the political loyalties created through imperial attempts to establish small native homelands have continued in the former Soviet Union. Contemporary allegiances to the Russian
Federation among non-Russian groups inhabiting post-Soviet states, for example, have elicited several instances of ethnic conflict over sub-state territories since the Soviet Union’s collapse (violent conflict occurring in the former Georgian territories of Abkhazia and South Ossetia, and the war in eastern Ukraine being the most recent standouts). The mutual unity with Russia that ethnic Abkhazians, Ossetians and Eastern Ukrainians express (and their desire to join politically with the Russian Federation) illustrate the extent to which the notion of the small native homeland’s connectedness to the larger Russian political space exists among some post-Soviet peoples. It likewise demonstrates how effective some elements of imperial discourse has been for colonizing the consciousness of non-Russians in the Russian Empire.

Nicholas Dirks’s arguments regarding the colonial utility of caste in South Asia are instructive here and parallel the conceptual use of the ethnic nation in the Russian Empire and Soviet Union, as they both represent only one possibility for organizing and representing identity. According to Dirks, British scholarly investigations of Indian society used the ethnographic conceptualizations of caste as the analytical framework with which to conduct empirical studies of Indian society. The scholarship arising from these efforts then informed the British colonial administrative process, causing an emphasis on caste to enter the consciousness of colonized Indians through their interaction with colonial discourses about indigenous social organization (Dirks 1992). The deployment of ethnic nationality operated in a similar manner for Russian 19th and early 20th century orientologists and the Kazakh intellectuals exposed to their ideas. As Esenova effectively argues, an indigenously developed sense of a Kazakhness legitimately exists/ed among the Kazak people. However, the point at which they understood this

19 I credit this line of thinking about western European colonization in African and Asia to Adrienne Lynn Edgar (2004).
notion within the category of ethnic nation (natsional’nost’) fixed into a specific territory (or homeland) marked the critical moment of the colonizing process and the enduring effect of imperial orientology and later Soviet nationalities policies (Saulesh Esenova 2002).

Although orientologist discourses survived as a significant influence on Soviet nationalities policies of the 1920s and 30s, imperial authorities did not commission their ethnographic research to support a pre-established nationalities policy (as Bolshevik officials would do several decades later). Rather orientologists distributed their research to public sources for the purpose of crafting policy and stemming the inclination towards Russification directed at the Empire’s minorities. In doing so, they devised a discourse about ethnic national culture and people territorially situated, which survived to become a tremendous influence on the Soviet understanding and treatment of non-Russians. I next examine how Soviet ethnographers and policy-makers utilized this colonial-imposed understanding of territorialized cultural identity.

**Soviet korenizatsiya and its legacies: The “roots” of post-socialist nation-building projects**

With the orientologists before them, rather than alienating the non-Russian populations of the old Czarist Empire through privileging the Russian core as the nationalizing nation, early Bolshevik leaders opted for something akin to a civic nation, hoping to consolidate its multiethnic territories into a Soviet state. Beginning in the 1920s, Soviet authorities encouraged the further articulation of territorialized ethnic nations. In formulating this policy, Lenin argued that cultural and limited political autonomy for non-Russians living in the boundaries of the former Russian empire would signal to these populations that the Bolshevik regime valued their interests and aspirations. An additional objective, which differed widely from the orientologist approach, was to simplify the available categories of personal identity, granting Soviet officials
greater influence over how non-Russians could identify themselves. Once official categories of identity became simplified, institutionalized, and naturalized, Soviet leaders expected that adherence to one’s ethnic national identity would wither in favor of membership in the Soviet nation (Hirsch 2005: 1-20).

Soviet authorities designated this program as an indigenization, or in Russian a korenizatsiia. The term korenizatsiia, which literally means “rooting” in Russian, implied the attempt to rediscover and utilize the cultures of the populations, which had historically “rooted” themselves into the Soviet Union’s soil. Terry Martin argues that korenizatsiia functioned as an affirmative action policy for non-Russians in the Soviet Union emphasizing the use of local languages and cultural traditions, empowering native cadres as regional political leaders, and filling government administrations with members of the regional ethnic nations (Martin 2001: 15). To accomplish korenizatsiia, Soviet leaders adopted a much more systematic approach than the ethnographic work imperial orientologists employed by appointing ethnographers to survey the entire population and fashion it into groups of ethnic nations. In this way, Soviet authorities asserted the right to determine the size and number of the state’s ethnic nations and tightly control the nature of their national character and expression.

The authorities then tasked their ethnographers to determine how various linguistic groups, clans, and tribes might best be consolidated together into single ethnic nations. Soviet authorities also charged ethnographers with the duty of forming national territories, creating linguistic vernaculars, identifying and standardizing cultural traditions, and compiling histories for the newly constituted national groups. They then divided all of the Soviet Union’s citizens into the officially established ethnic national categories. Using the newly established or refashioned ethnic national traditions, vernaculars, and histories, the Soviet leadership trained
and appointed indigenous Bolshevik cadres as the leaders of the officially designated ethnic nations (Hirsch 2005: 1-20). As various cultural minorities were in effect consolidated into artificial categories of identity and behavior through these policies, authorities ironically intended *korenizatsiia* to appear as a valorization of non-Russian culture and an attempt to address economic and political inequalities existing in the multiethnic Soviet Union.

Although Stalin officially halted *korenizatsiia* in the late 1930s, the program’s more robust method of applying ethnography to state nationalities’ policy (compared to imperial orientology) influenced a fundamental transformation in how people identified themselves. The ethnographic surveys, territorial mapping, writing of new histories, and the affirmative action policies associated with *korenizatsiia* largely precluded Soviet citizens from identifying themselves with other familiar, pre-Soviet categories, such as religion, locality, or kin groups.20 Instead of utilizing past identifications, *korenizatsiia* trained the Soviet population to identify themselves as members of officially designated ethnic nations (rather than the looser categories tied to locality the orientologists established). In this way, adherence to ethnic nations served to standardize identity with ways of thinking about oneself that political authorities could easily quantify and manipulate (Brown 2005: 226-40). The process of instilling an ethnic identity into an individual began at birth, but a person’s ethnicity became officially recognized when one received her internal passport at the age of sixteen, which recorded the “nationality” that an individual selected. As Yuri Slezkine explains the process, “every Soviet citizen was born into a certain nationality, took it to day care and through high school, had it officially confirmed at the

20 The notion that *korenizatsiia* amounted to an “affirmative action” program is attributed with Terry Martin’s work, which argues that Soviet *korenizatsiia* policies included granting preferences to non-Russians in admissions, hiring, and promotion in education, industry, and government (Martin 2001: 125).
age of sixteen and carried it to the grave through thousands of application forms, certificates, questionnaires, and reception desks” (Slezkine 1998: 450).

Thus, *korenizatsiia* helped to eliminate potential oppositions to state-sponsored identities making the officially sponsored forms of identification tightly linked to life under socialism more tangible. Using socialism in a consolidating role, therefore, the state subjugated national ethnic identity to the preeminence of a Soviet socialist identity, which Stalin expressed through the mantra “national in form, socialist in content.” This reduced ethnic nationalism to the level of form through the usage of ethnic languages and the performance of strictly-defined cultural traditions. Meanwhile, the masses became Soviet citizens by exercising a socialist “content” through participating in the daily, socialist reality of labor and other state-influenced activities. These mundane patterns of socialist life provided common cultural values necessary to forge a civic Soviet identity that fused together citizenship and everyday behavior – in other words, a “political monoculture.” The task has now fallen on the Soviet Union’s successors to create a new monoculture in the absence of the overriding economic and political ideology coalescing with daily reality, which socialism provided for the Soviet civic nation. The extent to which they accomplish this, the methods used, the complicit foreign and domestic institutions, and the effects of such attempts on their citizens form the primary subjects of this dissertation.

The employment of civic nation-building discourse and policies in the former Soviet Union, as a familiar survival of *korenizatsiia*, represents a prescription to the socioeconomic pressures of stabilizing post-socialist states with largely non-democratic governments. The most immediate need to which civic nation-building explicitly responds is in stemming the possibility

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21 I discuss how Soviet authorities used labor as a tool to create a sense of citizenship to the regime at length in chapter five.
of nationalist-based resistance and social unrest already occurring in former Soviet contemporary states, such as Georgia, Moldova, Ukraine, Azerbaijan, Kyrgyzstan, as well as other regions of the former European socialist world. Therefore, concepts implicit in civic nation-building in states like Kazakhstan and Russia imply not a trajectory toward achieving capitalist consumption and production in a civil society (as multiculturalist discourse endeavors), but achieving a state of social stability in the face of political autocracy. Concerns about stability in the context of cultural diversity represent the factors influencing the social policies under consideration in this dissertation. In the next section, I lay out the specific circumstances relative to Russia and Kazakhstan to begin exploring the process by which authorities employ civic nation-building discourse in these contexts.

**Korenizatsiia’s influence on civic nation building in contemporary Russia and Kazakhstan**

The independent states that arose from the republics of the Soviet Union inherited extremely diverse multiethnic populations produced to a large extent through large-scale, forced and voluntary migration, such as the relocation of Germans I describe in chapter one. The nationalities’ policy that orientologists and communist authorities constructed and proliferated from the imperial period until the Soviet Union disbanded in 1991 instilled Soviet citizens and leaders with a unique way of thinking about ethnic nations. Since independence, both the Russian Federation’s and the Republic of Kazakhstan’s approach to nation-building reflect these imperial and Soviet constructs, but they have also offered new perceptions and strategies to the concept of the nation. One of those new strategies is a discursive shift to the term “civic nation” and dependence upon the discourse the concept implies. Authorities in Kazakhstan, for example, officially employ the term “civic nation” (grazhdanskaya natsiya) as part of its nationalities’
policy discourse. Russian leaders likewise employ the notion of the civic nation as a political
model for harmonious interethnic relations in the Russian Federation. This shift is largely a
semantic device, as Soviet nationalities’ policy and korenizatsiia represent clear progenitors of
civic nation-building discourse.

Russia’s and Kazakhstan’s populations are highly multiethnic. According to official
statistics, of Kazakhstan’s nearly 15 million people 59.2% of the population is Kazakh, 29.6% is
Russian, and 10.2% is made up of Germans, Tatars, Ukrainians, Uzbeks, and Uighurs. The
remaining 1% includes members of over 140 other nationalities. Russia, with a significantly
larger population, is even more diverse. Although 80% of Russia’s 140 million citizens are
ethnically Russian, the country is home to over 180 registered nationalities. The two states
have varied somewhat in their attempts to construct a post-Soviet nationalities policy, with
Kazakhstan promoting a much more coherent approach to managing its ethnic minorities than
Russia. Kazakhstan has also been more intent on translating civic nation-building discourses into
actual state policies than Russia, whose authorities typically employ the notion of civic nation as
a general discursive concept rather than a tool to develop legislation. I demonstrate the basic
differences in these neighboring states’ approaches to managing cultural diversity below.

Rather than constructing a state-sponsored national identity based exclusively on ethnic
Kazakh culture to assimilate the large non-Kazakh portion of the population, the leaders of
Kazakhstan have opted discursively for a multiethnic civic nation aiming to enfranchise all of its

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22 See the reference to President Nazarbayev’s proclamation on the Assembly of the Peoples of
Kazakhstan below.
23 These statistics are provided on the Kazakhstan’s embassy’s website in the United States,
http://www.kazakhembus.com/index.php?page=ethnic-groups (accessed April 20, 2010), and
Russia’s USA Embassy website, http://russianembassy.org/Embassy_eng/Russia/russia.html
(accessed December 17, 2010).
citizens regardless of their cultural identities. Similar to Soviet *korenizatsiia*, Kazakhstan’s nation-building approach encourages the state’s ethnic minorities to preserve and revitalize their own ethnic cultures and languages, but simultaneously characterizes Kazakh culture and language as the instruments of national consolidation and integration. To direct this unique style of civic nation-building through the promotion of ethnic minority cultural preservation, the state established the Assembly of the Peoples of Kazakhstan. The Assembly is a government-sponsored institution promoting “peace and harmony” among the ethnically diverse population of Kazakhstan. Among the Assembly’s tasks are the provision of minority representation in state and local government, the support of national cultural centers mandated to preserve and/or revive ethnic minority cultures, and the establishment of facilities and forums, such as cultural festivals and Houses of Friendship, for the exercise and performance of ethnic culture. Some of the stated intentions of these efforts include forming a civic Kazakhstan national identity, strengthening multiethnic and multi-religious harmony and tolerance, and countering the appearance of extremism and radicalism in society (Nazarbayev 2008).

With interethnic violence, the threat of succession, and demands for greater political and cultural autonomy arising from certain sectors of the non-Russian population since the collapse of the Soviet Union, Russia has faced a more fragile political environment while attempting to formulate an image of itself as a civic nation. Russian authorities are yet to establish an official discourse designed to integrate its diverse citizens together as members of the Russian state. Instead, rather than cornering itself into a specific model of official national identity, Russia manages the ethnic minority question using multiple strategies, discourses, and institutions to address the needs of non-Russians. However, none of these attempts are as ambitious as
Kazakhstan’s Assembly. While Kazakhstan maintains this single overarching institution to handle matters pertaining to ethnic minorities, Russia’s approach diffuses the responsibility into the hands of several state, regional, and local institutions and agencies.

Of the various institutions involved in managing the ethnic minority concerns in Russia, the state articulates much of its policies concerning non-Russians through the various structures of ethnic territoriality. A consistent aspect of Russian integration policy has been the public acknowledgment of the rights and distinctiveness of non-Russians largely through maintaining a federal structure that recognizes the territorial integrity of the state’s larger non-Russian groups. Among its 85 constituent federal entities, Russia has 21 ethno-republics, designed to recognize the self-determination of the majority titular minorities living within their borders. In addition to the large republics, the Russian Federation also recognizes the autonomy of sub-republican regions such as ethnic rayons (administrative districts) and even ethnic villages. Tolerating ethnic territoriality as a way to legitimate the striving for self-determination within the bounds of Russian citizenship therefore represents a primary aspect of Russia’s approach to integrating its non-Russian peoples as citizens of a larger Russian state (Smith 1998). Authorities of the Russian Federal Soviet Socialist Republic established the first ethnic territories of the USSR in the 1920s and 30s through korenizatsiia, the model of which Russian Federation officials resurrected or reinforced in the ashes of the Union in the 1990s to provide reassurance to Russia’s minorities that they would respect their civil rights in the new post-Soviet state. Although President Putin has dismantled or curtailed many of the structures and benefits of

24 Russia does have an Assembly of the Peoples of Russia; however, it has a much lower profile than Kazakhstan’s Assembly.
ethnic territoriality since his ascendance to power, its discourses and some of its institutions remain as the primary foci of Russia’s rather foggy nationalities’ policy.

A further implication of civic nation-building policies, which I allude to at the outset of this chapter, is the manner by which their emphasis on the ethnic nation as a coherent category of identity and behavior further validates the authority of the state’s titular cultural group. The question then becomes whether valorizing ethnicity within civic nation-building discourses strategically legitimizes the representatives of a single ethnic group maintaining power and authority over the primary institutions of the state. With this idea in mind, my theoretical contrast between civic nation-building and multiculturalism appears in much sharper relief. I argue that a country possessing a clear titular group (and a name signaling titularity), such as Kazakhstan, struggles to exist discursively as a culturally plural state. This is especially true in comparison to states with robust multicultural policies, such as Canada and Australia, which do not define themselves according the idiom of the ethnic nation, neither do the majority of its citizens identify strongly as such given the mix of British and northern European peoples from whom most of the white population descends. With its emphasis on the existence and maintenance of ethnic national groups, the discourse of civic nation-building in contrast breathes life to the concept of cultural difference in post-Soviet states, but also affirms the notion that one of those groups is the legitimate inheritor of those states. With its discursive disposition poised firmly away from encouraging capitalism and modes of production and toward the maintenance of ethnic nations, civic nation-building matches the integrative policies of post-socialism in the countries of the former Soviet Union.
Toward an Ethnography of Civic Nation-Building

A major irony of the political and social context inherent in Kazakhstan and Russia is the peculiar tension present in both korenizatsiia and civic nation-building discourses. Both systems strive to celebrate ethnic national characters and behaviors of the non-titular populations, while simultaneously desiring to render certain aspects of cultural behavior hollow and impractical to their constituents. With this in mind, I conclude this chapter with one reiterative point to set the stage for the forthcoming series of ethnographic accounts covering issues pertaining to property, territoriality, labor, and kinship, and to focus the reader’s attention on the underlying tension I describe above that weaves its way throughout all of the chapters.

Unlike post-socialist officials, the architects of Soviet nationalities’ policy were armed with a socialist discourse that largely succeeded in unifying their multiethnic population by establishing a set of like cultural values and practices creating a state-wide monoculture. The basic logic and structures of Soviet korenizatsiia have subsequently served as a model for Kazakhstani and Russian leaders in their attempts to establish a monocultural, state-aligned identity for members of both the titular and non-titular populations. As I suggest above, civic nation-building in the former Soviet Union strives to establish a monoculture by gradually chipping away at the ethnic national characters and cultures of minorities to produce culturally heterogeneous citizens tolerant of autocracy. That monoculture, however, must exist uncomfortably alongside a political discourse about categories of difference elevating the prominence of one ethnic nation among others within the context of the state. Lacking a unifying discourse to create a monoculture as powerful as socialism had been for the Soviets, contemporary attempts to create civic national identities largely struggle to capture the imagination of ethnic minorities as they experience inequities vis-à-vis titular ethnic nations.
Evidence for this assertion exists in the occasional occurrence of ethnic violence and movements dedicated to ethnic political autonomy and independence in some post-Soviet states, and the large-scale emigration of non-titular groups from the Republic of Kazakhstan.

The absence of viable institutions in Soviet successor states to fashion monocultural state identities among multiethnic populations has required these civic nation-building discourses to draw upon Soviet practices that reflected nationalities’ policies and international norms (Adams 2010: 151). As I describe above, a core feature of these discourses is the elevation of the very ethnic cultural behaviors that possibly obstruct the rise of a national monoculture necessary to establish the social stability these autocratic regimes desire. What emerges from the following ethnographic account is how the tension of simultaneously encouraging cultural differentiation and unification creates and informs social interaction. This tension and its implications for the social behaviors and identities civic nation-building encourages, but does not award economically, elucidates the restrictions policy-makers are up against in relatively new multiethnic states. It also underlies the challenging circumstances of successfully employing taken-for-granted concepts in the West, such as citizenship, governance, and the very nature of the state. What I present in the following chapters consequently represents an ethnographic account of the process and impact of civic nation-building (from both discursive and practical perspectives) present in the former Soviet Union. With the current global environment of prevailing, seemingly irreconcilable rifts between and within societies through issues pertaining to religion, migration, economies, and various forms of inequities, my research contributes to an anthropological understanding of how largescale forces attempt to mend such rifts and the impact these efforts have on the daily lives and social interactions of regular folks.
Chapter 3
“Developing” Ethnic Property

Introduction: Individuals, Institutions, and Culture

I met Heinrich Stier during a short stay in Podsosnovo in the summer of 2005. He later became a close friend and a primary informant while doing my field work in Siberia. When I first met him, Heinrich was a young-looking twenty-five year-old of German descent, who was already the manager of the flour mill and its attached bakery at the Kirov Collective Farm. Heinrich’s ancestors originally settled in Podsosnovo in the 1890s, and everyone living in his household (including his parents and younger sister), in addition to many of his friends, fluently speak both Russian and what he refers to as German dialect. Heinrich acknowledges that a command over the various “old” German dialects is a rarity among most people of German descent in the former Soviet Union; however, he grew up speaking a dialect, and his family maintains it as a primary mode of communication within the home. In addition to dialect, Heinrich can understand and communicate in “high German,” or what he identifies as the language that the frequent visitors from Germany speak, which he has had considerable opportunities to hear and speak since the Soviet Union disbanded. The Stier family’s fluency with dialect and German is significant here, as it represents a command over a highly valued expression of cultural authenticity for civic nation-builders in Russia, as well as their likeminded clients from Germany.

The reason Heinrich and his family have frequent opportunities to hear “high” German is because Podsosnovo and its neighboring villages are places where institutions from Germany and their personnel have consistently intervened, exposing this hamlet to a larger world of people and ideas flowing from Western Europe to the Eurasian steppes. Since the early 1990s, organizations from Germany have established programs providing opportunities for children,
youth and adults of German descent to learn about German culture and participate in German cultural events. As teenagers, Heinrich, his sister, and their friends occasionally attended German language camps, cultural festivals, and other “German events” taking place at the local House of Culture, the German Meeting Center, and other places in the village and region. Heinrich is now married and has two children – his wife, who is of German descent from Ekibastuz in Kazakhstan, works occasionally at the local German Meeting Center. Heinrich, however, claims to have very little to do with German culture and the institutions that perpetuate it. One day while discussing his brother and many of his friends and family members, who have moved to Germany, I asked him if he ever planned to move there as well. “No,” he responded, “After all, I’m Russian” (ladno, Ya Russky), using the term to ironically designate himself culturally Russian, and in some respects, reject the civic nation-building narrative about ethnic identity.

Not too far from Podsosnovo, across the international border in neighboring northeastern Kazakhstan are numerous villages with significant German populations. While doing research in the Kazakhstani village Sharbakti, I lived in a neighborhood populated with several families of German descent. The Bykovsky family lived near the house I rented. Aleksi, the family patriarch, is a declared Russian, but his wife Elsa’s parents were Germans from the Volga, and all of her children opted to identify as Germans on their state identity cards. This family’s mixed ethnic-identity choices are unusual since Kazakhstaniis normally base their official ethnic identity on their father’s designation. Elsa speaks very little German (what she can remember of the dialekt that her parents spoke and a little “high German”) and her children speak even less.

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25 This point arises from the countless conversations I had with Kazakhstani citizens regarding their official ethnic identity choices.
Aleksi and Elsa’s youngest son, Evgeniy, was 28 years old when I met him and worked as a maintenance man at the village poultry farm. When Evgeniy was approaching his sixteenth birthday, he, Elsa and his older brother Oleg participated in some of the culture acquisition programs that the local German Cultural Center provided, especially the German language courses. When I asked Evgeniy why he selected German to be his official cultural identity, he remarked that he was a teenager around the time his family was preparing the documents necessary to migrate to Germany. The family believed that they had a better chance to be granted German citizenship and permitted entry to Germany if its members were officially registered as Germans. Unfortunately, everyone in the family failed the language exam, denying them permission to move to Germany. Although he still aspires to move there, Evgeniy only sporadically participates in the activities of the German Center and asked me if he could come to my house and practice German. I encouraged him to come anytime, but he never did.

For post-socialist individuals subject to civic nation-building discourses emphasizing ethnic culture, there exists an economy of identity and behavior choices associated with what I term “ethnic property.”²⁶ Ethnic property is the aggregate of built environments and physical materials placed within those environments that multiple institutions set aside for the performance of certain ethnic activities at specifically designated ethnic times. These ethnic things specifically consist of the various buildings, assigned rooms within buildings (usually Houses of Culture), and the all the materials occupying these spaces such as books, pictures, costumes, and musical instruments.²⁷

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²⁶ I occasionally use the term “ethnic things” as synonymous with ethnic property.
²⁷ See below for a detailed description of the contents of German Meeting Centers.
Post-Soviet authorities, non-governmental organizations, and much of the public invest a great deal of symbolic meaning into these physical spaces and materials constituting ethnic property, as they intrinsically tie them to the practice of ethnic culture and hence the discourse of civic nation-building. In addition to its physical nature, ethnic property is also endowed with temporality. In other words, officials and regular people may perceive a place or thing “ethnic” only during certain time periods when they are discursively deemed as such. Some places and things may possess an integral character reflecting what Benedict Anderson refers to as “homogeneous ethnic time,” perpetually maintaining an ethnic image (Anderson 1983: 30-33).28 However, other ethnic things may serve alternative purposes having at certain times no relevance to the practice of ethnic culture, and hence become periodically decontextualized as ethnic property. Multiple possibilities exist for how any individual might choose to “be ethnic,” or in this case “be German,” which are often contingent upon their use of ethnic property.

Evgeniy’s claim to an official German identity and attempts to diversify his “German cultural portfolio” have been partially dependent upon his engagement with the programs of the local German Meeting Center, a site of ethnic property. For others, such as Heinrich, behaviors that one might characterize as ethnic, such as speaking dialekt, are normal aspects of unselfconscious expression. Yet, being marked as an “authentic” or “pure” German (as some Podsosnovo residents occasionally identify Heinrich and his family), or even being German through descent or claiming German on one’s identity card, does not necessarily imply the maintenance of any kind of Germanness (unselfconscious or not) or an affinity for more

28 I discuss what Anderson means by “homogeneous ethnic time” at length below.
objective versions of ethnic culture, which institutions involved with the project of civic nation-building offer through certain forms of ethnic things.

Arguing against the apparent group nature of ethnic identity, Rogers Brubaker suggests that ethnicity is simply a method for individuals to see, interpret, and make use of their world by utilizing ethnically-informed categories of knowledge. A focus on categories of ethnicity deemphasizes the traditional reliance on groupness for understanding how people and institutions actually do things with ethnic and national discourses (Brubaker 2002). Ethnicity, according to Brubaker et al., represents a “modality of experience” – not a continuous mode of consciousness, but an intermittent phenomenon happening at particular moments as individuals index knowledge when reacting to given situations. While recognizing the presence and influence of ethnically-minded institutions, Brubaker et al. argue that the content of the institutional sphere carries less weight in sustaining and reproducing the ethnic world than social-relational, linguistic, and socio-cognitive forms of expression and social interaction (Brubaker, Feischmidt, Fox, and Grancea 2006: 207-08). But what do we make of instances when it is the institutional content and its various forms of ethnic property facilitating the production of ethnicity?

Certainly, Heinrich’s relationship to Germanness relies upon the cognitive forms of expression that Brubaker describes, but how might we gauge the subjectivity and identity of individuals like Evgeniy whose “ethnic worlds” never or vary rarely become reproduced outside of the institutional sphere and its spaces? How should we understand the behavior of Germans in the former Soviet Union who attach their official ethnicity to an institutional framework for a diversity of reasons? Is it fair to characterize those who do not behave ethnically according to Brubaker’s formulation as inauthentic?
I argue that we should take these more constructed, institutionalized forms of ethnic engagement just as seriously as Brubaker’s socio-cognitive practices. My intent here, however, is not to serve as a standard bearer for constructivist positions tightly aligned with formative ideas such as Anderson’s “imagined communities” and Hobsbawm’s “inventions of tradition” to which Brubaker is reacting. Rather, I see my viewpoint as something more akin to Richard Handler’s notion that the process of cultural objectification is just as authentically cultural as the stuff of tradition being objectified (Handler 1988: 194-95). As Heinrich and Evgeniy’s stories illustrate, people engage in or abstain from the programs of ethnic cultural objectifying institutions for multiple reasons according to their own needs and goals, the civic nation-building strategies of countries in which they live (in these cases either Russia or Kazakhstan), the location and availability of the institutions, their family, friends and close associates, and their places of employment (or lack thereof). I argue that this sort of engagement is just as much an expression of ethnicity as Brubaker’s cognitive acts. The purpose of the present chapter is to closely examine the objectified ethnic properties themselves encompassing the various organizations actively working to provide German ethnic culture in Russia and Kazakhstan, including their workers, participants, physical spaces, and things.

I begin with a discussion about the seemingly underwhelming nature of ethnic activity I observed in Russia and Kazakhstan, and how this nature corresponds to social science literature addressing nationalist and ethnic behavior. By “underwhelming” I suggest that compared to the enormous financial resources and personnel dedicated to ethnic cultural programs the activities these resources facilitate appear quite small in scale and mundane in practice. Underwhelming or not, the spaces upon, the objects with, and the time periods in which they are performed often determine the transformative quality of such mundane behaviors into something identified as
ethnic. Next, I describe the ethnic spaces, times, and activities themselves and the institutions that oversee them in terms of their formational discourses and ideologies. As a point of departure, I consider the specific institutions undertaking the proliferation of ethnic German culture within communities with significant German populations. I then discuss the specific activities, places, and things these institutions organize and inform, as well as the designated times, in which institutional personnel circumscribe these actions, spaces, and objects as ethnic.

Given the tremendous impact socialist property has had on individuals and their communities (both under socialism and thereafter), I end this chapter by connecting my discussion of ethnic property to understandings and practices of socialist property. I focus here on how the meanings, practices, and behaviors surrounding the social relationships people maintained concerning property under socialism inform current relations related to ethnic property. My conceptual tools in this discussion are anthropological studies of property in both classical and socialist contexts. I reach back to the work of Max Gluckman on property rights in tribal societies and its influence on the foundational understandings of socialist and post-socialist property arising from the work of Caroline Humphrey on individual de facto property rights on Soviet collective farms and how Katherine Verdery understands administrative property rights in socialist Romania. These concepts elucidate how the individual and institutional behaviors related to social relations over ethnic property have to some extent persisted and subsequently structure the processes of civic nation-building.

**The mundane nature of ethnicity**

In his description of nations and nationalism, Anthony Giddens describes the occurrence of nationalism as an intermittent, collective phenomenon of social solidarity and commitment,
which energetically mobilizes during circumstances of cultural decay. In this way, the popular expression of nationalist sentiments and actions tend to surge and decline rather than occur as a part of normal day-to-day social life. Therefore, individuals express ethnic nationalism or behave according to its cultural precepts only in relatively transitory conditions or extraordinary times (Giddens 1985: 215-18). According to this assumption, behavior commensurate with ethnic nationalism occurs only within the context of forceful social movements and time periods of political conflict utilizing various symbols of the collective past for the purpose of mobilizing national constituents. In contrast to Giddens’s understanding of the infrequency of ethnic behavior, institutional discourses on natsional’nost’ found in Russia and Kazakhstan assume perpetuity and frame ethnic national symbols, activities, and materials as relatively fixed and integral aspects of everyday life. Many of these “objects and actions of the commonplace;” however, only become ethnicized when they occupy or take place in the spaces dedicated to the various institutions set apart to support the culture of ethnic minorities.

Thinking about ethnicity in terms of perpetual, ordinary behavior from the perspective of both practitioners and observers is certainly not new, but rather foundational in anthropological studies of ethnic discourses. This view stems from classic considerations of how people in normal social contexts think about ethnic identity and behavior, rather than how such identities and behaviors are mobilized from above. Fredrik Barth, for example, argues that the standardization of interaction among a collective of individuals ascribing themselves into

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29 Giddens’s use of the term nationalism is similar to what Anthony Smith identifies as “ethnic nationalism,” which I describe in chapter two. Based on this similarity between Smith’s and Giddens’ understanding of nationalism (as an expression of cultural commonalities among corporate groups) and nation (the individuals who form the corporate group), I interpret what Giddens means by nationalism and nation as ethnicity and ethnic groups (1985: 215).
corporate groups facilitates the emergence of cultural boundaries existing between such groups.\textsuperscript{30} This assertion implies that the mundane features of everyday life (commonplace actions, interactions, and things) within social systems represent the raw materials of ethnic behavior and identity because the maintenance of the collective values within a group inspires the behavior and materials deemed ethnic (Barth 1969: 18-21). Thus, ethnicity (or ethnic nationalism) is not a matter of intermittent mobilization within corporate groups, but rather exists as a multiplicity of behaviors and things practiced and used in everyday fashion among members of such groups. Since Barth wrote his seminal essay on the bounded nature of ethnic groups, numerous social scientists have applied the notion that group members and their observers perceive the very everydayness of group social life as integrally ethnic.

With the everydayness of group culture in mind, Michael Billig describes national identity as embedded in the routines of life that constantly flag or remind the individual of nationhood. In this way, nationalism ceases to appear as such while disappearing into the environment of normal social behavior and collectively shared symbols. Billig calls this process by which national symbols and actions become turned into routine habits “enhabitation,” ultimately resulting in the symbols and behaviors of the national past inhabiting the present in a “dialectic of forgotten remembrance” (Billig 1995: 37-59). These subtle, normalized reminders of nationhood transform background space into what Billig terms “homeland space” (Billig 1995: 37-59). Brubaker et al. evoke a similar concept in their discussion of Hungarian cultural space in Transylvania, or what they refer to as the “Hungarian world.” The Hungarian world is grounded within public and private institutions including family networks, associations, schools,

\textsuperscript{30} Barth in no way believed that such standardization was a static phenomenon, but rather he suggested that cultural change was a consistent feature occurring within ethnic groups.
business, and churches, within which behaviors become naturalized and unmarked. The everyday, unmarked behaviors of the Hungarian world, however, become explicitly ethnic to practitioners and observers upon expression in the Romanian public, even if they are identical to Romanian behaviors and practices (Brubaker, Feischmidt, Fox, and Grancea 2006: 266). Similarly in Trinidad Tobago, Viranjini Munasinghe argues that ethnicity is a matter of identification (or ascription in Barthian terms) for individuals within a group – those who consider themselves group members understand the daily rhythms of life to be ethnic practices enacted unconsciously (Munasinghe 2001: 28).

Finally, in his classic constructivist work, Benedict Anderson evokes the notion of a conjured social world, whose members are bounded and distinct from other groups through imagining their co-members engaging in acts of daily life in “the steady onward clocking of homogeneous empty time (Anderson 1983: 30-33).” Similar to Barthian ideas relative to the recognition of cultural boundaries, Anderson’s notion of homogeneous empty time suggests that group members imagine their actions and behavior collectively and temporally consistent with other members. Thus, ethnicity in these conceptualizations is the stuff of mundane, ordinary behavior and not simply the symbols used to mobilize members of the nation. These perspectives of unconscious ethnicity stand in sharp divergence from my argument in chapter two that ethnicness is very much a self-conscious exercise of cultural understandings, behaviors, and acts.

In Russia and Kazakhstan, the performance of ethnicness, which the institutions I discuss sponsor, is typically quite mundane activity conceptualized and enacted institutionally as ethnic behavior but often nothing more than playing karaoke or engaging in arts and crafts in national cultural centers. In nearly all cases of institutionally supported ethnicness, the places (national cultural centers, Houses of Culture and Friendship, the village or town central square) and times
(during the time periods set aside for German language courses, group meetings, or cultural festivals), in which acts are performed are what ultimately qualifies them discursively as ethnic. In fact for many people of German descent, the only instances when their activities are constituted as ethnic are when they take place in officially designated ethnic spaces, such as the German national cultural centers (commonly referred to as German Houses). In the conceptualizations of ethnicness I describe above, the materials constituting ethnicity are unmarked aspects of daily life; however, in Russia and Kazakhstan the practice of ethnicness constitutes ordinary experiences explicitly marked as ethnic for both practitioners and observers according to the performance’s locations and times and the ethnic discourses associated with them. As opposed to the positions I consider above, it is not the daily behavior of members within groups that practitioners and observers consider ethnic, but is rather contingent upon the places, times, and things associated with the performed behavior.

Public institutions such as the Assembly of the Peoples of Kazakhstan and ethnic territories in Russia carry out this political marking of the mundane as ethnic for the purpose of civic nation-building programs.31 Complicit in this effort are economic and cultural development institutions from Germany that discursively cast the markings of ethnicness upon the everydayness of people who identify or have been identified as ethnically German. The following sections will closely examine this foreign-sponsored cultural activity, the discourses that mark it as ethnic, and the nature of the ethnic spaces and things with which it takes place.

31 In chapter two, I briefly introduce the Assembly of the Peoples of Kazakhstan and the institutionalization of ethnic territoriality in the Russian Federation. I will discuss these institutional apparatuses at length in the following two chapters.
Germany and the Sponsorship of “Culture Work”

While sitting in the office of the Altai Foundation in the German National Rayon Halbstadt, Detlef Pröfrock, the director of operations there, clarified for me the rather complex institutional mechanisms culminating in the project known as the “Program for the German National Minority in Eastern Europe and Central Asia” (Programm für nationale Minderheiten in Osteuropa und Zentralasien), hereafter simply “the Program.” The Federal Republic of Germany partially funds and manages the Program using various umbrella organizations located throughout the former Soviet Union and other sites in Eastern Europe. Pröfrock represents Germany’s interests in the Altai Region through his position as an employee of the Society for Technical Cooperation (GTZ) and as the director of the Altai Foundation (Altai-Stiftung) located in the National German Rayon Halbstadt in southwestern Siberia. Germany’s involvement in this region rests primarily on the substantial population of people of German descent residing there.

Pröfrock, who grew up in the East German city Schwerin and speaks fluent Russian, has had a long career with the GTZ. After the reunification of the two German states in 1989, Pröfrock joined the GTZ to help manage the Program and was soon stationed to work with the German population of the Transylvanian region in Romania. After the bulk of the German population departed Romania for Germany, the GTZ transferred Pröfrock to Russia. Pröfrock is one of several Germans educated in the German Democratic Republic who the GTZ employs to manage the Program in the various former socialist states where it operates.32

32 In addition to the German National Rayon Halbstadt, I have visited GTZ offices in Berlin, Kaliningrad, Moscow, Omsk, Novosibirsk, Almaty, and Bishkek. The majority of the German citizens working in these offices grew up in the German Democratic Republic and speaks fluent Russian.
In addition to Siberia and other parts of the Russian Federation, the Program supports the “German National Minority” in other regions of the former Soviet Union, most notably Ukraine and Kazakhstan. In Kazakhstan, the Program’s operations are quite similar to those in the Russian Federation, with variances in state and local-level management personnel, techniques and philosophy. The fundamental difference is the extent to which local Kazakhstanis manage the Program at the top and intermediary levels. The primary Program-affiliated institution involved with the affairs of the “German National Minority” in Kazakhstan is known as Rebirth (Wiedergeburt), which strictly employs Kazakhstani citizens to run the Program, rather than importing managers from Germany like Pröfrock.

In the Kazakhstani village Sharbakti, where I did the bulk of my fieldwork, I worked closely with the leader of the German Meeting Center there, Lydia Ableeva. Ableeva is not a German official, and has never been to Germany. She owns her own cosmetic business in Sharbakti and manages the German Center whenever she can find the time. Ableeva works closely with the regional leaders of Rebirth, which is headquartered in the largest city in the area, Pavlodar. She serves as Rebirth’s representative in Sharbakti as a volunteer and receives very little compensation or reimbursement for any of the time or monetary expenses she incurs. She is most interested in her friends and family members who are German and the opportunities that managing the German Meeting Center provides her to maintain those ties through an ethnic cultural idiom - “Germanness.” Ableeva’s foremost concern influencing her management of the Center, as she explained to me and as I observed, has been for the local elderly Germans whose

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33 Following WWII, Kazakhstan maintained the second largest population of people officially registered as German after the Russian SSR in the Soviet Union. Although massive numbers of ethnic Germans have left Kazakhstan for Germany and the Russian Federation since 1991, Kazakhstan still has the second largest German population among former Soviet republics.
friends and family have either died or moved to Russia and Germany. She is also devoted to maintaining relationships with close family members and friends of either herself or her deceased mother who are German.

The Program’s local management and the scale of its authority and operations in the Halbstadt German National Rayon in Russia and the Sherbakti Rayon in Kazakhstan exemplify the fundamental differences in how the Program works in these neighboring regions of the former Soviet Union. In the case of the Halbstadt German National Rayon, the Altai Foundation and Detlev Pröfrock represent the highest level of authority for German institutions; in the Sharbakti Rayon, the German Meeting Center and Lydia Ableeva represent the highest level of authority.34 As I explain below, Pröfrock answers to officials from Germany headquartered in Moscow, while Ableeva looks to Kazakhstani citizens in Pavlodar City, the regional capital, for support and leadership. Although the projects that Pröfrock and Ableeva manage represent interests originating in Germany, how local personnel and participants use the procedures, materials, activities, and spaces the Program provides depends primarily upon local needs, interests, and forms of knowledge that are often disconnected from the Program’s original intent.

Before I detail specifically how the Program, its agents, and its participants operate among German communities in Russia and Kazakhstan, I briefly address why those who control the intervening institutions from Germany might want to cultivate the rise of German culture and language proficiency in the former Soviet Union. The question of motivation behind the desire to

34 The term rayon designates a territory roughly equivalent to a county in the United States. Therefore rayoni (plural) represent administrative units within Russia’s federal regions (usually designated as Oblasti or Krai in Russian). The German National Rayon Halbstadt is located in a region in southwestern Siberia heavily populated with ethnic Germans and hence provided with limited cultural and administrative autonomy. For a description of “autonomy” granted to titular nationalities in the Soviet Union, see Terry Martin (2001) and Yuri Slezkine (1994).
create German-speakers in places like Russia and Kazakhstan is not an easy one to answer. The Interior Ministry of the Federal Republic of Germany (BMI)\textsuperscript{35} and GTZ, which are the primary representatives of the Program’s discourse, typically explain that the need to develop and maintain the German language and culture among Germans in places like Kazakhstan stems from a responsibility Germany has for the social, economic, and legal rights of the German minority there. They also view their programs to be an opportunity for Germans to preserve their culture and flourish as Germans in a Russian or Kazakh world.\textsuperscript{36}

Other sources are skeptical. An official responsible for German language programs at the German Embassy in Almaty explained to me that the logic behind the Program’s emphasis on language acquisition is to provide Germans in the former Soviet Union with some accessibility to their own ethnic culture, stemming the tendency to migrate to Germany. The official personally views such logic as absurd, because Germans often use their acquired language fluency as a means to qualify for migration to Germany through passing the required German language exam, and at the very least they acquire an enhanced cultural knowledge inspiring a greater interest in Germany. This official gathered that nationalist tendencies, devoted to the spread of German culture and language outside the boundaries of Germany, existing among the older ranks of German political authorities were ultimately responsible for the maintenance of the cultural aspects of the Program. This opinion is not uncommon among the few GTZ and German government officials with whom I have spoken on the subject. No matter the intent of the

\textsuperscript{35} BMI is the official acronym for the Interior Ministry of the Federal Republic of Germany (\textit{Bundesministerium des Innern}). I explain the relevance of this institution to my ethnographic context later in the chapter.

\textsuperscript{36} See the BMI’s official statement regarding support for the German minority in the former Soviet Union at http://www.bmi.bund.de/cln_165/DE/ Migration Integration/Spaetaussiedler/ spaetaussiedler_node.html, last accessed, 12/10/2010.
Program from the German authorities’ side, the resources it provides its clients in Russia and Kazakhstan fit comfortably into the civic nation-building discourse these countries employ.37

**The Society for Technical Cooperation and the “Program”**

The Society for Technical Cooperation (Gesellschaft fuer technische Zussamenarbeit), or GTZ, is a private development institution that the German government occasionally contracts to implement projects throughout the world.38 One current GTZ-led project, which has attracted a high level of financial and technical investment from Germany into the former Soviet Union, focuses on several German communities characterized as “compact settlements” (Kompaktsiedlungen). Since the GTZ’s arrival into the FSU in 1993, it has implemented projects designed to provide credit to the German population for economic projects and entrepreneurship, housing for Germans and non-Germans immigrating to the Russian Federation from Central Asia, medical resources for those with serious ailments, and “traditional” German language and cultural instruction for school children and interested adults.39 The GTZ itself, which is a registered private corporation (GMBH) in Germany, works under contractual relationships with

37 I have observed that as the political and economic environments change in Germany, Russia, and Kazakhstan, so do the discourses utilized to identify the organs of the Program and the manner in which it operates. As a result, the constituent parts of the Program, as I have explained and identified them, quite possibly have changed since my fieldwork. For example, since I began my research, the Development Society of Halbstadt became the Altai Foundation. According to Maxim Kloos, an official at the Barnaul German House, the institution changed its name to take advantage of reduced tax rates for institutions officially registered as “foundations.” The day to day operations, activities, and personnel of the Altai Foundation are, however, identical to the Development Society.

38 I briefly discuss the GTZ in chapter four in relation to its support for the limited liability company Brücke (Bridges) in the Halbstadt Rayon.

the German government and other public and private entities, such as the World Bank, the European Union, the United Nations, as well as other various private companies. According to Pröfrock, the fundamental purpose of the GTZ is to support sustained development projects with the intent of initiating economic reforms and improving livelihoods in developing countries.  

By far the most prolific institution that has established a contractual relationship with the GTZ is the BMI. The relationship between the BMI and the GTZ revolves almost exclusively around Germany’s relationship with German national minorities residing in Eastern Europe and the countries of the former Soviet Union and is fostered through the Program, which the Ministry funds entirely. According to the information that both the GTZ and BMI have published on their websites, the Program is designed to help improve the life environment for people of German descent in Eastern Europe and the countries of the former Soviet Union, as a result of the disadvantages they have experienced from the consequences of World War II. The major focus of the Program is to provide the aforementioned population with an alternative to migrating to Germany and strengthen its collective desire to remain in the various countries of residence.  

According to the stated goals of the Program, the German citizens of former socialist countries will become self-reliant citizens contributing to the development of their homelands and

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41 Beginning in the late-1980’s, hundreds of thousands of Germans from Eastern Europe and the former Soviet Union have legally migrated to the Federal Republic of Germany. The ability to immigrate to Germany and obtain citizenship status there has been made possible by Article 116 in the German Constitution (Grundgesetz) of 1949 in combination with various pieces of national legislation. Article 116 states that Germans living outside of the boundaries of the Federal Republic of Germany after World War II may enter into it with full citizenship rights provided they possessed German citizenship before the end of the war, they maintain membership to the German nation (Volkszugehörigkeit), are refugees or expellees, or are a spouse or descendant of an individual living in Germany after December 31, 1937. A detailed examination of German migration to the BRD from Eastern Europe and the former Soviet Union is available in Brubaker (1998). The opportunity to migrate to Germany has left almost all German communities in the former Soviet Union severely depleted.
preserving relationships with people and institutions in Germany.\textsuperscript{42} This implies the maintenance of indirect and informal political, commercial, and cultural influence from the Federal Republic of Germany – a subject I address in my discussion of transnational kinship in chapter six.

The headquarters of the GTZ for the Russian Federation is located in a building called the “German House” in Moscow. The German House hosts a complex net of German organizations, including the International Union of German Culture (IVDK), which among other projects maintains a press for the printing of books about German culture and history, and the Social Academy of Scholars of the Russian Germans. In order to legally operate in the Russian Federation, the GTZ has established an NGO identified as “Breitenarbeit” to direct its projects.\textsuperscript{43} Breitenarbeit identifies both an institution and a discourse – individuals often evoke the term as a way to identify the German cultural programs and activities the GTZ sponsors. Officials also use Breitenarbeit to represent the specific set of cultural activities conducted at GTZ-funded German Meeting Centers.\textsuperscript{44}

Officially affiliated with the NGO Breitenarbeit in Moscow are several so-called “daughter organizations” located in Kaliningrad, Novosibirsk, Saratov, Omsk, Tomsk, and the

\textsuperscript{42} GTZ, http://www.fize.de/veranstaltungen.halterjugov.zusammenfassung (acessed December 2006).

\textsuperscript{43} The term Breitenarbeit does not a possess an English equivalent; however, based on my familiarity with the social context in which it is used, I would translate it roughly as “diffusion work,” suggesting the process of diffusing German culture to those German communities that have lost it. I acquired the information about Breitenarbeit and its programs from employees of the Altai Foundation. The Foundation’s web administrator, Alexander Jeltschin, provided me with a set of full-color copies detailing all of the programs the GTZ sponsors in the region (including extensive details of Breitenarbeit). Marina Hamburg, the officer for German language acquisition, and Natalia Khaoustova, the officer for youth programs at the Foundation further clarified aspects of Breitenarbeit which the informational sheets failed to address. Due to the difficulty of translating the term into English, I will continue to use the German word Breitenarbeit as its identifier.

\textsuperscript{44} For a thorough discussion of this usage of Breitenarbeit as a set of “subfields” operating in German Meeting Centers see below.
National German Rayon Halbstadt. The GTZ personnel dedicated to the Program in Central Asia operate from the Almaty German House in Kazakhstan. The Program in Central Asia is managed much differently from the Breitenarbeit system in Russia as local Central Asians (especially in Kazakhstan) have taken on most of the responsibility for administering the Program there. The common denominator for the Program in all of the states of the former Soviet Union is the presence of German Houses and Meeting Centers, which provide the primary physical sites at which German culture is performed.

GTZ officials and Russian civic nation-builders ultimately value the efforts and resources invested into Breitenarbeit because of its discursive power to synthesize a perception of German ethnic identity into a relevant international development project and contribute to the efforts of civic nation-building. The synthesized ideology that Breitenarbeit implies indexes the improvement of Germans’ “life environment” through the reintroduction and protection of their cultural characteristics as the titular nationality of the Halbstadt German National Rayon. For state authorities in all three countries, Breitenarbeit discourse also suggests the revitalization and preservation of minority ethnic culture contributing to the image of these states as multiethnic civic nations. The next three sections examine how the Program and its German centers operate in both the Russian Federation and Kazakhstan. I first elaborate on the features of Breitenarbeit in the Russian Federation (using the Altai Krai as a case study), and compare the differences between Breitenarbeit in Russia and how the Program operates in Kazakhstan.
In addition to his employment with the GTZ, Pröfrock is the director of the Altai Foundation, which is Breitenarbeit’s “daughter organization” in Russia’s Altai Krai. The Altai Foundation and the other Breitenarbeit affiliates throughout the Russian Federation operate a number of projects designed to support the German population. The Altai Foundation operates two primary institutions in the Altai Krai; the German House in the regional capital Barnaul, and the Altai Foundation’s headquarters located in the village Shumanovka in the Halbstadt German National Rayon. Within the structure of each Breitenarbeit daughter organization, there are six work fields (Arbeitsfelder), each of which has its own staff and possesses specific “development” responsibilities. The six fields include professional development, humanitarian aid, agriculture, entrepreneurial promotion, partnerships between the German National Rayon and regions in Germany, and what is also termed Breitenarbeit. In addition to its designation as the Russian Federation-based NGO that directs the Program for the GTZ, officials use the term Breitenarbeit as a general identifier for the three subfields of German cultural development work, which include German language acquisition, youth programs, and the management of German meeting centers (Begegnungszentren).

Each Breitenarbeit subfield is assigned an officer, who is responsible for the programs operating within his or her subfield. At the time of my research, all of the Breitenarbeit subfield officers working with the GTZ in the Halbstadt Rayon were Russian and spoke German at varying levels; however, many of the people who worked under these officials are of German descent (most of whom speak German at a very low proficiency, if at all). The officer in charge

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45 A krai is a Russian federal region, typically situated along one of Russia’s international borders.
of the German meeting centers potentially carries the most responsibilities as both 
Breitenarbeit’s language and youth programs use the centers for their projects. According to the 
GTZ-published informational sheets describing Breitenarbeit, the primary objectives of the 
meeting centers are to instill the linguistic and cultural traditions of Germany in those who 
participate in their programs and to “protect” the historic traditions of the Volga Germans. In 
addition to language training, therefore, the centers host a variety of other activities and 
organizations, such as women and children’s clubs and other cultural training opportunities 
ranging from performance in traditional dances and theater to the culturally appropriate manner 
of celebrating German holidays and life events – all of which are linked to understandings of 
“Germanness” originating from the Volga and the western German homelands. German cultural 
authorities working within the various institutions supporting the Program have designed these 
language and cultural programs to establish or reaffirm an awareness of the life and customs of 
the historic German communities of western Russia, Ukraine, and Bessarabia in addition to 
forging cultural linkages to the Federal Republic of Germany.

The meeting centers also function as sites for the implementation of projects from the 
other GTZ work fields (those other than Breitenarbeit). For example, many of the centers are 
equipped with computers and host computer-training classes, which those working in the 
“professional development field” typically teach. The officers for youth programs and language 
training work closely together as the Program generally directs the bulk of the German language 
training at teenagers. Although the GTZ office in Altai Krai is located in the Halbstadt Rayon, 
the Breitenarbeit programs are not designed exclusively for Germans living in the Rayon – 
rather, most of the work fields reach out to both Germans and non-Germans living throughout 
the Krai. However, as Pröfrock clarified, for all projects implemented, at least 50 percent of the
participants must be of German descent. In any case, the Breitenarbeit program in the Halbstadt Rayon financially supports 38 Meeting Centers located in 17 Rayoni of the Altai Krai. The programs of the other work fields are available to ethnic Germans only living within the Altai Foundation’s regional sphere. The Altai Foundation’s sister organizations operate in other Russian regions with significant populations (such as Novosibirsk, Omsk, and Kaliningrad) and maintain identical programs that the GTZ and its local affiliates manage and sponsor under the auspices of Breitenarbeit. Although German cultural workers across the border in Kazakhstan rarely (if ever) reference the term “Breitenarbeit,” its discourses heavily inform their activities.

**Rebirth in Kazakhstan**

Just a few kilometers away from the Halbstadt Rayon and across the Russian Federation’s border with the Republic of Kazakhstan are villages and urban centers with significant German populations also equipped with the various programs and institutions designed to meet their cultural and material needs. In Kazakhstan, the operation of the Program is to some extent independent from the jurisdiction of the GTZ, as the organization Rebirth operates it, albeit with partial funding and direction from the GTZ. Certainly the GTZ is involved in administering the Program in Kazakhstan and has an official presence there; however, its operations and personnel are limited to an office in the German House in Almaty, where it manages the work of the Program for all of Central Asia (which includes activity in Kyrgyzstan and Uzbekistan). As a

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46 The 2000 census in Kazakhstan reported the German population in the Pavlodar Oblast at 26,890, which makes up the fourth largest group in the Oblast behind Kazakhs, Russians and Ukrainians. The German population of the Sharbakti Rayon where I did the bulk of my research stands roughly at 1000 people.
result of its partial autonomy from the GTZ, Rebirth in Kazakhstan has a more local flavor than the organizations affiliated with Breitenarbeit in Russia.

I believe this institutional separation between Rebirth and the GTZ (especially compared to how the program operates in Russia) occurs for two reasons. First, as a GTZ official explained to me at their headquarters in Berlin, programs for Central Asia are managed by a separate branch of the GTZ (that happens to be located in Frankfurt) than the programs for Russia and the rest of Eastern Europe. According to my understanding, this separation is purely a matter of organization – global regions are divided up and given to separate departments to manage. A second reason for the separation is simply the local Kazakhstanis’ desire to manage their own programs. As the executive director of Rebirth, Alexander Dederer, explained to me, a primary goal of Rebirth is to eventually establish complete autonomy from German funding. In spite of the emphasis on separation between the two institutions, they certainly share a collaborative and cooperative relationship, especially since Rebirth receives significant funding from the GTZ.

Over the years, since the GTZ has operated in Kazakhstan, the amount of funding from Germany has decreased in proportion to the decrease in the German population, and local officials like Dederer recognize that Rebirth must completely sustain itself financially in order to remain a significant political and cultural presence in Kazakhstan. An additional advantage of self-financing for Rebirth is the freedom to operate exclusively within the agenda of its leadership and act as partners with officials stationed in Kazakhstan from Germany rather than having to act according to the stipulations they set. Alternative sources of funding for Rebirth

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47 Alexander Dederer, personal communication.
projects currently stem from Kazakhstani government institutions such as the Assembly of the Peoples of Kazakhstan and private contributors.48

Local Kazakhstanis run all aspects of Rebirth – the employees of Rebirth throughout the country are primarily of German descent; however I have met several Russians, Ukrainians and Kazakhs working for the organization in various capacities. Rebirth tends to hire employees who have worked up through its hierarchical structure. For example, I had a few acquaintances that worked as cultural workers in German meeting centers in villages and cities and were later hired to work in better-paid administrative jobs at the higher ranks of the organization’s hierarchy. One former German meeting center leader is the current director of Rebirth for the Pavlodar Oblast. One of the reasons for this upward mobility is the need for Rebirth to recruit its own managers locally rather than relying on GTZ employees from Germany.

Even as Rebirth seeks economic independence from Germany, the organization runs the Program in a similar fashion to how it functions in Russia; however, differences exist according to available resources and managerial styles.49 Similar to Breitenarbeit’s structure in the Russian Federation, Rebirth operates within a hierarchical structure – the head office in Almaty directs the operations of field offices located around Kazakhstan in several of its oblasty with sizeable German populations. The oblast-level offices in turn direct regional offices located in small

48 My observations and discussions with individuals in the field suggest that private contributions vary significantly, from large cash contributions from corporate sponsors in urban centers to minimal cash payments and material help from local business people. In Sharbakti, for example, the German owner of a trucking company provides transportation to cultural events around the Oblast for German Center participants.

49 When Rebirth first established itself in Kazakhstan in the mid-1990s, it also identified its programs within the framework of “Breitenarbeit;” however, as part of the effort to distance itself from the GTZ, it has backed off from the use of the term, although the programs are identical (to the extent that funding is available) to those identified as Breitenarbeit in the Russian Federation.
urban centers and villages within each oblast. At the oblast-level, Rebirth maintains an administrative office staffed with a director and auxiliary staff.50

The Pavlodar Rebirth office staff consists of a director, a secretary, an accountant, and various administrators responsible for the work fields of the Program. In the Pavlodar office, I was aware of one administrator responsible for humanitarian needs, and several others responsible for the cultural programs that took place at the local German Meeting Center. Similar to the staff at the Altai Foundation assigned to work in the Breitenarbeit subfield, the other staff members at Pavlodar’s Rebirth are dedicated to the German language, youth, and other meeting center programs. While assignments in these different aspects of Rebirth activities are not arbitrary, they are often assigned based on the employees’ abilities and availability – most of the staff is young, and some are still working on university degrees. Retention among staff members is high, as talented workers are often retained after they graduate from university and given positions with greater responsibilities. Many of the employees working with the cultural programs are also German language teachers and are sufficiently fluent in German. Most of the cultural workers I met during my research were working toward degrees in German language teaching and imagined themselves either continuing their careers with Rebirth or teaching German in primary or secondary schools. The staff responsible for cultural activities is also active in organizing and executing the two annual German language summer camps – one camp is organized for children and the other for high school youth.

50 I have visited the Rebirth offices in Almaty and Semipalatinsk, and worked closely with the office in Pavlodar.
German meeting centers and “ethnic cross dressing”

GTZ officials have established German meeting centers in cities and villages with substantial German populations throughout the former Soviet Union. In Central Asia, for example, there are several meeting centers in Kyrgyzstan and Uzbekistan. The meeting centers in those countries are primarily located in major cities, such as Bishkek and Tashkent, however, in Russia and Kazakhstan, where there are still substantial rural German populations, there are also numerous centers throughout the countryside. Nearly all of the cultural work and programs that the GTZ and the subsidiary organizations in both Russia and Kazakhstan sponsor take place in these centers. The meeting centers therefore represent the spaces where people of German descent primarily engage with cultural programs and processes imagined in Germany, but designed and carried out in sites from St. Petersburg to Semipalatinsk. Each meeting center is equipped to some extent with the tools to execute the Program; however, the manner in which the Program becomes implemented at any particular center depends heavily upon the facilities, personnel, and participants, the nature of which varies considerably across regions.

Institutional discourses aside, the people who actually participate in the activities and institutions of the Program represent its most interesting quality. The centers are staffed with a local “leader” (rukovoditel’), and other specialists depending upon their needs. In addition to the leader and other administrative staff, most centers usually employ German language, music, and art teachers. Center employees are often not people of German descent; in fact many are simply Russians enthusiastic about German language and culture. For example, a large number of the German language teachers employed at German centers I met while researching in the Altai and Pavlodar regions were Russian, university-trained German teachers, and about half of the meeting center leaders were Russian. The reason for this culturally mixed group managing and
participating in German cultural programs is largely related to the ethnic demographic and economic changes taking place after the dismantling of the Soviet Union. Several Germans fluent in or actively involved with German culture in the past, as well as the bulk of highly educated Germans, have left the region for Germany. Many of the Germans who have stayed (the Altai and Pavlodar regions maintain a sizeable German population) simply are not interested in the programs, especially since there is little to no economic compensation for the work, and everyone in the village must attend to private agricultural production and other sources of household, professional, and informal labor.

Several other extenuating factors related to personal interests, social relations, and even coincidence also influence the staffing of the centers and the ethnic makeup of their participants. For example, a young Russian woman named Anastasia Eriskina who works in the village administrative office currently manages the Podsosnovo German Center. Her appointment as the Center’s leader appears to be a coincidence conditioned by her place of employment, interest in German culture, and the latest location of the German Center. On my first two visits to Podsosnovo in 2005 and 2006, the Center was located in the village House of Culture, and led by a young German woman who worked there. Upon my second visit, the mayor informed me that he had helped to arrange the construction of a new German Meeting Center in the basement of the administration building (through funding from the GTZ). When I returned to begin my fulltime research in the village in 2008, the Center had already moved into its newly-completed home, and a Russian member of the mayor’s staff was now the Center’s leader. Eriskina’s appointment as Podsosnovo’s German Center leader had just as much to do with her place of employment and subsequent relationship with the village’s mayor who was largely responsible for the building of the new Center. In addition to German culture enthusiasts, others who
participate in the Podsosnovo Center’s activities are made up of Eriskina’s friends and family members (for example her daughter and parents’ Russian neighbor Zhenia are frequent participants) regardless of their ethnic affiliation.

In spite of this ethnic incongruity in the meeting centers, the style of German ethnic discourses persists in assuming the Program’s predominant applicability to people of German descent. The probable reason for the static nature of these institutionalized German ethnic discourses (and their continued existence) lies in the needs of the involved states – the German state’s need to provide cultural resources for its ethnic kinsmen as a means to consolidate and stabilize the ethnic German population in the former Soviet Union, and the Russian and Kazakhstani states’ need to maintain the image of multinational civic nation-building providing cultural and material benefits to non-titular groups. As I previously noted, ethnicity in these states largely amounts to everyday kinds of behavior that institutions have ethnicized precisely to serve the needs listed above. Thus, the activities taking place within the German centers that the institutions operating in concert with the Program (GTZ, Assembly, and German national territories) identify as ethnic behavior are largely composed of mundane activities, which individuals might otherwise practice privately or under the auspices of other non-ethnicized institutions. In what follows, I describe the German meeting centers in both Russia and Kazakhstan in detail and certain events I observed there. My purpose with these “thin descriptions” is to demonstrate the kinds of normalized activities that civic nation-building

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51 Some of the literature exemplifying Breitenarbeit’s discourse recognizes the participation of non-Germans in the activities taking place in the German Houses and other venues of German Culture. For example, an information packet that the GTZ circulates containing a description of their programs states the following about Breitenarbeit’s German language programs: “The extracurricular language instruction serves not only the German minority with the resurrection of their language. In addition, young and old Russian residents in the Altai recognize that their study of the German language offers personal and career advantages.”
politizes by fashioning them into the raw materials from which its discourse is built – deliberate acts of ethnic cultural expression (i.e. ethnicness).

What I mean by “thin description” is taken from Clifford Geertz’s seminal essay discussing the analytical ambitions of anthropological ethnography. Geertz posits the notion of “thick description” as an analytical exercise undertaken to identify meaning from acts of social intercourse. His emphasis on analysis does not, however, discount the exposition of unanalyzed observations, the thin descriptions, as superfluous, but regards them as integral to producing analyses and the subsequent thick descriptions emerging from them. Stressing the danger of compromising context for interpretation, Geertz argues that “if anthropological interpretation is constructing a reading of what happens, then to divorce it from what happens…is to divorce it from its applications and render it vacant (Geertz 1973: 18).” It is in the spirit of Geertz’s suggestion to set my research subjects “in the frames of their own banalities,” in order to “dissolve their opacity,” to which I dedicate the next three sections that I provide the following mundane descriptions (Geertz 1973: 14). I believe these instances offer real contexts from which I base my analysis into how and why folks interface with concepts such as ethnicity, nationalism, and civic nation-building (or, like Heinrich, avoid engagement with them).

The anatomy of German Meeting Centers

Some of my closest and most helpful informants in both countries held leadership responsibilities in meeting centers. The rukovoditel’ or leader of each meeting center is a local resident of the village or town where the center is located. The leader is usually a woman and has the primary responsibility for running the Program in her region of jurisdiction. The extent of the leaders’ responsibilities depends upon the size of the German population in the center’s region and the level of organization regional Program leaders employ (which in turn depends upon the
level of financial investment provided the Program in any given region). In Podsosnovo, for example, the leader of the local Center has authority to manage the Program in her village only, as most of the neighboring towns also have centers. In contrast, the leader of the Sharbakti Center manages the program for all Germans living within the boundaries of the entire rayon (in this case, the Sharbakti Rayon), which is one administrative district among several in the Pavlodar Oblast. The Rebirth office in Pavlodar directs the Program for Germans living in rayoni without a German Meeting Center. Similarly, the Altai Foundation administrative office and the German House in Barnaul handle the concerns for Germans living in regions within the Altai Region without German meeting centers.52

The day to day operations of the centers revolve around language courses, children’s activities, adult clubs (usually for women and senior adults) as well as preparations and rehearsals for performances. Often, the usage of the centers depends upon where they are located, and they might serve multiple purposes for the larger community. The centers and their personnel may also rely on various local institutions for resources and other forms of support. The German Center in Podsosnovo is especially dependent upon the village administration and its mayor for reasons I explain at greater length below. The Center also serves as a site for important community events completely unrelated to ethnic culture. For example, the Center hosted a recent mayoral election.53

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52 “Handling concerns for Germans” primarily implies distributing humanitarian relief to qualified individuals. Humanitarian relief mostly involves the distribution of prescription medicines and other health products such as eyeglasses. However, there are other aspects of the Program’s functions that might apply to people living away from German Centers, such as children desiring to participate in cultural activities that the Centers sponsor. This may involve arranging for transportation to and from summer German language camps for participating youth.

53 I describe the election at length in chapter four.
Of the twenty or so German centers I have visited over the years, all of them are equipped with similar materials. The walls are covered with posters and maps depicting places in Germany, photographs of the Center’s participants engaged in various cultural activities and performances, the products of children’s arts and crafts activities, and various other representations of “Germanness.” The walls of many centers feature framed pictures depicting notable Germans from Russia, including writers, academics, and military and political leaders, most of whom are men. The centers also usually contain rows of bookshelves stocked with numerous volumes pertaining to German history and culture in Russia. The International Union of German Culture in the Moscow German House publishes the vast majority of the books found in German centers, and the Union provides their publications to individual centers at no cost (GTZ workers often distribute the books to German centers at training meetings and other forums). The titles range from German language texts for Russian speakers, to books recording the history of Germans in Russia, to manuals describing how to prepare food or engage in ritual activities (such as weddings and holidays) in the “traditional” German fashion.54 Based on the amount of funding the individual Centers receive, they are equipped with a range of technical equipment, including portable stereos and CD players, televisions, VCRs, DVD players, and computers. The Centers also serve as the storage space for performance paraphernalia, such as costumes, musical instruments and stage props.

Physically, the Podsosnovo and Sharbakti German Centers differ to the extent that the Podsosnovo center is larger and more richly equipped than the center in Sharbakti.55

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54 I have visited the International Union of German Culture’s publishing office in Moscow and perused the entire catalogue. The books are evenly published in the Russian and German languages, depending upon the author and the didactic nature and intended readers of the text.

55 This difference is generally the case with all of the village level German Meeting Centers I visited in Russia and Kazakhstan. In the Altai Region, I visited four village Centers and three in
above, the German Center in Podsosnovo is a new facility and has multiple purposes. The space is quite large, comprised of four large rooms, which are usually dedicated to cultural activities – there is a classroom for language lessons, a media room equipped with a sound system to watch videos and play karaoke, and two large spaces devoted to rehearsing for performances and hosting cultural exhibits (such as the artistic work the Center’s participants produce). I attended a German day camp at the Center during the spring break period of 2008, and the participants used the large rooms for physical activities and games. In contrast, the German Center in Sharbakti consists of a single room at a children’s after school center fondly referred to as the Rainbow Club. However, when necessary the Center’s personnel use the other spaces there, including a large central room and an auditorium for performance rehearsals and other activities. The single room comprising the German Center is quite small and can barely accommodate the large central table, bookshelves, and cabinets packed with costumes and set pieces for performances.

Technical equipment in the Sharbakti Center consists of a television and VCR.

The specific activities and clubs the centers host vary depending on the size of the German population, the active participants from the village or town where the centers are located, the material resources the centers possess, and their access to funding. At the very least, they sponsor German language courses for children and adults, a children’s club, and a women’s club. Other possibilities are German clubs for teenagers, senior citizens’ clubs, and German language conversation clubs (I once attended a meeting for the “Club for the Lovers of the

the Pavlodar Oblast. Each Center in the Altai Region maintained a large space (in one very small village located a few hundred kilometers from the Halbstadt German National Rayon, the Center was housed in its own multi-room building), and was richly equipped with literature, furniture, and electronic equipment. In contrast, the Centers in Kazakhstan were all rented, single-room affairs lodged in village Houses of Culture (except for the Sharbakti Center).

56 From this point forward, I will identify the Rainbow Club simply as Rainbow (raduga), reflecting the local reference.
German language” in the Siberian town Yaravoya). Centers occasionally host periodic events such as German language camps and holiday celebrations. Staff members at German centers usually organize groups or ensembles specializing in performing German folk songs and/or German dances. These groups often enlist high school aged youth, especially for their dance ensembles, but older women occasionally participate in German vocal groups. In Pavlodar, for example, the German House sponsors a female German vocal group called “Die Nette Frauen” (The Kindly Women) and a youth dance ensemble “Paradies.” Some groups typically perform at the various village, city, rayon, and oblast-sponsored ethnic cultural events and festivals, as well as statewide German cultural events organized within the Breitenarbeit framework. Participation in such groups usually involves some form of travel to distant cities, villages, and possibly even to other countries within the former Soviet Union.

An additional responsibility of the German centers is to participate in the organization of annual German language youth and children’s camps. Center staff are responsible for organizing youth participants for the camps, recruiting camp counselors (usually from the centers themselves, although local school teachers often volunteer to work as counselors), and serving as camp counselors. The Altai Foundation in the Halbstadt region and Rebirth in Pavlodar City run two German language camps in the summer (one for youth and one for children) and two during the spring break in March. The camps run for two weeks in the summer and one in the spring. The summer camps take place in camp grounds located around lakes or in forests, requiring travel from home villages and towns to places within the region or Oblast. In addition to German language study, camp activities involve instruction on European German culture, history, and geography; physical and artistic activities, ranging from games and sports, to theatre, music, and
dance, and lastly “disco evenings.” Most camps are also equipped with a native German counselor who speaks fluent Russian.57

Although the framework of the institutions and the discourses driving the agenda of the Program appear sufficiently ethnic in nature, a great deal of their activities performed in the name of ethnicness are typical activities done privately or in other public institutions that have nothing to do with ethnicity. All kinds of activities in Russia and Kazakhstan therefore become discursively ethnic once practiced in marked spaces and temporal periods. Brubaker et al. argue that ethnic Hungarian space in Transylvania and the activities associated with it are ethnically unmarked until one leaves that space to join the unmarked Romanian public (Brubaker, Feischmidt, Fox, and Grancea 2006: 266). Conversely in the former Soviet Union, one’s activities remain ethnically unmarked until they enter the space that institutions have deemed ethnic although they may be identical to those conducted outside of the ethnic space. In order to exemplify how ordinary activities become ethnic in ethnically marked space and time, I provide examples of two German center events in Russia and Kazakhstan.

**The spring break German language camp in Podsosnovo**

In March of 2008, I attended two days of a week-long German language camp in the Podsosnovo German Meeting Center. The camp is held annually during the village’s one-week school vacation in March and provides language instruction, games, sporting events, rehearsals for theatrical performances, and several leisure activities (such as watching videos and playing

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57 In the past several years, I have attended three German language summer camps in Russia and Kazakhstan for varying periods of time. I have also visited the institution in Berlin that recruits and trains native German counselors for the camps. The most recent camp I attended in the Altai Krai was in 2006, and it did not receive a counselor from Germany that year for funding reasons.
The fifteen participants (twelve girls and three boys) of the camp were composed of members of the Center’s “Children’s Club” who ranged from eight to twelve years old (the bulk of the participants were eleven). Two of the Center’s staff members managed the camp’s activities. Olga Jung, a German language teacher and ethnic German, ran the camp in the morning and focused on language learning using simple vocabulary and various language-strengthening games and activities. In the afternoon, the second staff member, Tatiana Zmiyako, a local art teacher of Polish descent, replaced Olga and helped the children concentrate on arts and crafts projects. Olga informed me that five of the fifteen participants were German.

When I arrived at 9am, a handful of children were sitting around a large table in the classroom, others were running around the various rooms of the Center or outside in front of the village administration building – Olga had not yet arrived. Once she did, all of the children entered the classroom and took seats around the table. The morning language learning involved vocabulary acquisition activities focusing on a set of words related to food and sports. Olga designed the games and activities to reinforce the words that she had taught. Frequently during the morning the group moved from the classroom to the larger rooms to engage in physical activities. For example, at one point the children filed into a larger room to do some calisthenics, such as jumping jacks and running in place. As they performed the exercises, they each took turns pronouncing memorized sayings in German related to physical fitness. Some of the activities were competitive in nature. At one point the group was divided into two teams. Olga instructed the children to construct imaginary fruit and vegetable salads using their newly

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58 The Children’s Club usually meets together every Sunday for an activity known as “Sunday School.” The activity is cultural in nature rather than religious, and is practiced throughout the former Soviet Union in German centers and other ethnic and non-ethnic cultural institutions.
acquired food vocabulary. The team captains recited the composition of their salads in German, and Olga and I judged which salads we thought were the best.

In the afternoon, Tatiana replaced Olga to lead the group in arts and crafts activities. Most of the children sketched pictures and then painted over the sketches. Others made what they identified as German-style dolls from various materials. One girl attached what looked to be cookies on painted, old vinyl records. The boys all seemed to be painting the same picture – a scene of a boy standing in front of a landscape which included a castle to his side. When I commented to the boys that they all appear to be painting the same scene, one replied that his building was a church rather than a castle like the other boys were drawing. This project held the boys’ attention for only a few moments and they eventually went off to play in the outer rooms and outside. Many of the girls left to go do things in the other rooms as well, so that only a handful of determined artists remained (all girls) – the most dedicated seemed to be those who were working on the dolls. Tatiana was very attentive to those who remained to work on their pieces. The final few hours of the day were considerably less organized in structure, as the children chose to either work on art projects or do other things (including running from room to room and making a lot of noise). Tatiana explained that the kids enjoy the day camp because of the “free format,” meaning there is structure provided, but the kids can do what they want.

**Practicing for the regional cultural festival in Sharbakti**

Every year, the Assembly of the Peoples of Kazakhstan sponsors a multiethnic cultural festival designed to give the state’s multiethnic citizens the forum to practice and demonstrate attributes of their ethnic cultures.59 These festivals take place in *oblast* and *rayon* capitals and the

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59 I reference this festival in chapter five.
local authorities expect members of the regional national cultural centers to participate. In the fall of 2008, the German Center agreed to participate in the upcoming festival by staging two songs and a dance. In order to execute the performances, the Center’s staff had to mobilize some of its members to perform in the festival, which in turn required significant preparation and rehearsals. The rehearsals took place at the Center, many of which I attended as an observer.

The festival participants rehearsed in the evening at Rainbow while a German language course was simultaneously taught in the German Center. The Center’s space is quite cramped and can hardly accommodate any physical movement, let alone dancing. Therefore the rehearsals took place in the large hall at Rainbow located directly adjacent to the room housing the German Center. Ableeva’s assistant at the Center, Olga Steingauer, a local music teacher and ethnic German, organized all of the performances, including a German polka dance in which several of the Center’s participants performed. I attended the third rehearsal (and all subsequent rehearsals), which was scheduled to begin at 5:30 pm. When I arrived, an arts and crafts class for the Children’s Club that Olga had organized was taking place focusing on water color painting. One of the participants was Olga’s daughter and the other her nephew. When the adults who were to participate in the rehearsal arrived, Olga instructed the children to go into the larger room to begin practicing their dance. By 6 pm, the participants had assembled themselves in the large hall, and the students for the German language class were beginning to arrive. The dance participants consisted of two German boys, three girls (one German, one Russian, and one Tatar) and two adult women (one German and one Russian). The singing group was made up of three adult women (two Germans and one Russian). There were four German language students (two adult women and two teenage girls, all Russian) and one language teacher (also Russian).
Before the dance rehearsal began, Olga ascertained that the dance group was short one participant, and one of the children reported that the person who had previously rehearsed with the group would not participate. Upon hearing that news, Olga went into the Center and fetched a teenaged girl studying German to fill the vacancy (although the girl seemed surprised and embarrassed, she continued to participate and performed with the group at the cultural festival). Rainbow possesses a large sound system attached to a relatively new computer for playing DVDs, CDs, and MP3s. Olga had brought her flash drive equipped with MP3 versions of German polka songs for the dances they would perform. Once she set up the necessary music on the audio equipment, she began the rehearsal.

Olga’s dance instruction method consisted of reviewing the dance with no music, and after a few repetitions, the dance pairs practiced the number with music. Olga first divided the participants into two groups – one group of adult/youth pairs, and one group of children pairs who took turns learning the dance steps in front of the entire group. After the children’s group practiced the number several times, Olga told them to take a break so that she, one of the Russian adult dancers Natalya, and Lidiya Ableeva could practice singing a German song they planned to perform at the festival. Once they had practiced singing the number a few times, Olga went back to the dance instruction. The adult/youth pairs practiced their steps a few times and were finally joined by the children pairs to practice the number as a group before ending the rehearsal for the evening. The entire rehearsal lasted about sixty minutes, and before departing, the group agreed to meet again the next evening.

All of this activity within the set apart spaces and time periods of German culture becomes ethnic precisely because of their physical locations (the German meeting centers) and in the latter case the temporal location (preparation time for a cultural festival). The activities also
required a great deal of institutional resources and action taking place at various loci along the entire hierarchy of official personnel employed in the project of civic nation-building. As I discuss below, the execution of these activities is contingent upon the needs and desires of those involved, including both administrators and participants at all levels. In order to properly devise, implement, and participate in the cultural activities, institutional personnel designing them and their participants require a set of familiar conceptual references closely related to the available governing strategies of the Soviet and post-Soviet periods. The following two sections employ my thick description of the “conceptual references” informing these acts of civic nation-building. I begin with a discussion of how and why actors manipulate the objects of culture I describe above, after which I discuss the longstanding familiar notions of socialist property, which likewise condition the nature and manner of these ethnic acts.

**The objects of ethnic cultures**

The activities discursively marked as ethnic took place in the instances I describe above largely as a result of the wide spectrum of needs and desires that individuals and institutions maintain intersecting at a time and place where such action benefited all of those involved. Kazakhstani and Russian civic nation-builders desire activities and institutions communicating toleration for ethnic minorities and their cultures. The German government wishes to stem migration from the former Soviet Union by providing cultural and material resources and programs for people of German descent. Local cultural leaders and their participants seek the benefits that institutionalized ethnic culture might provide, such as a wage, a professional credential, or a fun way to spend a wintery day in the early Siberian spring (and sometimes even the desire to practice ethnic culture). The events and activities I describe (and many others at the
various national cultural centers), however, required numerous mobilizations at the various levels of the institutional hierarchy responsible for civic nation-building.\textsuperscript{60}

The rehearsals I attended at the German Meeting Center in Sharbakti, for example, happened as a result of the federally mandated cultural festivals that occur annually in every region in Kazakhstan. Ultimately, the rehearsal I witnessed took place because officials from the Assembly of the Peoples of Kazakhstan presented a general plan pertaining to the purpose and structure of the festivals to the \textit{oblast}-level officials from the Pavlodar Small Assembly of the Peoples of Kazakhstan responsible for regional culture programs. The Small Assembly officials then instructed their regional affiliates (the local officers responsible for language and cultural development from the \textit{rayon}i and villages) who together with the \textit{Rayon Akim} met with the leaders of the various local national cultural centers, comprising the Sharbakti filial of the Small Assembly of the Peoples of Kazakhstan.\textsuperscript{61} The \textit{Akim}, acting as the Sharbakti filial executive, and the official responsible for language and cultural affairs in the \textit{Rayon} discussed their expectations and asked the cultural center leaders to commit to a number of performances for the festival and provide food in the form of “national cuisine.”\textsuperscript{62}

After the meeting with the Sharbakti filial, Ableeva informed Rebirth’s \textit{oblast} leaders in Pavlodar City of the regional government’s performance requirements and the commitments she made on behalf of the German Center. Rebirth personnel then worked with Ableeva on her

\textsuperscript{60} I elaborate generally on the hierarchical structure of ethnic cultural institutions in Kazakhstan in chapter five. Part of the exercise in this chapter has been to flesh out the institutional cultural activities that happen as a result of decisions and plans made along the hierarchy and filter down to the local practitioners of ethnic culture.

\textsuperscript{61} A \textit{Rayon Akim} is roughly equivalent to a county mayor.

\textsuperscript{62} The official responsible for cultural affairs and language development for the Sharbakti \textit{Rayon}, Gulsara Balakina, explained to me the chain of authority and the manner in which state and local officials organize government-mandated culture programs, such as the festival.
budgetary needs for the performance and food preparation. Rehearsals for the festival required the use of Rainbow and its equipment, as well as hours of preparation by Ableeva, her assistant Olga Stengauer, and other German Center workers and participants. Those involved spent several weeks selecting songs and dances from stacks of books, translating German songs into Russian to be understandable to the singers, composing and memorizing texts in German to be spoken before and after the performance, choreographing dance routines, and rehearsing the numbers they planned to perform during the “German cultural segment” of the festival.

A similar process of mobilization took place across the border in Russia to carry out the German Language Camp during the spring school recess. Officials managing the Program in Podsosnovo sponsored the camp to occupy village children during the recess while their parents were working at the collective farm. An aspect of the Program’s curriculum devised in Germany is to develop and preserve proficiency in the German language and other aspects of German culture among people of German descent in the former Soviet Union. A means to that end has been the organization of language camps. The Program has employed German language camps for children and youth since the time of the Program’s inception in 1993 as they resemble the structure of Soviet Pioneer camps, an institution quite familiar to post-socialist people. GTZ-managed organizations have therefore uniformly sponsored such camps throughout the former Soviet Union as a tool to encourage German language acquisition.63

At the local level, the Altai Foundation personnel working in the Breitenarbeit program contacted the leaders of all the regional German centers over which they have responsibility, providing them with a list of activities that should take place during the camp. The Center in

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63 My evidence for this statement stems from conversations I have had over the years with officials and individuals linked to the camps, and participants of Soviet Pioneer camps.
Podosnovo required cooperation from the village administration personnel to use its facilities (the basement of the village administration center, as well as the village’s collective farm administration that maintains the local cafeteria where the children eat lunch on camp days). The Center also needed funding from the Altai Foundation for the food and beverages provided to the participants and the wages for those who managed the camp, which necessitated the leader to draw up a budget and submit it back to the Foundation. The Foundation sent its accountant to Podosnovo to pay for the various expenses. The Centers’ leaders had to be certain that their staff consisted of local school teachers who were available to work at the camp during the spring recess (in the Podosnovo case, both Olga and Svetlana are teachers at the local school).

This description of how ethnic culture happens in the former Soviet Union implicates the crucial role of institutions and their political and economic resources, without which cultural activity, according to the manner in which the institutions imagine it, won’t happen. In this way, ethnic culture becomes an object of local economic and political production; people produce, consume, and manipulate things in the name of ethnic culture to meet political, economic, social, and personal objectives, or they don’t. The most significant aspect of this social interaction from the institutional perspective is that there are ethnic cultural things to manipulate inherently associated with specific ethnic groups. Authorities in the Soviet and post-Soviet Union have long perceived ethnic groups and their cultures to be mutually exclusive systems composed of objects managed and manipulated according to the needs of their constituents and the state. For example, Francine Hirsch argues that ethnic elites in the USSR’s formative years learned to manipulate their cultural forms to show that their ethnic nationalism “was the correct Soviet kind” (Hirsch 2005: 12). This required a “double assimilation” as ethnographic experts and non-Russians
collaborated to shuffle objects into cultural spaces most compliant with Bolshevik socialist discourse and to brand those objects as ethnic (Hirsch 2005: 146-47).

Certainly, the manipulation of people in respect to things is an integral aspect of governing within the modern state. Foucault’s discussion of Guillaume de la Perriere’s political writings, for example, identifies modern government’s concern for objects’ facilitation of social relations (such as wealth, means of subsistence, and land). According to this conceptualization of government, its primary role is to manage the relations between people by means of things to produce the ends that both the governor and the governed deem convenient (Foucault 1991).

Dale Eickelman applies this to the managing of culture, cultural things, and cultural discourses in the state within the varieties of Islam in the Arab world as ‘systems’ of beliefs and doctrines. Eickelman argues that employing cultural vernaculars as systems of manipulable objects “makes it possible to borrow from other systems and to incorporate changes, thereby increasing the system’s viability” (Eickelman 1992). Finally, Richard Handler connects this notion of thingness to the nation by suggesting that we see ethnic culture as a thing composed of various objects that are readily identifiable and analyzable, the existence of which testifies to the viability of the ethnic group in question (Handler 1988: 14-16; 191-92).

I argue that for citizens and authorities of post-socialist states, ethnic culture implies such systems – rather than being simply categories of knowledge informing the modalities of experience (as Brubaker maintains), these systems are embodied by cultural things with individual units that are added and deleted depending upon the needs of the persons or institutions operating within the systems of ethnic culture. These “units” are then reified as features integral to the exercise of ethnic culture. Just as Eickelman portrays various forms of Islam as systems filled with beliefs, texts, and practices to manipulate, so are the various ethnic
cultures of the former Soviet Union systems equipped with cultural things – literature, costumes, DVD players, folksongs, and dance routines – and people acting upon those things according to what they imagine or need ethnic culture to be. What, however, ultimately transforms these things into articles of ethnic culture are the ethnically characterized spaces and times within which those who identify ethnic culture place them. When these articles find themselves within these spaces and times, they are discursively transformed into the physical objects of ethnic culture. In doing so, they assume an additional utility separate from their use value as they become the very cultural things that qualify institutions as legitimate bearers of ethnicity and operatives in the work of civic nation-building. The construction and maintenance of ethnic culture through the establishment of ethnic times and places coupled with the introduction of cultural objects therefore represent a negotiation between institutions and individuals to produce the “ends” which all involved deem convenient and useful.

The institutional ethnic discourses perform the primary work of transforming certain spaces and time periods together with the mundane activities and things located within them from culturally neutral to ethnic. For example, a volume published with the cooperation of the Small Assembly of the Peoples of Kazakhstan in Pavlodar states:

“With professional cultural workers we found this important form of reviving and preserving culture, like cultural festivals and the art of ethnic peoples of Kazakhstan. There have already been eight such festivals organized. These festivals incorporate the amateur artists together with masters of creative works and national cooking. The festivals take place for the ethnic holidays. They want to instill within their children a love of their people, of their ethnic group (Lisovskaya and Musabayeva 2004: 30).”

The events of the rehearsal in Sharbakti I describe above are exactly the kinds of mundane activities that discursively become acts “of reviving and preserving” ethnic culture. Likewise, a GTZ Information Sheet from the Halbstadt German National Rayon in Russia discussing Breitenarbeit reports that in the meeting centers:
“...participants become familiar with the German language and culture of Germany. In addition, the traditions of the Russian Germans are preserved. The preservation of the customs, behaviors, folklore, as well as the various exhibitions, video projects, etc. also reflect the historical and contemporary achievements in the region. Women’s, children’s, and youth organizations in the German Meeting Centers help not only to make the leisure time of individuals more attractive and interesting, but they also develop personal creativity among participants when they take part in activities such as theatre studios, dance groups, and choral assemblies. The Halbstadt Development Society also provides German meeting centers with financial support to conduct parties and festivals for children and youth with the cooperation of creative family teams.”

As this literature exemplifies, authorities discursively set apart certain spaces (German houses and meeting centers, houses of culture) and times (the period of time during a cultural festival or language camp) as the points in which mundane activities become ethnic and the key moments of cultural revival and preservation. Those involved with the activities of the centers (including their leaders), however, often refrain from articulating how, or even if, their acts are preserving and reviving German culture. For many, participation with the centers simply presents opportunities to escape difficult, solitary, or dull domestic conditions rather than an engagement of ethnic cultural preservation. Others, who validate the institutionalized ethnic discourses attached to centers’ activities, often possess personal motivations for their affiliation having very little to do with ethnicness. In this way, at the level in which the institutions meet individual needs (and individuals meet institutional needs) a set of negotiations occurs satisfying the needs of all parties involved. There is also an element to this process of negotiation that is inherently post-socialist, which I view to be intimately connected with common understandings of property relations rooted in the Soviet past. Rather than the preservation and revitalization of ethnic culture (with which very few people consciously engage) it is through social relations connected to property that ethnic culture becomes an inherent piece of the fabric of daily post-socialist life.
Social relations and the disposal of ethnic things

Rainbow in Sharbakti and the Podsosnovo village administration represent institutions deeply integrated into the social fabric of their communities. Village and rayon administrators, workers from the House of Culture, local students and teachers, and even staff members and participants of the national cultural centers often use the facilities of Rainbow and the Podsosnovo village administration for various purposes. Both Rainbow and the village administration similarly utilize the programs, personnel, and facilities of other village institutions. The manner in which people interact with these institutions and move through their physical spaces is suggestive of how Soviet understandings of property and value facilitate social relations in post-socialist contexts. I will discuss the public utilization of Rainbow in Sherbakti and the Podsosnovo village administration to illustrate this point.

The Sharbakti Rayon administration fully funds and officially sanctions Rainbow as a platform from which to organize and host children’s clubs, activities, and performances. Every Friday, for example, Rainbow hosts a children’s dance evening (diskoteka). It also serves as practice space for rayon-sponsored dance and vocal performances by children’s groups. The director of Rainbow is the leader of the Slavic National Cultural Center (whose physical space is located in the village library) and often conflates the Slavic Center’s activities and Rainbow’s programs (there is a large crossover among children and youth participating and performing with both the Slavic Center and in Rainbow’s activities). In addition, the German and Slavic Centers often share spaces, resources, and personnel.

Like Rainbow, the Podsosnovo village administration is home to the German Meeting Center in the village. Although the German Center space is dedicated to the Altai Foundation directed Breitenarbeit programs, their rooms also serve the needs of the administration and other
local institutions. Both the village administration and the Kirov Collective Farm located in Podsosnovo use the spaces of the German Center to host various meetings (I observed a mayoral election held in the Center), events, and exhibitions (an exhibition featuring the paintings of a local artist was held in the Center during the period of the spring language camp). The village administration and German Center also share personnel – Eriskina, the leader of the German Center (a young woman of Russian descent), is an employee of the village administration.

Catherine Alexander intimates that this sort of integration mirrors that found in socialist community structures in her discussion of post-Soviet privatization in Kazakhstan. Alexander explains that during socialism the nature of economic and social production was holistic, as the institutions of production, their workers, and social spaces often constituted one collective whole. Economic enterprises maintained the livelihood of entire city blocks, neighborhoods, or villages in terms of providing housing, subsistence, health care, and primary education, while their constituents dedicated themselves to the economic production of those specific enterprises. After independence and the subsequent privatization of formerly state property, Soviet-style institutional integration collapsed. Alexander maintains, however, that certain institutional behaviors whose forms had supposedly changed through privatization offer a glimpse of how socialist-style integration of relations, things, and persons persevered. For example, Alexander argues that even after the state privatized their enterprises most managers in Kazakhstan maintained administrative control through the public distribution of ownership in the form of shares (Alexander 2004: 315-17). I would go beyond such surface examples of continuity to suggest that a pattern of social interactions relative to the social and holistic notions of property deeply interwoven within Soviet norms has remained consistent throughout and since the onset of privatization, marketization, and other socioeconomic disruptions to daily life.
An alternative way to consider the relations between people and things in the former Soviet Union is through anthropological conceptualizations of property relations both inside and outside the auspices of socialism and post-socialism. I view the various social processes associated with Soviet understandings of property relations that persevere in the post-socialist present similar to how Alena Ledeneva conceptualizes the persistence of blat. Ledeneva believes that the socialist practice of blat manifests itself in post-socialist practices by “stretching beyond” the areas in which blat was used, but still maintaining continuity with past usages (Ledeneva 1998: 175). For example, information passing between acquaintances regarding how to obtain necessary goods and services once referred to as blat or “po blatu” (doing blat) is now often expressed in terms such as “money, business, laws, regulation, and tax evasion (Ledeneva 1998: 211).” Although many of the social networks have remained the same, in the post-socialist language of informal economic activity the term blat is rarely invoked. Certainly, the maintenance and distribution of things has changed since 1991, however, Soviet conceptualizations of property relations (as well as the understandings and behaviors associated with them) persist in various forms while stretching beyond their socialist utility. I will qualify what I mean by soviet conceptualizations of property relations with a discussion of how anthropologists have theorized property in both tribal and socialist contexts.

If Verdery’s argument is accurate, then we must consider property as a social process and intimately connected to mutable social relationships and cultural systems of authority in regards to things (Verdery 2003: 13). Max Gluckman’s classic interpretation of tribal property relations supports this notion, claiming that group membership in tribal societies endows individuals with administrative rights to dispose of property and offer subsequent rights of disposal to those positioned lower in the social hierarchy. Such rights occur in the absence of formal ownership
and in relation to one’s position and personal relations within the group (Gluckman 1965: 43 and Verdery 2003: 56). In the social systems to which Gluckman referred, maintaining rights over property involves contingencies related to an individual’s social status, kinship relations, group membership, and other possible variables. Thus, notions about property emphasize the obligations and relationships between people in respect to things (Gluckman 1965: 45-46).

Applying Gluckman’s ideas to the socialist context, Caroline Humphrey argues that similar social relationships occurred among collective farm workers in the Soviet Union. These individuals maintained rights to dispose of property by virtue of a politically defined status endowing collective farm workers (kolkhozniks) with privileges different from those working in other institutions. In this way, collective farm workers simultaneously possessed rights of citizenship in the USSR and separate rights as kolkhozniks (Humphrey 1998: 5). Humphrey identifies these rights as “de facto,” and therefore exercised in the absence of an associated legal code. In the case of the collective farms she documents, the members hold de facto rights over things according to their statuses in the farm, the Communist Party, and their kin groups producing what Humphrey identifies as an “overlapping hierarchy of rights.” In the context of this hierarchy for any given individual, specific de facto rights become available to the members of the various institutions at different levels producing a “community of multiplex relations” (Caroline Humphrey 1998: 119).

Verdery expands on this notion of de facto rights over things with her use of Gluckman’s term “administrative rights,” which she identifies as the right of direct administration of things for individuals empowered along the state hierarchy. While such rights precluded ownership over the things in question, they did allocate authority to those holding power to dispose of them as they saw appropriate. In exchange for these administrative rights, those who held them were
obligated to provide goods, services, and allegiances to those who stood at higher levels of the hierarchy (Verdery 2003: 56). Similar to Ledeneva’s description of the manner in which past practices manifest themselves in contemporary behaviors, the nature of social relations related to concepts such as de facto and administrative rights in relation to things under socialism often “stretch beyond” these former understandings, but yet closely resemble them among relationships between individuals. Most notably for my purposes is how past conceptions about de facto and administrative rights inform relations between those who manage contemporary spaces and times administratively deemed ethnic.

I want to take these concepts about property out of the context of direct consumption or usage of land and other tangible things (such as tools, commodities, etc.), and consider them within the realm of the social relations which the understandings and behaviors that such systems of resource allocation produce. Humphrey states that a person’s advancement within the local hierarchy and her ability to gain access to material resources additional to her wages depended on her capacity to undertake “social work,” or extra work (often arduous) over and above her professional responsibilities often couched as “socialist obligation.” Performing socialist obligation entailed workers promising to fulfill a production target or extra unpaid work for honorific rather than material rewards. Humphrey argues, however, that implicit in the performance of socialist obligation was the unofficial allocation of enterprise resources to those who performed them. The assumption of social work and socialist obligation facilitated an individual’s ability to expand her “political capital” leading potentially to upward career mobility and increased access to enterprises resources (Humphrey 1998: 169, 220-21; 358-62).

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64 Humphrey refers to these as “in kind wages and bonuses (1998: 220).”
65 She uses the example of shepherd families accruing the private use of the farm’s flock (1998: 221).
Most significant in this system of exchange for my purposes is the way it creates habitual interactions between superiors possessing administrative rights in relations to things and individuals performing extra duties for the superior and receiving generalized benefits from the relationship. Ledeneva describes this phenomenon as the coincidence of expectations and correspondence of value resulting in the routine maintenance of the relations of exchange with little regard for the regimes of equivalence (Ledeneva 1998: 146). Thus, the parties involved routinely maintain a relationship of expectation about the future performance of labor and the granting of resources, regardless of how often the labor is performed or resources granted.

Although the institutions of socialist property that facilitated relationships of expectations have disappeared, the social relations characteristic of socialist property have persisted. Examining the continuation or disturbance of these “relationships of expectation” in the contemporary ethnic spaces of Russia and Kazakhstan reveals some instances of truly post-socialist moments.

I became aware of this phenomenon after a puzzling conversation with Ableeva, who remarked to me that she had “quit” Rainbow. I told her I had no idea that she formally worked for the Center. She replied that she didn’t, at least she wasn’t paid for the services she provides Rainbow. She then explained that local administrators and officials periodically expect her to perform certain duties over and above her responsibilities with the German Center, and of course she complied with those expectations. The duties included such things as procuring several bouquets of flowers for an upcoming holiday celebration while visiting the Rebirth offices in Pavlodar City (for which she received no reimbursement).

As a leader of a German Center located within a public building (Rainbow), Ableeva is positioned along the chain of expectations with those who maintain administrative rights in relation to the physical space that the German Center occupies and the resources that Center
occasionally uses. According to the nature of the social relations between her and local authorities, Ableeva expects to use the resources at Rainbow. In turn, local authorities expect Ableeva to employ her personal means and the resources of German development to meet their needs. In the instance Ableeva described to me, she was asked to collect the flowers during a trip to Rebirth – local officials hence considered her trip related to her official role as a preserver of German culture. As local officials provide space and resources to Rebirth for Sherbakti’s German Meeting Center, local leaders expect Rebirth to occasionally serve their needs (deliver flowers for a government-sponsored event). Although at a personal level this interaction takes place between the local administration and Ableeva, it also represents the relationship between the state and German development institutions. In this way, the institutions of cultural development and preservation find themselves operating within the network of social relations and expectations borrowed from former Soviet styles of social relations.

In spite of the language she used to express her actions, Ableeva did not “quit” Rainbow – Rainbow only stands as an institutional space facilitating a set of social arrangements between Ableeva and certain local officials. Rather, Ableeva released herself from the chain of expectations reaching from Rainbow into the group of local administration officials, who could no longer expect her to perform random duties upon request. Ableeva’s ability to “quit” her role within this local network is truly a post-socialist act most probably impossible under socialism. Ableeva is unique compared with most German Center leaders because she is a local businessperson – she owns her own cosmetics company. She established her business several years ago once Rebirth began to cut funding to the German Center in Sharbakti, and she needed a way to supplement the support she received from Rebirth and local authorities to fund the Center’s activities. In response to this need, she began distributing Faberlic cosmetics from a
small office in the local House of Culture. She managed to fund most of the Center’s activities and pull in a profit making her independent of administrative resources and thus empowering her to sever the link she held within the chain of expectations.

Compared to Ableeva’s experience, Anastasia – the German Center leader in Podsosnovo – has little chance of freeing herself from the chain. In addition to her role at the German Center, Anastasia is an employee of the local administration. The majority of her family’s income arises from her post, and therefore she is much more dependent upon those who occupy higher positions than her on the chain of expectation. Among the expectations placed on Anastasia is that she serve as the Center’s leader and make its resources (primarily space) available to local administrators and other major allocators of property (most notably the Kirov Collective Farm, which employs her husband and provides services to her household and parents).  

For both Ableeva and Anastasia, the state’s need to undertake the process of civic nation-building results in the inception of social relations related to the distribution of rights over discursively conceptualized ethnic objects. All of which, however, follow the previously familiar patterns of distributing rights in relation to property under socialism. Hence, German development institutions, such as the GTZ, are very much subject to the property relations quite prevalent in socialism, except in those characteristically post-socialist moments when individuals can free themselves from the chain of expectations because of the resources they might accrue through capitalist practices. Individuals aside, socialist property relations in the realm of ethnic property persist largely because ethnic institutions often depend upon forms of public property that local administrations and their personnel control.

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66 I provide examples of how local officials make use of German cultural property in Podsosnovo in chapter five.
Conclusion

The cases of Heinrich Stier and Evgeniy Bukovski I introduced at the outset of this chapter illustrate how the social nature of ethnic property may or may not affect the livelihood of individuals. Although Heinrich Stier’s genealogy and native fluency in German dialekt mark him in the community as authentically German, he is reluctant to identify himself with the kind of Germanness that the activities and things found in his local German Center exemplify. After all, he has little need of the instruments of German ethnic culture, such as the costumes, language textbooks, and musical instruments lying around the village’s German Center. Like Lydia Ableeva, Heinrich enjoys independence from the sources of authority stemming from official spaces of German ethnic culture and the social obligations they impose. This is possible through his position as a leading member of a major controller of economically productive property (the Kirov Collective Farm) and the lack of necessity to establish German cultural credentials that engagement with the local German Meeting Center might provide.

Conversely, Evgeniy significantly depends upon a public and official German identity and the cultural credentials institutions like the German Meeting Center in Sherbakti supply to accomplish his aspiration to migrate to Germany. Since Evgeniy does not maintain the cultural markers that Heinrich possesses, however, the likelihood that others who lack a familiarity with his relationship with the German Center and what is written on his state identification card might identify him as authentically German is quite low. Evgeniy therefore requires the local spaces of German ethnicity to support his profile as a German, because it is through his relations with them that he might demonstrate his Germanness and facilitate his goal of moving to Germany.

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On one occasion, while I sat with Zhenia in the local police station, the clerk asked him to state his ethnicity. The clerk was surprised to hear him identify as a German, which prompted Zhenia to explain that his mother is German causing him to identify as German as well.
As an occasional participant of the German Center, Evgeniy includes himself in the line of social relations produced through his associations with ethnic things. In exchange for the ethnic credentials the Center provides him, Evgeniy has entered a relationship of expectation with Ableeva, potentially allowing her to draw upon the resources that he possesses.

The examples presented through Heinrich and Evgeniy are not meant to discount the experiences of those who find meaning, beyond their material utility, from participating with the national cultural centers. My vignettes are rather meant to identify a process by which some post-socialist people experience, support, and/or reject institutionalized ethnic culture. Although government officials and foreign development workers have sponsored and established the institutions transferring ethnic culture, I believe the actual process of transference is nothing new, but represents a familiar set of institutional devices born in socialist institutions. As I have argued in this chapter, property relations persisting from the Soviet period maintain an extraordinary influence on the ways in which ethnic culture is reproduced. The production of such culture and the social relations connected with the property upon which it is produced operate as integral features of the civic nation-building goals of post-Soviet states. In a similar way, state authorities in Russia utilize another form of property, ethnicized state territory, in service of its civic nation-building goals. I examine how Russia uses ethnicized territories to meet these goals and their effects on communities and individuals in the next chapter.
Chapter 4
The Discourse and Practice of Ethnic Territoriality and Autonomy in Russia

Introduction to the question of territoriality

Although Russia, similar to Kazakhstan, maintains an “Assembly of the Peoples of Russia,” as an institution dedicated to building civic citizenship among non-Russians, its scope is less ambitious. This became evident to me in Kazakhstan when confronted with the existence of its “Assembly.” Traces of Kazakhstan’s Assembly were apparent in various public cultural activities and performances, its relationship with local and national government, and the information produced about it in the local and national media. I also often encountered large billboards throughout Kazakhstan depicting enthusiastic, “indigenously dressed” ethnic minorities advertising the existence and mission of the Assembly. While doing fieldwork in Russia, I never encountered any sign of its Assembly – in fact I wasn’t aware of its existence until hearing about it in Kazakhstan as a sister organization to its Assembly.68 The general lack of emphasis on such institutions, especially in regions with large minority populations, suggests that civic nation-building discourses and institutions are less developed in Russia compared to Kazakhstan. Yet, Russia’s leaders occasionally employ political discourses promoting the citizens of the Russian Federation as members of a civic nation, and the institutions that support this effort have a significant impact on the lives of some of Russia’s ethnic minorities.

Many analysts of contemporary Russian politics insist that since the rise of Putin, the Russian Federation has backed away from the project of civic nation-building that Yeltsin initiated in the 1990s.69 These pundits draw attention to Putin’s emphasis on state centralization

68 I will discuss the Assembly of the Peoples of Kazakhstan in greater detail in the following chapter.
69 See Emil’ Pain (2009); Fiona Hill (2005); Donna Bahry (2005); Cameron Ross (2003).
over ethnically flavored federalism through various reforms that divided the country into seven federal districts. This included eliminating gubernatorial elections and replacing elected republican governors in the upper chamber of the Russian parliament (the Federation Council) with appointed regional leaders (Pain 2009). Such reforms are seen as an attack on the very institutions (the ethnic federal units) that were meant to preserve the rights of non-Russians and engender their citizenship.

The manner in which such policies of political centralization have seemingly tainted Russian claims to civic nation-building is the progeny of the haphazard process that led to the emergence of a federation of ethnic and non-ethnic republics and ethnic sub-regions in the early 1990s. Yet the presence and persistence of ethno-territories in Russia have served to preserve the notion of the civic nation as a viable political discourse, leading to the establishment and construction of institutions that the discourse has enabled. The lasting significance of these institutions is reflected through how they provide political and economic opportunities for their constituents, channel a sense of ethnic identity, and engender behaviors and activities associated with being ethnic.

The following sections examine the course of civic nation-building in Russia by considering ethno-territorialization in both the Soviet and post-Soviet periods and the institutions arising from this phenomenon. As a case study, I will examine the ethno-territories and institutions associated with Russia’s German minority. I also refer to other ethnic contexts, especially the Tatar republican movement, to illustrate the tensions existing between the discourses of civic nation-building, ethnic territorialization, and the objectives of the central government on a national scale. Focusing primarily on the German case, I will examine how old and new federal policies concerning ethno-territories and civic nation-building have influenced
the creation and maintenance of ethnic regions, the opportunities that such structures provide for
their non-Russian constituents, and the behaviors they provoke. I suggest that as Russia’s leaders
have attempted to instill a sense of citizenship among their ethnic minorities they have employed
a Soviet-style civic nation-building discourse, which is most often expressed within the context
of ethno-territories and autonomous. In this way, Russia’s leaders have adopted the precepts of
korenizatsia emphasizing ethnic exceptionalism to incorporate its minorities as citizens of the
Russian state. This chapter considers the outcomes of this process by examining the institutional
products of civic nation-building and how the public recognizes and responds to them, often in
ways unintended by the architects of the civic nation and the institutions they empower.

**Federation and civic nation**

Most contemporary ethno-republics in the Russian Federation are direct descendants of
the autonomous socialist soviet republics (ASSRs) created during the Soviet period, which
functioned as subunits of the larger all-union republics. Since the break-up of the Union,
however, the ASSRs became the primary units of Russia’s post-socialist federal system along
with Russia’s regions and territories. Soviet officials initially fashioned the ASSRs as ethnic
homelands with special rights for titular nationalities, but still subordinate to the political center
and the Union republican governments. At the beginning of the 1990s and the break-up of the
USSR, the newly empowered ASSRs, some acting as sovereign states, began to unilaterally sign
treaties with both Yeltsin and Gorbachev who were trying to outbid each other in an attempt to
mobilize political support from the non-Russian regions. This outbidding resulted in several of
the ethnic republics and other ethnic-based groups gaining major concessions from the state in
the form of self-management of natural resources and taxation. After Yeltsin was elected
president of Russia, one of his early concessions was to sign the Federal Treaty in 1992, granting special status to the republics and recognizing their sovereignty and rights over local property and resources (Bahry 2005).

I argue that in addition to establishing republican sovereignty for Russia’s ethnic regions, Gorbachev’s glasnost reforms and Yeltsin’s later political concessions concerning minorities significantly inspired an emphasis on civic nation-building discourses in the Federation enabling subsequent movements and institutions. As the Putin administration curtailed privileges ethnic republics won in the early 1990s, the smaller-scale institutions have maintained themselves and in some cases expanded. Elise Giuliano (2011) has shown that glasnost allowed informal organizations to arise and employ grassroots tactics to gain wider public support. Some of the most vocal and popular of these groups became large-scale ethno-nationalist movements and institutions, such as Rebirth among Germans in Siberia and Kazakhstan and the Tatar Public Center in Tatarstan. The success of these groups in expanding their institutions and influence over their ethnic comrades through the late 1980s and early 1990s was, however, contingent upon the collapse of core Soviet governing structures, the emergence of new ones, and the maintenance of certain ideologies. For example, the triangulation of glasnost policies, continued relevance of Soviet concepts related to ethnic identity and practice, and political compromises made by Yeltsin and Gorbachev directly enabled the rise of two national German rayony in Siberia in 1991.70

At the republican and national levels, the early political outcomes favoring ethnic exceptionalism were formative in terms of how Russia currently locates itself as a multiethnic nation-state. As central power receded before and after the collapse of the Union, and Gorbachev

70 I address this example at length below.
and Yeltsin proceeded to competitively grant greater authority to the regions, rising ethnic nationalist leaders received greater public influence and even posts in newly constituted local legislatures and councils. Such ethnic nationalist figures placed pressure on firmly established local leaders, usually members of the former Soviet nomenklatura who managed to maintain political power, forcing them to address the demands of nationalist organizations. This in turn required local leaders, including those who otherwise had no ethnic nationalist aspirations, to make demands on the central government in Moscow for ethnically-driven political concessions, such as political sovereignty and cultural autonomy (Giuliano 2011: 185-86). This notion that non-Russians would maintain separate institutions and cultural identities through sovereignty and cultural autonomy, but maintain their status as citizens of Russia, significantly shaped the early political discourse in the Federation – a discourse that has maintained itself through the Putin era although many of those political concessions granted have been severely curtailed. Since taking over for Yeltsin as president of Russia in the late 1990s, Vladimir Putin has imposed severe limits on republican sovereignty in order to consolidate power under the regime’s central government. Central authorities have tightened control over production and trade within the republics, limiting the latter’s ability to develop economic bases autonomous from central authority and shifting local revenue to the state. In addition, legislation passed early in Putin’s presidency strengthened the state’s ability to remove governors and dismiss regional legislatures (Bahry 2005).

Although Putin has strictly limited the sovereignty of Russia’s ethno-Republics, he has at least committed himself to the discourse of civic nation-building for Russia. Shortly after his first

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71 Giuliano identifies Mintimer Shamiev, a former Soviet cadre and long-time president of Tatarstan, as one such figure.
election in 2000, for example, the President emphasized the need to unite the society of the Russian Federation around one common *rossiskaia* people (Russians as citizens) rather than around *russkaia*, or ethnic Russians (Tolz 2004: 170). Katherine Graney argues that since the manifestation of his hard line against the ethno-republics and ethnic pluralism in general at the beginning of his presidency, Putin’s support for and participation in the Kazan Millennium celebration demonstrates his willingness to maintain a culturally pluralistic federal structure and national discourse. Furthermore, Graney maintains that although authorities have floated various plans to dismantle Russia’s ethno-federal system, none have ever come close to being actualized (Graney 2007). The discourse on nationalities’ policy in Russia also makes generous overtones to the idea of ethnic plurality and ethnic “cultural development.” Similar to Kazakhstan’s approach, this discourse places great emphasis on the mechanisms of civic nation-building, such as the support of ethnic minority cultural institutions, as the primary means to preventing interethnic conflict (Budazhapova 2004).

Russia therefore endeavors to structure a *Rossiane* (“we are all Russian citizens”) discourse promising not only protection, but also full civic participation to ethnic minorities in the Federation facilitated through ethnic self-determination. The result of this discourse has been its translation into the establishment of numerous institutions dedicated to directing the project of minority self-determination. My purpose with this line of inquiry then is not to demonstrate whether Russia has or has not become a civic nation, but rather to consider the political discourses germane to civic nation-building, and the impacts that such pronouncements and

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72 *Rossiskaia* and *russkaia* are adjectives, which respectively communicate the ideas of Russian citizenship and Russian ethnicity.

73 The “Kazan Millennium” took place in August 2005 and was a celebration of the thousandth anniversary of the city Kazan, the capital city of the Republic of Tatarstan – one of the more significant ethno-republics in the Russian Federation.
subsequent policies have on ethnic minorities in the Russian Federation. Regardless of the institutional weakness and political inclination of the current Russian regime, I argue that like Kazakhstan, Russia has made substantial attempts since 1991 to establish a civic national identity among its non-Russian subjects using unique institutions, although the Assembly of the Peoples of Russia is not one of them. In the following section, I will examine the close relationship between the lingering emphasis on civic nation-building discourses in Russia and the manner in which early Soviet leaders conceptualized policies regarding non-Russians in the 1920s and ’30s.

**Titular regions in the Soviet Union and the rise of national autonomous territories**

Russia’s approach to civic nation-building, although extremely different from that of Kazakhstan, is intimately connected to the Soviet nation-building project stressing the principle of ethnic self-determination with complete integration into the state. A primary instrument the Russian Federation has chosen to instill allegiance among its non-ethnic populations is through the maintenance and (in some cases) the construction of national autonomous geographic territories and supporting cultural institutions. Although Soviet authorities established several still-existing ethnic regions under the *korenizatsiia* program, others like the German Autonomous rayony in the Altai Krai and Omsk Oblast arose or were reconstituted after the collapse of the Soviet Union. The construction and maintenance of such “ethno-regions” constitute the most significant governmental intervention supporting ethnic nations in the Russian Federation and the subsequent preservation of civic nation-building discourses.

The notion of establishing a civic nation in Russia is certainly not new. According to Valery Tishkov, the idea of creating a civic nation in Russia, or a *Rossiane* nation, has been
around since the 18th century with the reign of Peter the Great. Rather than identifying Russia’s people through a cultural idiom, leading intellectuals, such as Mikhail Lomonsov and Alexander Pushkin, conceptualized Russia’s population as Rossiane (rather than Russians or Russki), who were devoted to the state through their affinity with the land, symbols, and prestige of Russia. Tishkov suggests that in a very real sense, Russian imperial leaders forged a sense of civic nationality, at least among the multicultural intelligentsia, which Soviet leaders ignored as they characterized the empire as “the prison of the peoples,” in order to gain favor with the ethnic minorities in the territories they were attempting to consolidate into the Soviet Union. As the Soviet Union began its own program of incorporating its ethnic minorities into Soviet citizenship, they simply replaced the notion of a Rossiane nation with that of the Soviet nation (Tishkov 2010).

As previously noted, the initial task Soviet officials undertook in the 1920’s to create a civic national discourse was to assign ethnographers and other social scientists to designate the boundaries of national groups – a nearly impossible task considering the overwhelming cultural diversity existing throughout the Soviet Union. From 1926 until 1939, ethnographers, statisticians and government officials executed a series of censuses to document the various nationalities of the USSR. A tangible product of this effort was the issue of internal passports to all Soviet citizens in 1932 that defined their official identity in terms of name, place of birth, authorized domicile, and nationality legitimizing a sense of distinct ethnic identification. By 1938, Soviet authorities issued a decree requiring the registration of each passport recipient’s ethnicity to be in accordance with parentage (Hirsch 2005: 275).

74 The Russian term Rossiane is meant to identify an individual as a citizen of the Russian state rather than an ethnic Russian.
75 Russki is the designation for cultural Russians.
The primary objective of the census project was to determine “population points” or geographic regions to be identified as homelands according to the dominant, or “titular,” nationality group. After receiving a list of 172 titular nationalities, in order to establish reasonably sized federal territorial units (rather than 172 micro-units), Soviet authorities asked ethnographers to further consolidate by combining groups with similar ethnic characteristics. For example, groups such as the Mingrelians, Svans, Batsbi, Laz, and Ajars were combined into one unit identified as Georgian (Hirsch 2005: 133). Soviet officials then established a pyramid of “national soviets,” or territorial units based on dominant titular groups, extending down from the large union republics to small national districts and villages, ultimately merging with an individual’s own, officially designated ethnic nationality (Martin 2001: 25).

The result was the formation of two kinds of territorial units within the Russian Soviet Federated Socialist Republic (RSFSR) of the Soviet Union (the other fourteen “SFSRs” – known as all-union republics – were based on the titular nationality of the region, e.g. Kazakhstan, Estonia, Georgia, etc.). In addition to non-ethnic units such as regions (oblasty) and territories (krai), the RSFSR officials organized ethno-territorial units based on the titular ethnic groups officially recognized as historically indigenous to the spaces within the units. Soviet authorities designated sixteen Autonomous Soviet Socialist Republics (ASSRs) identified as homelands for several of the Union’s non-Russian ethnic groups. Scattered among the other fourteen union republics were a total of five ASSRs (Jeff Kahn 2000). In addition to these, within the RSFSR’s constituent units were lower-level ethnic territories with less authority constituted as autonomous oblasty and districts (okrugy), national counties (rayony), village soviets, city neighborhoods, and even collective farms (Martin 2001: 10).
For the sizable German population living along the Volga, Soviet nationalities policy translated into the construction of a Volga German ASSR (the Volga German Autonomous Socialist Soviet Republic) in the 1920’s within the RSFSR, establishing Germans there as the titular nationality. In addition to the Volga Republic, Soviet authorities established titular territories for Germans throughout the Soviet Union. For those Germans living in the Altai region of southern Siberia, for example, German Bolsheviks established a national rayon centered around the village Halbstadt in 1927 (Matis 2001: 9). Other German national spaces appeared as government authorities established several more German rayony and village soviets (sel’sovety).76 The Volga German Republic and all of the other German national territories were dismantled in the late 1930s (Schneider 2000: 57).77 Although German ethno-territories, and other titular ethno-territories assigned to distrusted ethnic groups such as Chechens, disappeared in the 1930s and ’40s, such territories for other groups persisted up until the collapse of the Soviet Union, most explicitly the ethno-republics of the RSFSR.

The structure and transitional nature of contemporary Russian federalism

The post-Soviet political and territorial organization of the Russian Federation’s ethnic minorities is, to say the least, quite complex. During perestroika and its aftermath with the collapse of the Union, Russia’s relationship with non-Russians has involved a series of struggles between leaders of ethnic territorial units and Russian federal officials for greater or lesser measures of political sovereignty. Shortly after the RFSFR’s declarations of independence from

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76 By the 1930s, there were thirteen German national rayony and hundreds of German village councils (sel’sovet), which were comprised of rural areas within rayony centered on villages after which they were usually named.
77 Soviet authorities disbanded the Halbstadt Rayon in 1938 (Vladimir Matis 2001: 12).
the Union in 1991, local nationalist figures and institutions pushed many ASSRs to compose their own declarations of sovereignty from the new Russian state. Although there was considerable debate as to what exactly sovereignty meant to these political units, many of their declarations called for changes in status to a federal-level republic, the supremacy of local laws over federal laws, recognition of republican citizenship, autonomy in economic decision-making, and the control over natural resources. Most declarations also demanded respect and protection for the languages and cultures of the republics’ titular groups (Kahn 2000). The Russian government had recognized the authority of most ethnic-based administrative units by 1993 and provided some of them with full republican status. Through these measures, 21 territorial units based on the ethnic principle became republics of the Federation. The remainder of the Russian Federation at the republican level is composed of 6 non-ethnic krai, 49 oblasty, 10 (until recently) ethnically based autonomous okrugy, two federal cities, and one autonomous oblast (the Jewish Autonomous Oblast).

Since the beginning of the Putin administration, much of what the ethnic republics gained in terms of political and economic sovereignty in the post-Soviet period has progressively eroded. Putin began to impose centralized authority by installing seven supervisors over all of Russia’s federal units, removing republican presidents and other prominent figures in local governments, and demanding that regional laws and constitutions conform to federal ones. Many of the stipulations regarding political sovereignty granted to the republics during the Yeltsin years were revoked, and the power-sharing treaties established between the republics and Moscow were renounced (Bahry 2005). During Putin’s second term, arguing the small and economically weak regions would be stronger if unified with larger units (six of the ten autonomous okrugy, for example, were merged into different territorial units), the federal
government proceeded to reduce the number of Russia’s administrative units in order to consolidate Moscow’s control over the country. This course has primarily affected several of the ethnically defined territorial units. Beginning in 2005, state authorities began the process of consolidating a few ethnic regions, including Komi-Permyak, Evenk, and Adyghey, into non-ethnic political units.78

In addition to the Putin regime’s resistance to federal ethnic territories, the ethnic republics have struggled to gain the measures of sovereignty expressed in their initial declarations and constitutions as a result of Russia’s inability to create effective economic policies. The republics’ capacity to attract outside capital, develop trade with other independent states, and generate local sources of revenue depends on central controls. Yet, the Russian government has often failed to protect/enforce property rights, create an efficient tax system, or provide a stable regime for trade and investment, further stifling republican sovereignty and prohibiting the development of substantive international economic ties (Bahry 2005).

Of all of the republics in the Federation, Tatarstan has won the highest degree of political sovereignty. When Boris Yeltsin told a crowd in the Tatarstani capital Kazan “to take all the sovereignty you can handle” in August 1990, Tatarstan’s political officials complied by attempting to form a sovereign state without provoking a negative or violent reaction from Moscow (Giuliano 2011: 117). These efforts have had a measure of success. Tatarstan’s leaders have promoted regional-level economic and social policies independent of the Federation’s central government to demonstrate its capacity to provide for the material needs of its citizens. It

has also pursued accessing sources of international capital and ranks among the top ten Russian regions in terms of foreign investment (Graney 2009: 17-27).

While justifying its call for sovereignty from the Federation in the name of the titular nation’s right to self-determination, Tatarstan’s leaders have simultaneously taken a liberal pluralist approach to dealing with non-Tatars in the Republic. They have done this by expressing a commitment to a civic nation-building model through funded programs and institutions designed for non-Tatars and Russians to preserve and maintain their ethnic cultures and traditions. This policy of promoting a civic nation in Tatarstan demonstrates its leaders’ commitment to the provision of ethno-cultural justice for all of Russia’s citizens in line with the political rhetoric originating in Moscow, which emphasizes the culturally plural nature of the Federation (Graney 2009: 88). This strategy has been modestly successful. Although Moscow forced the government in Kazan to rewrite its constitution to conform to federal laws and the Republic lost its ability to regulate tax revenues and other economic processes, Tatarstan’s leaders have been able to maintain some of the concessions won from their march to sovereignty in the 1990s. Russian authorities allowed the republic’s longest standing president, Mintimer Shaimiev (Odynova and Bratersky 2010),79 to maintain his post until 2010, and Moscow has allocated significant funds to several of the Republic’s infrastructure projects (Bahry 2005). Putin also publicly demonstrated his support of at least the rhetoric of republican sovereignty as he participated in and financially supported the Kazan Millennium celebration (Graney 2007).

Regardless of the earlier political concessions supporting Tatarstan’s and other ASSRs’ bids for territorial sovereignty, resistance from the central government since the rise of Putin

79 Rustam Minnikhanov replaced Shaimiev as Tatarstan’s president in 2010. According to official sources, Shaimiev elected to step down from office at the conclusion of his fourth presidential term.
along with the numerical superiority that Russians enjoy in most of the ethnic-based republics have made ethnic territorial sovereignty more of a dream than a reality. The Tatarstan case does, however, illustrate that the movement toward political autonomy for ethnic titular regions has led to the subsequent rise of institutions providing benefits for the people residing in those regions. For example, the various cultural and political organizations that arose to form the Tatar national movement in the late ’80s and early ’90s continue to operate, but have turned their attention away from politics and toward religious and other cultural concerns (Giuliano 2011: 105-25).

Although operating on a much smaller scale, German political activists in Russia had also sought to transform the new country’s political landscape in favor of their ethnic constituents and succeeded in creating an official German territorial existence.

**The German ethnic territorial movement in late and post-Soviet Russia**

Similar to other ethnic minorities during *Perestroika*, representatives of the German minority actively made claims for German territorial sovereignty and cultural “autonomy,” ideally achieving concessions similar to those granted to the country’s large titular ethnic groups. The movement for the return of German territory had been active since 1955, shortly after Germans sentenced to work in the World War II-era Soviet Labor Army were freed from that obligation and allowed to return to their families (Schleicher 1996: 13). It wasn’t until the mid-1980s, however, that the movement began to forcefully assert itself, especially after its members learned about the Crimean Tatars’ June, 1987 demonstration on Red Square in Moscow demanding the return of the Crimean Tatar Republic (Schleicher 1996: 49).

Inspired by the Crimean Tatar movement (Schleicher 1996: 83), German activists in 1989 organized a club in Novosibirsk for the purpose of recognizing the 65th anniversary of the
establishment of the Volga German Autonomous Soviet Republic. The organizers of the Novosibirsk club named it “Rebirth” after their aspirations to reestablish German territories in the Volga region and Siberia. Following the establishment and official registration of Rebirth in Novosibirsk, several other German clubs arose throughout the USSR dedicated to the same goal. Finally, in March of 1989, delegates of the various clubs convened a conference in Moscow for the purpose of establishing a Union-wide institution to be recognized by the state authorities. The delegates named the institution the “Union Society of the Soviet Germans,” and identified its purpose as an organization dedicated to meeting the political, cultural, and educational goals of the Soviet German people, and above all the reestablishment of the Soviet German Autonomous Republic and several other national rayony (Schleicher 1996: 116-24).

While attempting to court financial investment from Germany early in his presidency, Yeltsin reportedly backed the reestablishment of the German Volga Republic; however, in 1992 he abruptly withdrew his support, stating that a German republic would be created in the Volga region only when Germans make up at least 90 percent of the entire local population there. The apparent reason for this reversal was the strong local opposition from Russians residing in the boundaries of the former German Volga Republic (Mukhina 2007: 162-63). The initiative to recreate the German ASSR also failed to garner large-scale support among the German population of the former Soviet Union. Many Germans born after the resettlement of their parents from European Russia to Siberia and Central Asia expressed little interest to return to the “ethnic homeland” represented by the Volga. Germans whom I questioned about their potential

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80 Ironically, I have gathered through informal inquiries that many of those German activists involved in claiming cultural autonomy and the reestablishment of the Volga Republic for the German minority during perestroika were among the first to immigrate to Germany. Josef Schleicher also confirms this assertion (1996: 5).
resettlement of the Volga in the early 1990s unanimously expressed a lack of emotional attachment to the region and a feeling of comfort with their current places of residence.\textsuperscript{81} Given that a large proportion of Germans in the former Soviet Union possess ethnically mixed kin relations, with parents and in-laws belonging to various other ethnic groups, the notion of ethnic homogeneity is largely absent among people of German descent. Therefore, Germans with such non-German family relations were highly unlikely to relocate to the Volga from a sense of German group solidarity.\textsuperscript{82}

Many Germans also lost or repressed an affinity for Germanness during the Soviet period, largely resulting from the experience of exile from western Russia in 1941 and the harsh treatment Germans suffered at the hands of the Soviet authorities during and after WWII. Statements from my research subjects suggest that those who experienced the trauma of relocation, or whose parents experienced it, from the Soviet West to Siberia and Central Asia during WWII were likely to disassociate themselves from any sense of Germanness after the war. An additional factor influencing disinterest in the Volga “homeland,” stemmed from the availability of the Federal Republic of Germany as a competing center of ethnic heritage. Coinciding with the movement to reestablish the Volga German ASSR, German officials offered people of German descent comfortable, free resettlement in Germany and an instant economic advantage over those who remained in Russia and Kazakhstan.\textsuperscript{83}

\textsuperscript{81} I assume, however, that a substantial number of Germans who were in favor of resettling the Volga migrated instead to Germany.
\textsuperscript{82} This is equally true for Germans who migrated to Germany, which is a point I thoroughly discuss in chapter six of this dissertation.
\textsuperscript{83} I provide a detailed discussion of the Soviet and post-Soviet Germans’ relocation to Germany in chapter six.
The German National Rayon “Halbstadt”

In addition to federal level ethnic republics, there are several ethnically designated regions existing at the sub-republican level, such as the autonomous okrugs described above. There are also ten ethnic national administrative districts (rayony) and 41 ethnic national settlements (poseleniya) or village councils (sel’sovety) representing smaller minorities within ethnic republics and other non-ethnic territories of Russia. These formations provide local ethnic administrations in places where minorities reside in compact settlements (Oracheva and Osipov 2010). For Germans in Russia, there are two such territories – the German National Rayon Halbstadt located in the Altai Krai and the Asovo German National Rayon located in Omsk Oblast.84 In this section, I will describe the history and contemporary conditions of one of these German territories – the Halbstadt Rayon – in order to illustrate the nature of the institutions that ethnic territoriality invites.

The rising prominence of ethnic autonomy and territorialization in the late 1980s and early 1990s was crucially significant for German political activists in Russia bent on establishing or restoring ethnic German spaces. As several observers have noted, the late 1980s and early 1990s represented a period of conflict over ethnic territorialization leading to political struggles over secession, autonomy, and other concessions to Russia’s minorities.85 Much of this conflict took place within previously established autonomous republics, such as Tatarstan, Chechnya, and Tuva. Those nationalist-territorial movements intent on mobilizing their co-ethnic constituents

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84 In addition to these, a German National Settlement was established in the early 1990s in and around the village Bogdashkino located in Russia’s Ulyanovsk Oblast. Bogdashkino lost its official status, however, as a “national settlement” in 2010, presumably because of its low number of German residents (Silant’yeva 2010).

85 See for example, Elise Giuliano (2011); Katherine Graney (2009); Georgi M. Derluguian (2005); Mark R. Beissinger (2002).
and gaining concessions from the Russian state were the most successful when activists convinced co-ethnics that disparity in local economies was related to ethnic inequalities inherent in the Soviet system (Giuliano 2011: 60). At the sub-ASSR level, however, various movements arose determined to establish new ethnic territories, some of which, including the German bids in the Altai Krai and Omsk Oblast, were successful without precipitating major conflict. 86 In the Altai Krai for example, activists working for German territorialization in Siberia were less interested in ethnic division but emphasized the common economic concerns of Germans and members of other groups by arguing that the establishment of a German national rayon would improve the regional economy for all residents (Schleicher 1996: 217). 87 The notion of economic improvement through ethnic territorialization became especially compelling for both Germans and non-Germans in 1991 when authorities from Germany arrived promising technological investment in various economic enterprises in the region (Schleicher 1996: 222-23).

A June, 1991 referendum conducted in villages that authorities identified as “ethnic German” in the southwestern portion of the Altai Krai endorsed the reestablishment of the Altai German National Rayon within tracts of the Slavgorod and Khabarovsk Rayony (Schleicher 1996: 254). 88 Many local residents who supported the Rayon in the referendum wanted to remain in Russia and stood to lose family and friends from migration to the Federal Republic of

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86 Several national rayony and villages have arisen in Russia before and since 1991, especially in the Republic of Karelia and the Sakha Republic.
87 During this period, Joseph Schleicher worked as a journalist in the primary urban center in the region, Slavgorod. His thorough account of the public debates leading up to the restoration of the German Rayon in the Altai Krai presents a complex process that began in 1989 characterized by a struggle between opponents and supporters attempting to influence mixed public opinion. Schleicher’s record of these events suggests that the establishment of a German Rayon required activists to persuade members of all the region’s ethnic groups.
88 In order to create the German Rayon in the Altai, authorities ceded land from two previously existing territories – Khabarovsk and Slavgorod Rayoni – so that its borders would be roughly equivalent to the boundaries of the original Halbstadt Rayon (Mathis 2001: 12).
Germany and hoped that the existence of the *Rayon* would convince potential migrants to remain. Some considered the restoration an opportunity for their children to be educated in the German language eventually establishing a population with bilingual proficiency in both Russian and German. Other activists believed that the aggregate of local German residents and other Germans emigrating to the *Rayon* from different regions of the Soviet Union (especially Kazakhstan) could facilitate a solid economic infrastructure based on the sturdy agricultural institutions already present (Josef Schleicher 1996: 147-49). Once the referendum passed in favor of the *Rayon* in June of 1991, local and national authorities soon approved its restoration for later that year (Schleicher 1996: 254).

Nekrassova (currently Halbstadt) is a village of average size (less than 2000 residents), but was picked to be the German *Rayon*’s administrative center because it was the original administrative center of the former German National *Rayon* created in the 1920s. Once the *Rayon*’s officials settled on Nekrassova as the district center, they changed its name to the original German designation, Halbstadt, after which the *Rayon* is named. The initial administrative structure of the *Rayon* closely resembled those of the *Rayony* from which it emerged. Once the *Rayon* was established, local notables quickly chose 32 individuals for a district council to govern the new territory from the membership of the Slavgorod and Khabarovsk *Rayon* Councils. The new Council then chose a chairman who previously served as the Slavgorod *Rayon* Council chairman (Schleicher 1996: 254-55). Soon thereafter, residents elected a head of administration, Josef Berngardt, to serve as the main executive over the *Rayon* (Matis 2001: 92-93).89

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89 Berngardt served as the Rayon’s administrative head from 1991-1995.
The demographic picture in the Rayon has significantly altered since its restoration. In 1991 when the Halbstadt Rayon was reestablished, the German population there stood at over 18,000 among a total population of 20,517 (Matis 2001: 21), which is approximately equivalent to the current total population of the Rayon. Thanks to massive German migration to the Federal Republic of Germany in subsequent years, the ethnic demographic picture of the district has substantially changed. For example, a year before the German Rayon was established in 1990, the total German population in the Altai Krai was over 140,000. According to recent statistics, the current German population of the Krai stands at almost 80,000. The German Rayon itself is comprised of 16 villages, many of which are the centers of still operating collective farms, including the Kirova Collective Farm in Podsosnovo (the village where I conducted most of my research in Russia). The main sources of employment in the Rayon are the collective farms and other sources of paid and unpaid agricultural production. Nearly every household in the Rayon has access to land used for subsistence farming (primarily potatoes and vegetables). Many households also raise animals such as cows, chickens, and pigs for fresh dairy products and meat. All of the collective farm workers I interviewed reported that average collective farm salaries are very low, and therefore many young men leave the region to work in the oil fields in northern Siberia.

There seems to be no official tally of the German population in the Halbstadt Rayon since its establishment in 1991. One should also take into account that those 80,000 Germans are in part made up of German migrants from the Central Asian Republics.
92 Vladimir Matis also makes this point (2001: 29).
The “heads” of the village administrations (equivalent to a mayor) maintain primary responsibility over the village government in the Rayon. Village committees elect administration heads to serve four year terms – village residents in turn elect the members of village committees. The village committees I observed were made up of local notables who usually held prominent positions within significant economic enterprises (in villages that maintained collective farms, many of the committee members held prestigious positions in the farms). Village officials answer to Rayon authorities, who work from the Rayon’s headquarters in the village Halbstadt.

Due to its ethnic minority nature, the Halbstadt Rayon functions somewhat differently than other rayony of non-ethnic character. Vladimir Matis argues, for instance, that the development of political institutions in the Rayon were unique as its establishment coincided closely with the dismantling of the Soviet Union and the introduction of a new group of officials to manage the work of production, culture, and education after 1991 (Matis 2001: 26). What especially marks the Rayon as distinctive from other non-ethnic political structures is the massive amount of economic and cultural assistance the Rayon and its surrounding areas receive from the Federal Republic of Germany. For example, a significant additional source of local authority in the Rayon stems from the regional offices of the Altai Foundation – a Germany-funded NGO. In 1993, the first Germany-funded organization to operate in the Rayon, known as the Development Society of Halbstadt (later renamed to the Altai Foundation), was established. Once officially registered, the Society worked to purchase and preserve the homes abandoned by Germans who had moved to Germany and provided these homes to those German families moving into the Rayon from the Central Asian Republics, especially Kazakhstan. The

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93 I provide a detailed description of the Altai Foundation in chapter 3.
Society also helped to strengthen and maintain the local collective farms (discussed in the next section). Other major projects originating from German funding and now carried out through the Altai Foundation are the construction of a new Rayon center administrative building in 1994, reconstruction of the roads near the complex, rebuilding the central water lines in Halbstadt, and the provision of heating pipes in numerous houses and buildings throughout the district.

Germany has also supported the construction of cultural centers (known as German Meeting Centers) and the German cultural activities they sponsor (Matis 2001: 34-40).

Podsosnovo and ethnic “khoziainism” in the villages of the German National Rayon

Various critics have examined the nature of authority in Russia at both national and local levels since the rise of President Putin. Many of these interpretations depend upon top-down perspectives conceptualizing public authority in Russia as a product of decisions originating at the federal level seamlessly passed down and followed throughout its hierarchy.94 As James Scott argues, however, formal schemes of power, particularly those with authoritarian approaches to production and social order, are destined to fail without some elements of the practical knowledge, informal processes, and improvisation embodied in local practices (Scott 1998: 6-7). With this assertion, Scott suggests a consideration of local contributions to state-based power and authority is integral to understanding how a political structure maintains itself in the long-term at all levels of the state. Ethnic territorialization for Germans in Russia offers a compelling case in point. The formation of institutions, sources of authority, and political relations made possible through ethnic territorialization found in the German Rayon varies

considerably from local arrangements of authority found elsewhere in the Russian Federation. The ethnic and transnational nature of the German *Rayon* facilitated a hierarchical structure similar in form to the Soviet system; however, this transnational ethnic environment also offers unique possibilities and limitations for the exercise of authority and the experience of everyday life in the *Rayon*.

In a similar consideration, Douglas Rogers examines sources of authority in the post-socialist world by investigating a local agricultural enterprise – a former state farm that officials transformed into a “cooperative” as a joint-stock company – in the village Sepych, located in Russia’s Ural Mountains. Rogers shows how the primary source of authority in Sepych does not emerge from the village’s main administrator, but from the chairman of the farm. During the Soviet period, employees of various economic enterprises, such as collective and state farms, often identified their directors as “*khoziainy.*” Generally, the term *khoziain* pertains to a “master,” or the leader of a household (the female version of the term is *khoziaka*). As it relates to economic enterprises, or regional sources of authority under the Soviet Union, being a *khoziain* implied the ability to transform relative shortage into successful subsistence. Under post-socialism, contemporary *khoziainy* operate relatively independent from other sources of authority, as Gorbachev’s perestroika reforms eliminated the upper levels of the Soviet hierarchy that played significant roles in the distribution of local resources (Rogers 2006). Locals consider contemporary enterprise directors *khoziainy* based on their managerial accomplishments and skills necessary to maintain the stability of their economic institutions (Douglas Rogers 2006). Rogers pinpoints the director of the local farm in Sepych as the locality’s primary *khoziain* because of his control over economic resources and his ability to allocate them (Rogers 2006).
In the Halbstadt German *Rayon*, a variant of *khoziainism* exists in the local collective farms and other institutions. However, because of the ethnic elements of local enterprises and other structures of authority, being a *khoziain* in the *Rayon* is often contingent upon ethnic identification and institutional ties to Germany and its local agents in Russia. This form of *khoziainism* present in the Halbstadt *Rayon*, as well as the Asovo German *Rayon* in the Omsk *Oblast*, has become possible through certain historical contingencies enabling the maintenance of ethnic cultural institutions and expression, which include the collapse of core Soviet governing structures, the emergence of new political configurations during and after perestroika, and the maintenance of certain ideologies relevant to ethnic minorities. Another practice supporting this form of ethnic *khoziainism* is the relative tolerance of foreign-managed political and economic structures associated with ethnic Germans, especially if they introduce foreign capital.

These foreign-based institutions are similar to the structures of Soviet authority operating above the local enterprises and administrations in that they have the wealth to allocate resources in ways local authorities cannot. Thanks to the presence of these Germany-funded institutions, where former collective and state farms dismissed large numbers of employees through privatization or altogether folded in other parts of Russia, the collective farms in the *Rayon* continue to maintain high employment among their villages’ populations, albeit with significantly low salaries.

Instead of immediately privatizing the district’s collective farms or transforming them into joint-stock companies and identifying them as cooperatives, as many collective and state

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95 *Khoziainism* is my term. Rogers uses the Russian term *khoziastvo* to express the idea of multiple *khoziaiiny* or at least the recognition of such forms of authority.
96 I also discuss these contingencies in the second section of this chapter.
farms did throughout the former Soviet Union in the 1990s (Rogers 2006). All of the 11 collective farms in the German Rayon became part of one limited liability company known under the German name Brücke, or Bridges (Anonymous 2003). They also maintained their identities as collective farms. Once it received its status as an LLC, Brücke proceeded to establish the Development Society of Halbstadt as a local economic development NGO, which local organizers immediately turned over to managers from Germany, representing the GTZ. Under this structure of GTZ financing and Development Society management, all of the collective farms of the district enjoy significant investment and technical assistance necessary to improve and increase production (Matis 2001: 35). For example, beginning in 1993 the Development Society allocated funds to build a bakery complex in the village Redkaya Dubrava, a meat processing plant in Shumanovka, and milk processing plants in Grishkovka and Orlova. The Development Society also provided many of the farms with badly needed capital inputs to upgrade from their older Soviet-made equipment (Matis 2001: 35-38).

This enormous foreign investment flowing into such a tiny, backwater region in Siberia sets it drastically apart from most other rural communities in Russia in terms of local power relations. These foreign interventions in the Halbstadt and Asovo Rayony have reproduced a social order closer to the former Soviet hierarchy where local institutions depended upon higher-level, regional authorities for resources. With the German government stepping in and establishing an NGO to help manage the maintenance of the collective farms in the German Rayon, foreign German officials have effectively replaced the higher-level Soviet bosses as the

97 Rogers explains elsewhere that joint stock companies in Russia allowed former collective and state farms to retain their Soviet-style brigades and permitted only current and former employees to hold shares, vote at meetings, and receive yearly dividends (Rogers 2009: 196).
new regional *khoziaisny*. The foreign German presence also influences the nature of social relations and power within localities that can both constrain and enable local authorities.

Caroline Humphrey characterizes many post-socialist farm chairmen in the early 1990s as local “suzerains” whose influence over the economies and politics of local communities grew considerably as the power of the communist party weakened. In the cases she documents in Siberia, farm chairmen managed to translate their economic resources into political authority (Humphrey 2002: 5-14). This image might loosely apply to some local collective farm directors; however, the “suzerains” in the Halbstadt *Rayon* must also operate within the limitations that potential investors and government officials from Germany present to them. At the same time, local officials’ ability to cull resources from Germany often endows them with the political capital necessary to maintain their administrative positions. I illustrate this phenomenon by describing the economic and political environment in the village Podsosnovo.

With 2,543 residents, Podsosnovo is the most populated village in the German *Rayon*, though its history, institutions, and social structures resemble those of its sister villages in the district (Matis 2001: 41-53). 98 Similar to the *Rayon’s* other villages, German migrants from western Russia established Podsosnovo in the late 19th century, and its population was boosted with more German residents from western Russia whom Soviet officials relocated there during and after World War II (Schneider 2000: 12-13; 78-79). Through the 1990s, a large portion of Podsosnovo’s German residents resettled in Germany, leaving houses available for migrants from Central Asia, many of whom, but not all, were of German descent. In the early 1990s, the large influx of German families immigrating into Podsosnovo and other villages in the *Rayon*

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98 Podsosnovo’s village administration posts exact population figures in its office. I recorded the population number from the office in 2008.
helped to maintain the large German population as they replaced those departing for Germany. However, as both long-time residents and new arrivals from Central Asia began to simultaneously leave for Germany, the proportion of German to non-German residents dwindled. The current number of village residents who claim German ethnicity makes up about 35% of the village population, and only an estimated 5-10% of the village’s German inhabitants living in Podsosnovo before perestroika have remained.

Podsosnovo’s “Kirov” Collective Farm represents the primary commercial institution in the village and, in addition to household production, the major source of agricultural output. The farm’s offices are located in a large three-story building and occupy the most visible site in the village – the middle of Podsosnovo’s central square. From this central point, the sections of the farm reach throughout the village and its outskirts. The farm is made up of several stations, each responsible for different aspects of primary and secondary agricultural production, including grain, poultry, meat, dairy products, bread products, and even beer. The director of the farm, Andrei Hagenhals, has been its steward since 1988 and is a strong example of a local khoziain (Matis 2001: 49). Since it employs the majority of the working population of the village (the farm employs an average of 850 workers), operates two of the primary stores offering fresh meat and produce, and also manages the local kindergarten, the farm penetrates the lives of all the

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99 Matis explains this process for the German Rayon in general (2001: 21-33). The interviews I conducted in Podsosnovovo confirm that the process and nature of migration that Matis describes for the entire Rayon is also true in Podsosnovovo.

100 Nadezhda Laas provided these statistics, who is the assistant to the main administrator of the village. The village does not tally population statistics, so her estimation of the number of German residents is based on responsibility over the village registration process. Every year, the village administration requires its residents to register, including a declaration of ethnicity. Village residents usually report to Nadezhda to register, which is why her estimation of the German population is likely relatively close to accurate.
residents in the village.\textsuperscript{101} In addition, the farm annually provides tractors to plow villagers’ potato plots during the planting season (an enormously significant gesture in the lives of all villagers) and regulates the local central heating, water, and electrical systems.

The farm also possesses a storied history of exemplary economic production in the region. The Kirov Collective Farm was established in 1950 through the consolidation of three farms into one. The village and its environs originally underwent the process of collectivization in 1927, and by 1938 authorities had established three farms in Podsosnovo. In 1950, however, the three farms were transformed into one farm that took the name Kirov, after one of the three that were consolidated (Schneider 2000: 97). Before 1957, in the region that is now the German Rayon, people of German descent were not allowed to serve as collective or state farm directors. In that year the local party secretary, hoping to increase the efficiency of agricultural production, began appointing some local Germans as directors. The Kirov farm’s first German director was a native of Podsosnovo named Friedrich Schneider who assumed the post in 1960 (Schneider 2000: 106). Under Schneider’s tenure, Soviet authorities regularly recognized the farm for its high level of efficiency and output and decorated Schneider with the Hero of Socialism award in 1973 (Smirnova 2003: 10; Matis 2001: 49). Schneider continued as director until his death in 1988. In that year, Andrei Hagenhals became the farm’s second German director and has remained in the post to the present.

The current leadership structure of the farm reflects its historical legacy, but it is also shaped by the contemporary ethnic, economic, and political conditions of the region. While

\textsuperscript{101} Matis provides this number (2001: 48), and I confirmed it with the village’s mayor, Aleksi Ermakov, in 2008. As an outsider, even I had constant relations with the collective farm independent from my research. For example, since my two young children accompanied me to my fieldwork site, I had to ask the farm’s president, Andrei Hagenhals, for permission to enroll them in the collective farm’s kindergarten.
doing research at the farm, I worked in two of its sections – the brewery and the flour mill (which is part of the bakery complex). After a few months working in the mill and brewery, I was struck by the composition of the farm’s leadership – most of the top managers are of German descent, grew up in Podsosnovo, and have competence with the local German culture (i.e. they possess fluency in the German dialect spoken in the village over the last several decades). This may seem surprising considering that only 10% of the current German population is comprised of people who resided in the village in the 1980s. Although the placement of farm managers with local German cultural credentials appears to be an expression of ethnic hiring preference, I believe there are more complicated factors in play.

In her discussion of Hungarian cooperative farms, Martha Lampland suggests that community support for farm managers in the post-socialist period is contingent upon their past success in running a farm and their efforts to cultivate positive social relations with employees and outside sources of productive resources (Lampland 2001). The warm community relationships and accomplishments that managers accrued during socialism bolster the confidence that locals have in their, or their progeny’s, maintenance of authority. In the Kirov Farm, Hagenhals and other Germans who worked, or whose parents worked for the farm in its glory days represent a link to the farm’s historic reputation of efficient production. The fact that most of the farm’s German managers either worked for the farm when Schneider was director, or have close kin ties to those who did, supports this assertion. In addition, people of German descent who have had the option to migrate to Germany are more likely to remain in Russia if

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102 By manager, I mean an individual who directs a particular subunit of the farm. I worked closely with the dairy production plant, the bakery/grain mill, and the brewery and knew the managers of these subunits well.
they possess lucrative professional positions, explaining why these managers are mostly individuals residing in the village before perestroika.

While living in Podsosnovo, I occasionally heard expressions of reverence among the current population for the past accomplishments and managers of the farm. Many of the village’s residents whom I interviewed, whether long-time or new residents, spoke admiringly of the accomplishments of the farm, socialist farm managers, and the state of the village during the socialist period. Mina Schneider, a guard at the brewery, grew up in a smaller, neighboring village, but fondly remembers the clean streets, shops and playgrounds the village and farm offered its residents in her childhood. Later as an adult, Mina jumped at the chance to move to Podsosnovo and hopes to reside in the village for the rest of her life. Mina also enjoys working for the current director of the brewery, Alexander Jaug, whose father was also a farm manager during the socialist period, and represents the positive legacy that Mina remembers with affection from her youth.

In addition to the social capital that current managers possess in the minds of local residents, many of the farm’s German managers maintain the necessary cultural capital, which is attractive to the foreign German distributors of economic resources. According to some farm managers at Kirov, officials from Germany responsible for assisting the collective farms under the Brücke umbrella have occasionally visited the Kirova Farm, many of whom don’t speak Russian. Certainly farm managers’ ability to communicate in German with German officials presents an advantage.103 However, high-level managers representing the historic, local German

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103Two of my informants expressed this idea on separate occasions. For example, the manager of the Bakery Complex and fluent German dialect speaker, Andrei Stier, explained that whenever officials from Germany visit Podsosnovo to tour the Kirova Farm, he is often called upon to serve as a guide. The former assistant director of the farm and current mayor, Vladimir Haas, who is also fluent in the dialect told me he often receives German-speaking visitors.
culture also convey the existence and preservation of Germanness to the authorities who represent funding sources from Germany – sources interested in the persistence of German cultural practices in Russia.¹⁰⁴

Another important element of local authority in Podsosnovo is the competition between the farm and the village administration as they appeal to khoziainy from Germany for resources. According to Rogers, the relationships that arise between the cooperative farms and the individual households are cemented through the types of exchanges they regularly make (such as labor contracts, or plowing household potato plots). These exchanges undercut the local village administrations’ attempts to consolidate the type of authority they imagine for themselves as the state’s representatives. In the villages of the German Rayon, however, village administrators might also draw upon the next level of khoziainism, German NGOs such as the Halbstadt Development Society/Altai Foundation, to demonstrate their ability to gain access to valuable resources and distribute them in the community. I observed, for example, that village administrators in Podsosnovo often appealed to The Halbstadt Development Society for financial support for youth-driven and other infrastructure related projects.

I attended an election in Podsosnovo for the post of main administrator (a title equivalent to mayor), which nicely exemplified how the village administrations in the Halbstadt Rayon attempt to employ German institutions in order to compete with the collective farm for authority in the village. The election pitted the incumbent Aleksi Yermakov, a Russian, who had moved to the village several years ago from Kazakhstan, against Vladimir Haas, the German assistant director of the Kirov collective farm. The ten-member Village Committee, whose chairman is the farm’s director, Andrei Hagenhals, managed the election in a private meeting, and only its

¹⁰⁴ I address these sources and their motivations in chapter three.
members were allowed to vote. A close acquaintance who is one of the farm’s managers told me that the current incumbent had no chance to win the election, since his challenger was the assistant director of the farm and the voters were primarily farm employees.

Before the committee members voted, the chairman gave each candidate a moment to say some words. While the challenger who represented the interests of the farm stressed the economic problems of the village, particularly the rising unemployment, Yermakov emphasized his achievements in relation to German cultural programs. He discussed his focus on the youth of the village in the context of his cooperation with the Altai Foundation to build a new German Meeting Center and the village’s relationships with German institutions that have led to international youth exchanges. Ultimately, cultural resources for the youth lost out to economic development, and Haas defeated Yermakov seven votes to three. The event demonstrated the dependence that the village’s main administration has on Germany-funded NGOs, in order to assert authority in the German Rayon. The result of the election also expresses a preference among the council members for the economic benefits that the collective farm represents, and that a high-level administrator of the farm might accumulate, over the cultural benefits that Yermakov won in the form of facilities for the village’s German youth.

Although the circumstances at play in the German Rayon involving German NGOs and the collective farms are not directly related to the Russian Federation’s attempt at civic nation-building, the discourse and policies of Russian civic nation-building have enabled the establishment of official ethnic spaces and foreign institutions to fortify them. The result, at least for regions deemed “ethnic German,” has been a different form of khoziainism dependent on foreign sources, and providing resources for the primary economic and political institutions of the region. The effect has been the provisioning of village main administrations with some form
of distributable resources (albeit usually cultural rather than economic) to at least compete with economic enterprises that have usually had the upper hand in establishing primary authority in rural Russia. Through Russia’s rhetorical bid to establish a civic nation, individuals may draw upon the institutions that civic nation-building discourse enables and tolerates to accumulate political, social, and economic capital at varying levels. Certainly, the collective farms maintain an advantage over village administrations in terms of the sheer number of resources they can distribute to the villagers, and farm managers’ authority will usually win out over local administrators, as Yermakov losing his job to a representative of the collective farm illustrates. Still, it’s important to note that political institutions in the Rayon may call upon resources that foreign German interests provide to gain authority and influence among the population.

**Ethnic Autonomy**

The two-decade long struggle between Moscow and its minority regions (especially those that have been more volatile) has forced federal authorities to move away from the principle of ethnic territoriality as the basis of the Federation to an arrangement in which authorities recognize the special rights of non-Russians through the formation of officially sanctioned, non-territorial ethnic institutions. As an alternative to ethnic territoriality, federal authorities passed legislation in 1996 titled the “Law on National Cultural Autonomy.” According to this law, ethnic organizations may form “National Cultural Autonomies” (NCAs) as non-territorial ethnic institutions if their constituents represent an ethnic minority group on their corresponding territory (therefore an ethnic majority in any given region may not establish an NCA). The primary purpose of NCAs per the legislation is for ethnic groups to independently resolve issues related to the preservation and development of their indigenous languages, educational
institutions, and cultural identities through non-territorial institutions (Torode 2008).

Membership in ethnic autonomies for people of German descent generally provides a cache of potentially accessible assets for those with previously established positions of authority. For Germans, autonomies operate within a network of ethnic German institutions and government organizations, which claim devotion to the cause of preserving German culture. The efforts of autonomies, in concert with other German institutions, can also have an impact on the behaviors and interests of the German and non-German public in Russia, however, not always in the fashion those who designed the projects imagined.

The first step in the process of establishing an NCA is for members of an ethnic group to create an ethnic “association.” Once an ethnic organization officially registers with the state it becomes an “association” and has the right to further register as an NCA. A primary motivation for ethnic associations to establish autonomies stems from a legal stipulation allowing (but not requiring) the state to support national cultural autonomies financially. In general, state officials allocate funds to NCAs by periodically publishing announcements for funding to which all autonomies can apply. Autonomies also possess the right to request permission from governing bodies to conduct their activities when necessary (Torode 2008).

Ethnic associations may establish NCAs in one of the three levels of Russia’s state hierarchy (federal, regional, and local) and may register for any of these levels, however, only one NCA is permitted to register at the regional and national level per ethnic group. At the local level, multiple NCAs may exist for a single ethnic group. The potential to register as a regional or federal NCA has provoked tremendous competition among local associations – the first to register were usually those who authorities granted status as federal or regional NCAs and subsequently received institutional ties to government organs and officials as well as greater
status among the local associations (Torode 2008). Up until 2008, there were exactly ten federal level NCAs, more than 100 regional level, and over 170 NCAs at the local levels (Arent 2009).

In addition to the legislation permitting the registration of NCAs, Russian authorities created an overriding federal institution with ties to the central government known as the Consultative Council on the Affairs of the National Cultural Autonomies of the Government of the Russian Federation (or simply the “Consultative Council”). The Consultative Council closely deliberates with representatives of the federal level NCAs regarding policy making on ethnic issues. The chair and members of the Consultative Council maintain significant political power – one former chair was the federal Minister on Ethnic Affairs and other Council members are and have been representatives of various state-level ministries. This institution has served to tie the NCAs to significant levels of political power and influence (Torode 2008). The hierarchical nature of NCAs and the supportive role of the Consultative Council is the closest system that Russia has to matching the structure and role of the Assembly of the Peoples of Kazakhstan and its constituent ethnic minority organizations in terms of civic nation-building responsibilities.

Germans in Russia were among the first to begin organizing and establishing their own NCAs, and there are now 42 existing in the Russian Federation. The picture of ethnic autonomy for Russia’s Germans is, however, quite messy due to the numerous German organizations established in the early 1990s prior to the formation of NCAs. Before the establishment of NCAs in Russia, the German minority in Siberia already maintained several organizations dedicated to supporting ethnic culture, such as Rebirth, the GTZ, and the national Rayony. After 1996, Siberian Germans established regional-level autonomies throughout Russia (Siberian Germans were especially active creating regional autonomies in the Altai Krai, and the Omsk, Tomsk, and
Novosibirsk Oblast), and a federal-level autonomy in 1997 (Baumgärtner 2005). Dozens of local level autonomies were also established. For example, in the Omsk Oblast Germans created autonomies in fourteen of the Oblast’s rayony. The activities of the autonomies range from directing the preservation and development of German culture happening within the various state-sanctioned German cultural institutions and managing programs dedicated to the development of the compact settlements of Germans in Russia.

One such recent example of programming directed to German “compact settlements” intimately entwined with cultural autonomies is the Russian Federal Program entitled “The Development of the Socioeconomic and Ethno-Cultural Potential of the Russian Germans from 2008-2012 (Развитие социально-экономического и этнокультурного потенциала российских немцев на 2008-2012 годы). Established in 2008, the primary purpose of this program, according to the officially published statement of the project, is to economically develop the regions in the Russian Federation that possess “compact settlements” of people of German descent (in this case economic development appears to mean building and renovating local infrastructure such as utilities, and educational facilities). The program also aims to contribute to the development and maintenance of German identities, especially among German youth. The compact settlements where the bulk of the work is to take place are located in the Halbstadt and Asovo Rayony, the former national settlement Bogdashkino, two villages in the

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105 These include the Altai Krai National Cultural Autonomy of Russian Germans, the Novosibirsk Regional National Cultural Autonomy of Russian Germans, the German National Cultural Autonomy of the Omsk Oblast, and the German National Cultural Autonomy of the Tomsk Oblast.
Samara Oblast, and one village in the Saratov Oblast. In addition to making a contribution to the Russian economy, the program aims to stem the tide of German emigration.\(^\text{106}\)

Since there are several such German institutions in Russia, with or without NCA status, German leaders have made attempts to consolidate them, or at least coordinate their efforts. In order to bring the numerous German institutions in Siberia into Russia’s NCA system, regional German leaders established the Coordinating Council of Siberian Germans in 2005. In addition to all of the regional level autonomies in Siberia, the Halbstadt and Asova German Rayony, and the Russian-German Houses of Barnaul, Novosibirsk, Omsk, and Tomsk comprise the membership of the Coordinating Council, and these organizations may compete for federal funding made available through the Consultative Council (Arent 2009). Under the leadership of Heinrich Martens, the Federal National-Cultural Autonomy of the Russian Germans has lately attempted to consolidate all institutions supporting the needs of ethnic Germans in Russia and coordinate their efforts to become the primary national voice for the German minority in relation to their interactions with the Russian government and Germany (Martens 2010).

Similar to other German cultural organizations, the autonomies work to promote German culture and language education (Arent 2009). What distinguishes the autonomies from other German institutions is the legal legitimacy they possess through the 1996 legislation, granting them the ability to officially appeal to regional, local, and federal governing bodies for financial and administrative support. A position within a German autonomy, however, is usually one of several political or cultural hats that officials of autonomies maintain, allowing the autonomies they represent to benefit from their social relationships and professional positions with other

political and cultural organizations. For example, Maxim Kloos is the President of the Executive Committee of the Altai Krai NCA as well as the Assistant Director of the Altai Krai Russian-German House. Kloos’ position with the Russian-German House requires him to oversee the planning of various German cultural and educational activities taking place in and around the Krai’s capital Barnaul. Kloos’ status as an NCA official qualifies him to seek approval from government authorities for the House’s activities and request funding from them. An additional example of an autonomy official is Peter Fitz who works as both the President of the Slavgorod City German Autonomy as well as the assistant to Slavgorod’s Main Administrator (similar to a deputy mayor in the US). These positions allow Fitz to easily gain approval for the various German cultural activities in Slavgorod and obtain funding. An ethnographic illustration demonstrates the outcomes of these institutional networks on the lives of individuals.

While helping villagers with their annual potato planting, I became acquainted with Zanaida Postnova, a pleasant woman in her 60s. Zanaida is Russian and recently moved with her children and grandchildren to Podsosnovo from Taraz, Kazakhstan. Similar to the experience of many Russians who currently live in the Halbstadt Rayon, Zanaida had German friends who moved to Podsosnovo from Taraz and suggested she join them. Zanaida lives with her sixteen year old granddaughter Zhenia, who is an enthusiastic student of the German language. Zanaida was planting potatoes alone that day because Zhenia was away at a German cultural festival, where she was a contestant in a German language competition (and subsequently won first prize).

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107 Russian-German Houses are German cultural centers existing throughout the former Soviet Union that receive funding and logistical support through a German NGO known as the GTZ. I will discuss Russian-German Houses in more detail in chapter five.

108 Slavgorod is a small city located in the vicinity of the Halbstadt German Rayon.
The German cultural festival’s execution, and Zhenia’s participation in it, can be traced back to the efforts of the Altai Krai NCA in Barnaul over which Kloos presides and various other institutions with which it cooperates. The organization and execution of the event demonstrate the manner in which the various German organizations overlap and complement each other’s efforts and how those efforts impact the behaviors and interests of the public. Kloos and his colleagues at the Russian-German House in Barnaul planned the cultural event that Zhenia attended. However, working as an official for the Altai Krai NCA, Kloos consulted with his partners from the regional governing apparatus for approval to use the campsite where the event took place and requested funding often allocated to NCA-sponsored activities. After organizing the event, the Barnaul Russian-German House invited their daughter organizations (the various German Meeting Centers scattered throughout the Altai Krai) to invite participants for the festival from their locales. The leader of Podosnovo’s German Meeting Center then invited Zhenia, who often participates in the activities of the Center, and other villagers to attend. Zhenia and her co-participants received transportation to the event (located on the other side of the Krai) in addition to food and sleeping accommodations at the campsite where the festival took place. As is evident from this vignette, several organizations contributed personnel, planning, and money in order to facilitate the execution of and attendance at the festival.

Of course a stated goal of most autonomies is to provide the means for non-Russians to preserve their ethnic cultures, and therefore the activities of their officials are inherently designed to impact the lives of those they represent. Often, however, the preservation of ethnic culture does not proceed in the manner that the ethnic and state authorities imagine. This happens as local cultural and political authorities disregard how improvisation, informal practices, and practical behavior of locals might incorporate ethnic programs into strategies to satisfy their
needs (Scott 1998). The fact that Zhenia, an ethnic Russian originally from Kazakhstan, participated and succeeded at the event signals how the actual outcomes of the ethnic programs will occasionally miss the intentions of their creators. Participants might also be unaware of the intentions implicit within the ethnic institutions, programs, and activities, but still incorporate them into their daily strategies because they meet needs and satisfy interests. For Zhenia, and others in Podsosnovo, participating in the activities at the German Meeting Center has very little to do with her desire to preserve German culture. Rather, these opportunities function as a conduit to satisfy her intellectual curiosity and ambitions, travel, and have fun with friends. In this way, various aspects of social life become “framed” as having a distinctive (in this case ethnic) identity, but in practice may have very little affinity with what authorities identify as ethnic culture. The concluding section of this chapter considers further the tensions between ethnic institutions and their publics over framing ethnicity and civic nation-building in Russian.

**Local “reframing” of ethnic territoriality and autonomy in Russia**

Elise Giuliano argues that nationalists do not necessarily understand what causes ordinary people to respond to their programs. In turn, ordinary people are not automatically activated by elite declarations that intend to mobilize ethnic constituencies. She argues further, that normal people begin to view social life in ethnic terms only when institutional leaders frame an issue ethnically to resonate with experiences that concern their occupations, social mobility, and socioeconomic status (Elise Giuliano 2011: 17-19). This notion of “ethnic framing” suggests the possibility of taking a social institution or set of social practices that are not inherently ethnic, and reframe them as ethnic in order to incite complicity with an ethnic project. In the Halbstadt Rayon and other locales where people of German descent reside, I have observed the opposite –
when institutions and their activities become framed as ethnic, ordinary people often reframe them as resources and opportunities to address their needs and interests typically unrelated to ethnicity. This disregard for ethnic framing occurs among Germans in Russia because more salient identity discourses exist than the “Germanness” that German institutions evoke.

With the various institutions available to serve the needs of the German ethnic minority in the Halbstadt German Rayon, such as the Rayon’s administration, autonomous, and ethnic-based NGOs, one might assume that ethnic behavior and identity features prominently in the daily lives of the regions’ Germans. People of German descent don’t appear to engage the state-supported ethnic institutions in the German Rayon (such as Rayon’s administration) much differently, however, than how citizens interact with any political institution. People require certain services that the Rayon and village governments can provide, like health care and education, and they must comply with the requirements of the local administration, such as paying for services, taxes and completing an annual homestead registration. Since Podsosnovo is not the Rayon center, people’s contact with the administration of the German Rayon is somewhat limited. Local residents certainly have frequent dealings with the village administration, which represents the interests of the Rayon government. In this sense, villagers interact with the ethnic Rayon administration through the organs of local administrators. In any case, the intensity with which the Rayon administration emphasizes ethnicity and the impact that has on behavior and identity among local citizens is difficult to isolate. Nonetheless, I would suggest that the influence of the ethnically accentuated Rayon administration does very little to instill and support the notion of Germanness among its population as a result of the dominant Russian-centric cultural discourse already present in the region.
As discussed in the last chapter, Brubaker, et al argue that the perception of ethnic categories is situational, and the ethnic categories that people call to mind in a given social environment inform ethnic identification and behavior. In spite of this process, however, the normative cultural discourse ethnic marking minorities simultaneously un-marks and de-ethnicizes members of the dominant culture, resulting in a general refrain from indexing categories of knowledge pertaining to ethnicity, ethnic identity, ethnic behavior and other such concepts (Brubaker, Feischmidt, Fox, and Grancea 2006: 207-37). I would argue that Germans, together with other non-Russian Euro-ethnics such as Ukrainians, Byelorussians, and Poles, living in the Russian Federation commonly adhere to the dominant Russian-centric cultural vernacular and even perceive themselves to be culturally Russian.\footnote{See chapter five for some ethnographic examples illustrating this point.} Following Brubaker et al’s argument, de-ethnicized Euro-ethnics living in the Russian Federation therefore lack the inclination to index ethnic categories in everyday thought and behavior. The reason this occurs is closely tied to the common life experiences shared by citizens of the Soviet Union.

In his discussion about Russians and other Russian-speakers residing in the former Soviet republics (“Russia’s near abroad”), David Laitin explores the concept of conglomerate identities. According to Laitin, conglomerate identities form under conditions where there is no credible traditional elite to protect group boundaries or to punish defectors who identify themselves as members of the dominant society (Laitin 1998: 31). For Russian-speakers living in former Soviet republics outside of Russia the probability of affinal attitudes for other Russian-speakers is high, especially if they are not members of the titular nationality. This cultural affinity is deeply informed by the various cultural symbols originating from the Soviet period, such as the songs, jokes, holidays, memories of the Great Fatherland War (or the unifying discourse of the war), the
Russian language, and the sense that citizens of the former USSR were part of an international society, all of which thread together the basis for imagining commonality (Laitin 1998: 297). Although Laitin exemplifies Russian-speaking conglomerate identity outside the boundaries of the Russian Federation, a similar feeling of closeness stemming through language, common historical experiences and the sharing of social experiences is just as pervasive for Euro-ethnics (and others) in Russia. Ethnicness and living in a titular ethnic region is therefore less salient for those who identify together as Russian-speakers sharing the cultural experience of living in a socialist regime and participating in its collective institutions that engendered social interaction, and of course sharing the collective and somewhat traumatizing experience of perestroika and its aftermath. The result of this phenomenon on Germans in the Halbstadt Rayon is low identification with Germanness in spite of the available and highly accessible ethnic institutions and their programs (discussed at length in the next chapter).

Having lived in both the German Rayon in Russia and the Sharbakti Rayon in Kazakhstan, I have had numerous relations with the local administrations (I knew the mayors of both Podsosnovo and Sharbakti personally and spent a great deal of time with local officials and in the administration buildings). In Podsosnovo, the nature of social relations in the local administration building rarely ever led to the markings of groups or individuals as German. The situation in Sharbakti was drastically different. Most, but not all, of the local officials in the Sharbakti local and Rayon administrations were Kazakh. This state of affairs often provoked discussions among my acquaintances regarding the ethnic imbalance of public sector jobs and ethnic favoritism. In addition, the local Department of Culture and Language sponsored a large number of the cultural events and activities taking place in the village, many of which emphasized Kazakh culture over other groups’ (most notably Russian which was formerly the
dominant cultural discourse during the Soviet period). The imposition of Kazakh culture during certain festivals and holidays was occasionally a point of dissatisfaction among non-Kazakhs.

In comparison with the Sharbakti Rayon in Kazakhstan, an administrative emphasis on German culture in the Halbstadt Rayon was much less prevalent and rarely discussed in everyday interactions. For example, I never heard any grumbling about ethnic favoritism in the local and village administrations, even in cases where there might have been cause, such as the electing of a local German to a high office in the Podsosnovo election. The only dissatisfaction I ever heard regarding the regime had to do with mandatory German language instruction in local schools over English, which seemed the more practical language to those voicing dissent. In both cases ethnic authority presides, yet for the German leaders of the Halbstadt Rayon, their authority is not conceptualized through a discourse of German ethnicity. In other words, the German ethnic elite has little interest in “protecting group boundaries or punishing defectors,” because they identify with those around them (whether German, Russian, or some other Euro-ethnic group) through a Russian-speaking conglomerate identity.

A portrait of the Kirov Collective Farm’s brewery manager, Alexander Jaug, qualifies this argument. Jaug is in his late 40s and possesses strong personal and familial ties to Podsosnovo and the collective farm. He grew up in the village and spent most of his life as a farm employee, as did his parents, and speaks the local German dialect fluently, often employing it in conversation with other local Germans. Jaug maintains fond memories of the USSR – he was a party member, which he proudly acknowledges, and identifies himself as a “Soviet man” over any other identity marker. His explicit Germanness (as identified by his name and ability to speak the German dialect) seems to have very little influence, however, on how he performs his duties as a collective farm manager or the institutional framework of the brewery. The brewery’s
staff is ethnically mixed, as is its management (the brewery’s current assistant director is a Russian woman who recently migrated to Podosnovo from the city Taraz in Kazakhstan). I conducted participant observation for three months at the brewery as an assistant maintenance worker, which afforded me the opportunity to interview, or at least speak with, most of the brewery’s employees. I never witnessed any grumbling or discussion regarding ethnic favoritism or the imposition of German culture or language on any of the enterprise’s employees. I have observed similar conditions in the other departments of the farm. Nonetheless, as a result of the farm’s and region’s historical legacy, and its place within an ethnic territory and subsequent relationships with German institutions, the farm becomes framed in ethnic terms.

Russia’s civic nation-building project, although tepid, has an impact on countless individuals and communities – it empowers some and enables others to claim resources. In terms of meeting its primary goal of strengthening citizenship among non-Russians, my evidence suggests that civic nation-building discourse is unnecessary for people of European descent living together in mixed ethnic communities, because they maintain a collective corporate Russian-speaking identity consistent with the dominant ethnic identity in the Federation. In other words, the work of creating loyal citizens for people of German descent and other Europeans in Russia is already largely accomplished. What then do Russian authorities hope to gain by enabling German (and other European) ethnic institutions? More importantly, do measures such as watered down ethnic territoriality and ethnic autonomy stand any chance of facilitating a sense of civic nationness among the Federation’s non-European population, particularly with the tapering of these policies since the outset of the Putin administration? I will address these questions in the next chapter as I consider parallel institutions dedicated to civic nation-building in Kazakhstan, specifically the previously discussed Assembly of the Peoples of Kazakhstan.
Chapter 5
Making Citizens the Soviet Way: Civic Nation-Building and “Socialist Production” in Contemporary Kazakhstan

Introduction: The labor of ethnicity and nationalism

The performances of the cultural festival were finally over. After weeks of exhaustive preparations and rehearsals taking place in the German Center and in the other national cultural centers in the village, each of the cultural groups executed their performances. Directly after the event, officials attached to the regional Small Assembly of the Peoples of Kazakhstan judged the festival’s activities as a whole for comparison with the other rayony of the Pavlodar Oblast. The structure and tone of the festival was quite similar to the numerous performance events I had attended in Houses of Culture throughout the Soviet Union from Kaliningrad to Kiev to Kazakhstan. This event was an annual festival commemorating the “art of the peoples of Kazakhstan,” designed as a regional competition between the rayony and urban centers of the Oblast. In addition to the performers of the Sharbakti national cultural centers, groups from a neighboring rayon also performed. Throughout the coming weeks, all of the rayony and major towns would stage similar festivals, from which the oblast’s judges would designate a best overall performance among the competing rayony, providing the winning rayon with national recognition for their residents’ ethnic cultural competency.

The crowd began to file out of the House of Culture auditorium, but some of the teenaged performers from the Chechen-Ingushetian Center remained milling around on the stage. As I followed the procession of attendees into the lobby, I noticed that the number of Chechen kids on the stage had multiplied and a few were forming a line along the back curtain. One of the young men on stage yelled something to my buddy Kanat, who had been operating the sound board during the festival performances, and the beat of pre-recorded Chechen music abruptly vented
through the auditorium’s speakers. All of the Chechen teens began clapping as they were apparently launching into an impromptu, un-choreographed version of one of the dances they performed during the festival. Once we all ascertained what was happening, most of the attendees stopped in their tracks, grabbing the nearest seat to watch the spectacle.

Chechen dancing, with its colorful interplay between male and female dancers and its unstructured body movement, is always a big hit among audiences. Given the informal nature of this performance, however, the quality of it seemed authentic and more exciting than the Chechen dance performances during the festival. The routine comprises a single line of dancers facing toward the audience clapping to music. Male and female dancers are evenly numbered and bifurcated by gender, with the girls on the left from the stage and the boys positioned to the right. At a certain point, one of the boys broke from the line beckoning to the female group and engaging in fancy footwork while wildly waving his arms. Eventually, a tall, wispy young woman joined to encircle the young man with fluttery, stutter steps and occasional graceful spins. After a few minutes, the couple returned to their place in line, and another boy emerged to repeat the cycle. The movement all seemed impulsive and original to the choices of each dancer – some dancers exhibited keener skills than the others, particularly the short young man who was the last of the male pairs to dance. With his vigorous foot and arm work, the boy succeeded in whipping the remaining crowd into excited applause and cheers as the youths completed the impromptu performance.

This occurrence was of particular interest to me, particularly after weeks of working alongside members of the German Cultural Center to engineer semblances of cultural knowledge into mechanical performances suitable for public expression as dictated by state discourses about ethnic activity. By contrast, the impromptu performance appeared as a slippage from those
discursive dictates to something induced not by a disciplined expression of identity, but a playful form of subjectivity drawing upon categories of cultural knowledge and practice, but simultaneously unrestricted by them. In their fun interplay using the idiom of ethnic cultural dance, these young people had, in the terms of Gregson and Rose, asserted their own performative authority against the authority of the state institutions seeking to define and judge the festival’s spaces and subjects (Gregson and Rose 2000). This moment of slippage from the dominant discourse was striking after experiencing weeks of operating within it through the German Center’s preparations for the festival and listening to hours of debates among its members about how to best conform to the performance rules laid out by local cultural administrators. In this sense, preparations for the festival and its execution felt to have those properties of public spectacle that Laura Adams suggests “enables elites to close opportunities for input from below, but without making the masses feel left out (Adams 2010: 3).” I would argue that “the masses” feel included in the process, in spite of their mandated dependence upon state discourses, which has a great deal to do with those familiar modes of being and acting associated with the patterns of life under socialism.

In Kazakhstan, people of non-Kazakh ethnic backgrounds are the key subjects for state institutions and programs intent on facilitating a sense of civic nationalism and an allegiance to Kazakhstani citizenship. The state’s current approach to creating citizens among their non-Kazakh population, who might otherwise be ambivalent about their citizenship, relies partially on former socialist practices completely disassociated from ethnicity and ethnic identity. This chapter examines ethnic organizations (national cultural centers) in Kazakhstan, and how social interactions and activities associated with the centers resemble processes prevalent under socialism designed to strengthen feelings of affinity with the state. I reference here the concept of
ethnic property and temporality I developed in chapter three to argue that civic nation-building discourses in Kazakhstan conflate familiar norms and behaviors prevalent under socialism with ethnic cultural expression taking place in particular times and spaces (such as Houses of Culture during state-sponsored festivals). I understand most (if not all) politically based interpretations of ethnic culture to utilize the social forms, institutions, practices and behaviors that are already familiar, practical and usable among potential ethnic constituents. In this way, those who wish to use ethnicity and ethnic identification as a political tool latch on to already familiar social conventions and identify them as ethnically based. Subsequently, ethnicized individuals may be more inclined to position themselves within a given cultural category of identity at certain times and places if their accustomed routines and habits are associated with that category.

With this line of discussion about the categories of ethnic identity, I follow the charge of Brubaker and Cooper that although such categories are useful sites for observation regarding the practices of groups and individuals, I do not posit the existence of an ethnic identity as such. As Brubaker and Cooper argue, the multiple, fragmentary, and fluid nature of individual and group behaviors severely problematizes associating them with any static category of identity (Brubaker and Cooper 2000). Especially in a social context such as Kazakhstan where state authorities have a great deal of influence producing the content of ethnic categories (such as the things, spaces, and times I discuss in chapter 3), conducting an analysis of German identity in Kazakhstan invites the potential reification of the concept as something tangible and comprehensibly understood among those associated either officially or informally with the identity. We can, however, pursue an investigation of those instances of social activity occurring when the content of ethnic categories intersects with daily, lived realities and the implications such intersections have on those involved with them.
My primary site of analysis to bring these intersections of ethnicity and subjectivity into relief is the national cultural centers operating in northeastern Kazakhstan and the government-sponsored ethnic activities these centers provide for their members. I argue that the Soviet practice of generating allegiance to the state through a convention unrelated to ethnicity but grounded in the routines of daily life, namely the socialist labor process, significantly influences how contemporary authorities design ethnic activities for non-Kazakhs. Programs for ethnic minorities in Kazakhstan seek to inform them about their distinct cultural identities, but also aspire to strengthen their affinity with the state. They attempt to do this through techniques similar in style to former Soviet practices associated with motivating the workforce, such as the staging of socialist labor competitions. As evidence, I show how ethnic activities taking place within and among national cultural centers closely resemble the endeavors of Soviet institutions engaged in economic production. The desired outcome for the practice of state sanctioned ethnic minority culture is to strengthen citizenship and civic nationalism among non-Kazakhs.

Just as the Chechen teens asserted their performative authority during the cultural festival in Sharbakti, however, the existence of individual subjectivity implies slippages from state discourses seeking to attract allegiance to the value of citizenship. In quite novel ways, post-Soviet subjects often draw upon civic nation-building discourses while asserting their own authority over discursively implicit behavior to satisfy their own needs and interests. In this sense, the work of civic nation-building takes on a mythical quality that Meyer and Rowan describe as the taken for granted products, services, techniques, policies, and programs, which institutions ceremoniously adopt. These institutional elements become myths due to their integral presence in institutional discourses, but consistent conformity to which is often inefficient or impractical. Impracticalities within discourses necessitate “ceremonial conformity” as actors
uphold the appearance of discursively embedded myths, while simultaneously behaving informally to satisfy individual needs (John W. Meyer and Brian Rowan 1977). I argue, however, that such institutional myths, although occasionally subverted for practical purposes, also maintain a measure of value among state subjects, explaining why states such as Russia and Kazakhstan continue to employ them for the purposes of civic nation-building.

I begin with a discussion of how Soviet authorities constructed the rhythms of life under socialism in the context of agricultural collectivization as an exemplar of the manner in which the labor process normalized modes of popular behavior and practice. I use the forms of socialization in the milieu of Soviet agriculture simply because I conducted my research primarily in rural areas, representing the contexts with which I am most familiar. In his work on Soviet collectivization, Oleg Kharkhordin argues that kollektiv formation in the USSR involved enforcing a standard set of practices, such as initiating a system of surveillance, the process by which laborers established production goals, and the personal purging and cleansing at public events (Kharkhordin 1999: 125-26). Given this discursive standardization under Soviet socialism that Kharkhordin suggests, I would argue the processes under agricultural collectivization were similar to kollektiv formation elsewhere in the Soviet Union.

Using ideas put forth by Judith Butler and Christel Lane, I also examine theoretically how Soviet authorities succeeded in constructing rituals to frame a sense of normativity in the context of formal labor practice. After considering ritual and labor practice theoretically, I undertake an empirical examination of the subjects in question, the national cultural centers, by identifying the participating social actors and institutions ranging from the national level in Kazakhstan to the individual centers in Sharbakti. Implicit in my discussion of these figures and
the institutions in which they operate is the extent to which they replicate those normative behaviors prevalent under the socialist labor process.

As my analysis focuses on the socialist labor process as a primary referent of normative behavior and its conflation with ethnicity, I feel it necessary to examine other institutional frameworks associated with officially organized leisure activities in the Soviet Union. These include specifically the Soviet youth organization, the *Komsomol*, and efforts to preserve and employ ethnic culture and folklore. In order to place into relief the inherent nature of the socialist labor process for the practice of ethnic culture, I discuss social contexts independent of the Soviet Union likewise employing folklore and ethnic culture for political purposes. What I gather from this comparison is that the processes of socialist labor absorbed numerous institutional frameworks in order to socialize individuals into conceptualizing themselves as citizens of the USSR. In addition to youth and ethnic cultural activities, one of those frameworks happens also to be socialist competition, but all of these became significant components of non-Russian, Soviet lifestyles. I illustrate the life experience within the institutions of socialist labor, and how exactly the experience intersected with these frameworks, through examining several historical studies as well as a case from my research in Kazakhstan.

Following this discussion, I turn to my ethnographic description of the civic nation-building practices associated with the Kazakhstan holiday, the Day of the Unity of the Peoples of Kazakhstan. My description of the state-sponsored events taking place on this day demonstrates how actors, institutions, and their discourses coalesce to exhibit the conceptual and theoretical models I build throughout this chapter. My closing remarks revisit the subjectivities of those Chechen youth dancers I introduce at the beginning of the chapter. I return to this moment in consideration of the question I posed at the end of my discussion in chapter four about
territoriality; namely, what is all of this “ethnic enabling” for? Do these processes of civic nation-building inherent in ethnic territorialization in Russia and the activities of national cultural centers in Kazakhstan really meet the objectives laid out in the nationalities’ policies of post-Soviet states? In order to begin effectively engaging such questions, I now turn to a discussion of life under the regime of Soviet labor in the collective farm.

Collectivizing Identity

Sheila Fitzpatrick’s and Caroline Humphrey’s work describing the processes of collectivization in the Russian countryside effectively describes how the Bolsheviks created collective identities through a multi-layered hierarchical structure that imposed distinct patterns of labor among collective farm workers. These illustrations of collectivized agricultural labor suggest the manner in which other labor institutions in the USSR socialized their workers. Before the 1930’s, according to Fitzpatrick, Russian peasant households shared land commonly through the “mir” apparatus (Fitzpatrick 1994: 22-23). In order to initiate the collectivization of the countryside, Soviet officials abolished the mir and replaced it with a collectivized village farm, or kolkhoz (Fitzpatrick 1994: 104). In theory, the kolkhoz was a cooperative structure in which each individual owned a share of the whole – households received shares upon joining the collective and contributing their means of production, which usually consisted of land and livestock (Fitzpatrick 1994: 114). Under this system, peasants released the land allotted to them under the mir system to the kolkhoz, but retained their smaller private plots (usually the land surrounding peasant households) used for their subsistence needs (Sheila Fitzpatrick 1994: 136).

In addition to Fitzpatrick and Humphrey on socialist collectivization, see Moshe Lewin (1975); Gerald W. Creed (1997); Gail Kligman and Katherine Verdery (2011); David A. Kideckel (1993).
The brigade was the basic work unit of the *kolkhoz* and consisted of a group of households working together in a particular section of the *kolkhoz* fields. A single leader headed the brigade, whom the *kolkhoz* administration appointed, and was responsible for making sure the brigade members accomplished their daily tasks (Fitzpatrick 1994: 140-41). Brigade leaders received work orders from the chief specialists, who in turn reported to the *kolkhoz* chairperson. The chairperson was ultimately responsible for the enterprise and held accountable for the *kolkhoz*’s output by individuals stationed at higher levels of authority positioned independent of the collective farm (Humphrey 1998: 102-05).

In her ethnographic account of Buryat Mongol collective farm workers in Siberia, Humphrey explains how a movement similar in spirit to civic nation-building associated with the labor process, specifically regulatory practice, worked to displace indigenous notions of self and community (Humphrey 1998: 231-32).¹¹¹ According to Humphrey, the *kolkhoz* produced individual and collective identities driven by values such as the maintenance of economic production standards and the achievement of higher prestige jobs and greater wages. Humphrey argues the economic norms and behaviors collective farms introduced and institutionalized served to replace other former identity-producing institutions, such as cultural heritage and kinship (Humphrey 1998: 252-58). Humphrey’s elaboration on life in the *kolkhoz* suggests that collective labor institutions imposed certain modes of thinking, being, and acting on their individual members producing the psychic material from which they formed identity and the manner in which they positioned themselves within increasingly larger imagined communities.

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¹¹¹ Although Humphrey does not conceptually use the notion of civic nation-building in her discussion of socialist competition, her description of how it operates at the ideological level to “link the individual or group directly with the state (1998: 168)” certainly mirrors the intentionality of civic nation-building.
For the Soviet nation-builders, this “psychic material” was the regulatory practice, or the daily activity of the labor process, the ritualized aspects of a normalized socialist lifestyle.

Given David Kertzer’s suggestion that the distribution of resources occurring in any society heavily influence’s the symbols employed in its rituals, labor and economic production indeed represent extremely relevant sites from which to discuss ritualized structures and behavior (David Kertzer 1988: 4). In her book on ritual in the Soviet Union, Christel Lane argues that Soviet life in the period of late socialism was rife with rituals designed to create a close affinity between Soviet citizens and the state. Like Humphrey, Lane references the kolkhoz as an institution where individuals performed specific rituals related to labor in order to clarify the tenets of Soviet ideology and facilitate the desired relationship with the state. Lane identifies ritual specifically as a “stylized, repetitive social activity which, through the use of symbolism, expresses and defines social relations. Ritual activity occurs in a social context in which there is ambiguity or conflict about social relations, and it is performed to resolve or disguise” such relations. Ritual is also significant for Lane because it stands for a transcendent principle “constituted by those beliefs and values at the top of the hierarchy of meaning which order and structure those at the lower levels (Lane 1981: 11).”

Citing Terence Turner, Lane characterizes ritual “as a controllable and orderly pattern of action…,” suggesting the hierarchical system imposes the regulatory practices and routinized behaviors that ritual creates, allowing individuals and groups “and another, more inclusive, group…” to imagine themselves as one cohesive

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112 In the section of *The Rites of Rulers* covering labor rituals in rural areas and collective farms, Lane contends that labor rituals were underdeveloped outside of industrial areas, the reason for which, she suggests, is due to geographic isolation, the shortage of qualified political cadres, and the prevalence of religious tradition. Given my discussions with individuals about the topic primarily in rural communities in Russia and Kazakhstan during the course of my research, I can attest that Soviet labor rituals (at least in the case of late socialism) were just as prominent in rural regions as they were in the neighboring industrial centers.
community engaged in a collective effort for a common purpose (Lane 1981: 12, 19). For a citizen of the Soviet Union (particularly those living on collective farms), the labor process constituted a swell of daily acts rich with socialist rituals.

Regarding the ritualized aspects of collective labor in the Soviet Union, Lane asserts that officials intended labor rituals to orient workers to Soviet values and transform members of work brigades and economic enterprises into single, likeminded communities (Lane 1981: 109). An institutionalized event Lane cites fusing practice with ideology is the periodic subbotnik. While working at the Kirov Kolkhoz brewery in Podsosnovo as a participant observer, I took part in the practice. Generally, a subbotnik constitutes an extra day of voluntary labor, usually falling on a Saturday. The nature of the labor occurring at the subbotnik in which I participated involved sweeping and tidying the property outside of the brewery complex. As Lane describes it, the purpose of the subbotnik is to provide labor above what is already required as a service to the state, typically involving the cleaning and beautifying of public spaces. Another noteworthy aspect of the subbotnik is its symbolic leveling, as physical and intellectual workers unite to complete the same work project. Following the notion of using labor ritual to fashion cohesive communities, Lane argues that “voluntary” participation in the activities of the brigade, such as subbotnik, induced collective farm members “to change their whole way of life and to conduct their social relationships both inside and outside of the industrial enterprise according to the moral postulates of the communist Moral Code (Lane 1981: 117-19).” Hence, for collective farm workers, participating in subbotnik facilitated the conceptual transformation of symbolic ideals related to the inversion of power hierarchies and establishing social equity implicit in Soviet
discourses into observable acts. Another regulatory practice with which Soviet authorities attempted to forge such normative social relationships through the labor process was through the socialist labor competition.

**Socialist Labor Competition**

At the outset of her study, Humphrey discusses the relation between the *kolkhoz* as an economic institution and its role as an instrument of political and cultural integration (Humphrey 1998: 1). According to Humphrey, the backbone of Soviet ideology depended upon labor; placing significant pressure on every citizen to engage in it, and identifying unemployment as criminal behavior. Laboring at any capacity in the *kolkhoz* implied giving practical support to the economic, political, and social ideals of the state, aligning individual economic production in the farm with political support for the entire regime (Humphrey 1998: 7). The *kolkhoz* was therefore intimately tied to the ideology of the state; its institutional apparatus represented the official Soviet doctrine of labor that could deeply penetrate the consciousness of the workers and unify them into an imagined community of likeminded Soviet citizens.

A tool Soviet authorities used to align individual laborers with the state, while simultaneously attempting to raise production levels, was initiating competition between work groups. Humphrey characterizes such “Soviet competitions” as a primary mode of ritualized behavior in the Soviet Union and an ever-present aspect of Soviet economic life. For Soviet authorities, labor competitions discursively stimulated a social environment by which the socialist-oriented moral community might grow among members of an agricultural labor brigade.

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113 My point regarding the role ritual plays in transforming concepts into things references Kertzer (1988: 7).
(Lane 1991: 117). In theory, Soviet competition took place when a group of workers discovered an efficient method of attaining a production target and tested the method through production competitions with other work groups. In practice, however, enterprise directors or local planners called for competitions in order to nudge unsuccessful enterprises or brigades towards greater levels of production.

At the local level, the Party leaders enlisted teams from the various farms of the district to participate in competitions. Preparation for and execution of Soviet competition required a great deal of action on the part of all brigade and enterprise members. The party secretaries selected targets and persuaded workers to sign an announcement of competition; meetings were held to plan how the target could be achieved and later to discuss the quarterly results; articles were written; workers filled-in their “socialist competition” booklets, those brigades lagging behind were chided, and those doing well rewarded. On an ideological level, socialist competitions served to link the individual or group directly with the state and were generally held to correspond to the various Soviet holidays and other commemoratory or ceremonial events, such as an anniversary of the October Revolution. The form and the timing of the competition created the perception that events of state importance inspired the individuals of the working unit (Humphrey 1998: 165-68). Soviet competitions, in addition to daily acts of labor, represented the kinds of regulatory practices by which Soviet subjects established meaningful bonds with the state and continually reaffirmed their position within it.

Although the form and function of socialist labor institutions have receded, their regulatory practices have reproduced themselves within certain post-Soviet environments and often serve to align their members with the objectives of the state. In Kazakhstan, post-Soviet officials use these regulatory practices of former, familiar institutions, such as socialist economic
enterprises, to stimulate a sense of Kazakhstani citizenship for its non-Kazakh peoples. I now shift my discussion from the forms of Soviet labor to consider the “content” implicit in the socialist labor process and its structures, namely the experience of subjectivity in the context of state discourses. I do this in order to exemplify what has patterned behavior choices for post-Soviets and why so many of my acquaintances in Kazakhstan view their lives under socialism nostalgically, conditioning their embrace of those regulatory practices when they occur.

Subjectivity and socialist labor

In their discussion of collectivization in the Romanian countryside, Kligman and Verdery reference the “practice of personhood” that developed under communism. For Romanian peasants, the experiences of collectivization involving the trauma associated with loss of property and livelihood, along with the severing of social relations caused the practices of personhood to “move inward, toward resourcefulness and coping (Kligman and Verdery 2011: 435).” This movement from subjective visibility to the opaque accompanied a discourse of passivity, as collectivized peasants framed themselves lacking in agency and completely under the authority of communist cadres (Kligman and Verdery 2011: 436). The outcome of this discursive positionality served “to euphemize personal responsibility and re-signify it as necessity.” This imbued the community with the ultimate agency rather than the individual (Kligman and Verdery 2011: 438-39). In this sense, Kligman and Verdery’s Romanian peasants publicly deferred to the mythic ideals associated with collectivization and the collective behavior its discourse implied, while secretly undertaking strategies of subversion allowing them to effectively cope with the social environment.
I refer to this account of personhood in Romanian collective farms to initiate a theoretical discussion of practice and how the ideologically and pragmatically informed actions of daily life fashioned subjectivity for the socialist laborer. Up to this point, I have framed the kolkhoz worker in the Soviet Union as a stable subject, understanding her personhood through state-devised rituals forming the patterns of institutionalized labor. I now question that image and its stability in terms of labor practice that socialist and nostalgic post-socialist discourses ascribe to it. Verdery and Kligman present accounts of individuals who represented themselves as lacking in personal agency, ascribing control over personhood to the collective. Meanwhile, for the sake of “coping” and “getting by,” people subverted normative socialist behaviors to engage in informal activities. This plurality Kligman and Verdery describe helps to characterize the nature of personhood for the socialist laborer, objectively constructed and enacted through the mechanisms of socialist discourse, while maintaining an opaque subjectivity.

Having had numerous conversations during my research in Russia and Kazakhstan with individuals affectionately recalling the patterns of socialist life, I might call into question the overwhelmingly negative recollections of collectivization and life under the socialist labor regime found in Kligman and Verdery’s account. I should point out that Kligman and Verdery’s informants experienced a starkly different historical and cultural context than my or Humphrey’s research subjects. While Kligman and Verdery portray the experience and trauma associated with early socialist collectivization, our examples from the Soviet and post-Soviet Union are informed through individuals who did not.

I superimpose Verdery and Kligman with my accounts of late socialism and post-socialism only to demonstrate that socialist subjects were in no way “passive recipients of inexorable cultural laws…” However, the multiplicity of those laws and the “force relations”
they presented in the life patterns of the *kolkhoz* had a significant impact on the subjectivity of the Soviet worker. As Judith Butler suggests, discursively conditioned experiences have their limitations on the life of the subject (Butler 1990: 8). Understanding what those limitations might be in any social context, however, is a tricky question. With the limitations of discourse and subjectivity in mind, I consider how the discourses implicit within the socialist labor process presupposed an “internal coherence of the subject…,” or, alternatively, ambivalence in terms of what guided behavior and decision-making (Butler 1990: 16).

Like any social institution, the *kolkhoz* operated as a site where various discourses coexisted, providing a space “for integrating the unbalanced, heterogeneous, unstable and tense force relations…” that the official Soviet and informal discourses disclosed among its subjects (Foucault 1978: 93). In theorizing the presence of discourses, Foucault explains that a multiplicity of discursive elements come into play through the various strategies employed in any social context. If the force relations inhabiting interactions between individuals and groups reflect the manifestations of power that Foucault conceptualizes, discourses are the tools by which such force is exerted through how they arrange the components of social interactions. Although often employed through strategies, Foucault argues that the process of arrangement is unstable. Thereby, discourse might produce and reinforce power, but also undermine, expose, or render it fragile. By the same token, through its occasional silent and secret nature, discourse might serve as a shelter for certain loci of power by limiting those forces that stand in opposition (Foucault 1978: 100-02). It is this multiplicity of forces through discourse that influenced the subjectivity of the Soviet worker. With this in mind, I argue that a multiplicity of discursive options persisted under socialism, in which the subject could “resignify” agency to the collective,

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114 The information in quotations originates from Judith Butler (1990: 8).
while simultaneously acting subjectively and (at times) subversively against the discourse for the purpose of “getting by” under the conditions of material scarcity. That many socialist discourses persisted in this context of multiplicity, as did the forms of socialization and behavior they engendered, suggests why they are often subjects of fond nostalgia for post-socialist people.

With this in mind, I return to Butler’s point about the limitations of discourses that arrange power’s relations to suggest that such limitations exist only due to the multitude of other discourses challenging them as individuals form strategies to employ within their social interactions. Thus, as Butler argues, subjective expression often fails to conform to normative discourses (in her case gender discourses), which (following Foucault) occurs precisely due to the multiplicity of alternative discourses available to the subject (Butler 1990: 24). Hence, as Butler proposes, subjectivity rests in the person’s ability to operate within the matrix of power without uncritically replicating relations of domination (Butler 1990: 30). In this sense, forms of repetition through regulatory practice (i.e., participation in socialist labor conventions, such as competition) may or may not have been outright iterations of socialist discourses and existed right alongside behavior that explicitly subverted the discourses.

In his examination of late Soviet subjectivity, Alexei Yurchak likewise recognizes this harmony of discursive multiplicity under socialism and suggests that individuals effectively managed it by employing what he refers to as “performative shifts (Yurchak 2005: 9).” Yurchak considers specifically the meanings and intentionality embedded in official discourse (and its public expression) prevalent in Soviet institutions. On the one hand, Yurchak identifies “constative speech acts” that actors express through the ritualized rote reproduction of discourse. Under late socialism, constative discursive speech was frequently necessary in order to meet institutional expectations within labor brigades, educational sites, and public events. By
consistently articulating official discourses when required, Soviet people qualified themselves for professional, social, and material opportunities. In this way, social actors employed “performative shifts” as strategically enacted speech or physical acts, not for the exclusive purpose of expressing the literal meaning of the act, but to capture the benefits its expression offered (Yurchak 2005: 12-14, 19). Yurchak’s primary example of performative shifts was the normative style of participation in the Komsomol.

The Komsomol functioned as the Soviet Union’s primary youth association and was responsible for organizing most activities for teenagers and young adults, from sporting events to musical training, and artistic performances. Similar to other Soviet institutions, Komsomol meetings necessitated the execution of ideological lectures, voting for resolutions, and appointing officials. Much of the activity taking place in Komsomol meetings was, according to Yurchak, purely performative, a masquerade enacted merely to meet the requirements of the state surveillance machine. As a result, meetings were often reported without actually taking place, members voted for particular initiatives without understanding their substance, and ideological lectures were held with only the most minimal preparation and attention.

The benefits such performative acts provided the organization’s members involved the production of “normal” social life, as members joined the Komsomol, participated in its committees, and followed their protocols for the purpose of hanging out with friends while taking advantage of the material resources it afforded their events. Although this level of activity in the Komsomol required certain ritualized discursive acts, participants dismissed the constative elements of the discourse (Yurchak 2005: 25-26). In this sense, similar to collectivized Romanian peasants, Komsomol members resignified their personal agency as collective
necessity, while those who performed the discursive acts received unspoken but valuable benefits for their performances as they adhered to alternative discourses.

It is important to keep in mind here that performative shifts should not presuppose a comprehensive rejection of the discourses sometimes articulated in a constative manner. As Gleb Tsipursky argues, “many youngsters responded enthusiastically to the Kremlin’s cultural policies and had fun with government-managed cultural spaces…” in ways that did not necessarily imply a subversion of state discourses about culture (Tsipursky 2016: 2). Yurchak himself stresses that Soviet citizens also found positive meaning in the literal interpretations of some Soviet ideology and practice, even as they undertook performative expressions of it. Particularly for the members of the last Soviet generation (raised in the Brezhnev years, but coming of age with perestroika), their performative shifts allowed them to maintain an affinity for the ethical values of socialism (the constative meanings) while offering opportunities not necessarily anticipated by state authorities (Yurchak 2005: 32). Rather than functioning as a site of resistance, this level of engagement with official Soviet discourses was therefore productive and engaged the socialist system to create new meanings and possibilities (Yurchak 2005: 157).

The employment of performative shifts with socialist discourses is not exclusive to Soviet Komsomol members, but rather such behavior pervades across various socialist and post-socialist contexts. Similar to the youth of the Komsomol, I argue that undertaking performative shifts was a consistent feature across Soviet social environments, particularly in those sites of collectivized labor I discuss above. They also transpire in those post-socialist arenas where structures resembling Soviet labor are reproduced, such as the formations associated with Kazakhstan’s civic nation-building discourse. A primary institutional site in which I observed performative shifts in the name of civic nation-building took place in the context of social
interactions associated with the Assembly of the Peoples of Kazakhstan. In the following section, I describe the Assembly, its appendages, and the manner in which its influence engenders the employment of performative shifts.

The Assembly of the Peoples of Kazakhstan

Kazakhstan’s lawmakers argue that encouraging the growth of minority ethnic identities is a viable strategy to strengthen a sense of Kazakhstani state citizenship among these minorities. This position is often represented in various state-supported media. For example, a 2008 article from the official government newspaper Kazakhstanskaya Pravda reported on a parliament-sponsored round table convened to discuss “the models upon which interethnic harmony can be achieved in Kazakhstan.” According to the article, participants made up of legislators and scholars expressed the view that the freedom to belong to an ethnic nation and preserve one’s ethnic language functions as an incentive for the population to identify as citizens of the state (Turyezhanova 2008). For Kazakhstan’s lawmakers, the freedom to belong to an ethnic nation and exercise a cultural identity corresponding to a chosen ethnic category achieves two primary goals: it provides a motivation to value one’s citizenship in the state and it supports the maintenance of peace and harmony among an ethnically diverse population. This perception suggests, therefore, that a fundamental task of the state is to further entrench Kazakhstan’s citizens into their chosen ethnic categories and through that entrenchment increase the value of their state citizenship. For the time being, the state has chosen the Assembly of the Peoples of Kazakhstan as the primary tool with which to undertake this task.

Through a structure reaching from President Nazarbayev down to the members of the affiliated national cultural centers of the country’s smallest villages, the Assembly and its
partners operate as a system of hierarchical councils. This structure resembles the paternalistic hierarchical council system of the USSR. The Assembly itself is a national-level organization, led by President Nazarbayev and composed of delegates representing the various officially registered ethnic cultural organizations of the state, who meet together at least annually to discuss and implement the Assembly’s operating strategies. In addition to the national Assembly, each region, as well as the cities Astana and Almaty, has its own “small” Assembly whose composition and operations mirror that of the national levels. The regional assemblies may also maintain filiali\textsuperscript{115} in rural localities under their jurisdiction – the structure of the local level institutions again resembles the regional and national levels (Nazarbayev 2008).

The organs by which the Assembly promotes its nation-building ideology among Kazakhstan’s population are the numerous national culture centers organized at the national, regional, and local levels representing members of the various ethnic groups in the places where they are organized. The centers, often in cooperation with the Assembly, sponsor the kinds of ethnic cultural activities for their members I describe in chapter three, such as language study, arts and crafts classes for children, social clubs for youth and adults, as well as the preparation and execution of performances involving traditional singing, dancing and dramatic pieces usually in ethnic national costume. According to the legislation passed to support the Assembly, the primary purpose of these activities is the “preservation and revitalization of the cultures and peoples of Kazakhstan (Nazarbayev 2008).” Attempting to meet this mandate, national cultural centers reproduce some of the key conventions prevalent among Soviet labor institutions.

\textsuperscript{115} A filial is a Russian term denoting a branch or subsidiary organization. Therefore in this sense, filiali operate as localized, daughter organizations to the regional Assemblies.
The national cultural centers operate at the most local levels of this structural hierarchy – the centers operating in any given locality represent its primary ethnic groups. In Sharbakti, Germans, Russians (identified as Slavs), Ukrainians, Tatars, Chechens, Ingush, Kabardins, Balkars, and Muslim Kazakh women have all established national cultural centers. With the exception of the Muslim Women’s Center, the primary participants active in the various centers are teenagers and children who engage in projects and programs designed to instill in them a sense of their ethnic heritage, history, and language. Certainly, on the face of this institutional structure, these cultural centers attempt to accomplish exactly what the Assembly advertises – they function as a means by which minority ethnic groups in Kazakhstan can restore and preserve their ethnic cultures and languages. Certainly, many of those who participate in the events taking place in the centers are seriously invested in such restoration and preservation of their indigenous cultures. On another level, however, the centers operate according to the social norms and ideals with which their leaders and participants are accustomed. This means that the structure and activities of the centers maintain an internal logic often present in former socialist institutions – especially those associated with economic production. Before I begin to compare contemporary national cultural centers to Soviet labor institutions, I will discuss the specific form and function of these centers, and utilize some of my ethnographic data to illustrate how they operate at the local level and the various discourses their members often employ.

**Local national cultural centers in Kazakhstan**

Typical of many Soviet and former Soviet public institutions, national cultural centers form the basis for an enormous hierarchical structure. The local level national cultural centers and their leaders are accountable to their local administrations, their parent institutions located in
the regional capitals, and the regional level assemblies, which are then subject to the national level Assembly.\textsuperscript{116} This hierarchical structure insures that those operating the ethnic programs at the local level observe the mandates from the institutions positioned above them. Every rung of the hierarchy maintains the identical structures and functions as those at other levels, but the constituent institutions operate at different scales according to their place in the hierarchy. The head of the local government administration (\textit{akim}) serves as the president of the local \textit{filial} of the small Assembly of the Peoples of Kazakhstan, regional Governors are presidents of the oblast level assemblies, and President Nazarbayev is the president of the national level Assembly. The membership of the local assembly is composed of the directors of the local national cultural centers and the \textit{akim} who functions as the president of the assembly. \textit{Rayon}-level departments of culture and language education function as the logistical mechanism for the Small Assembly’s local \textit{filial}, as their members work with the national cultural center leaders to ensure that state-sponsored cultural events take place according to officially designated timelines for festivals and other activities.\textsuperscript{117}

Lydia Ableeva, the German Center’s leader in Sharbakti, often attends meetings together with the other national cultural center leaders, Sharbakti’s \textit{Akim}, and authorities representing the German National Cultural Center for the region, headquartered in the \textit{Oblast} capital, Pavlodar. Ableeva must carry out the various programs and cultural activities that local authorities representing the state and the regional German leaders in Pavlodar expect of her and the Center. Quite often, the expectations from both sources of authority are in harmony and require the same

\textsuperscript{116} I have outlined the structure of the Assembly as a system of hierarchical councils, similar in structure to Soviet intuitions above. \textsuperscript{117} Gulsara Balakina, head of the Sharbakti Department of Culture and Language Communication, communicated this bit of information.
actions. This overlap often comes about around cultural festivals and the activities taking place during national and local holidays and other days of commemoration. On all of these occasions, members of the local national cultural centers are required to perform some aspect of their ethnic cultures at public events. In addition to public performances, authorities also expect local national cultural centers to maintain various ethnic culture clubs for children and adults, and consistently sponsor language courses.

The educational and recreational nature of these “ethnic activities” typically attracts teenagers and children, who make up the bulk of the national cultural centers’ membership. The primary activities of most national cultural centers are language acquisition, folk dance, and arts and crafts, all of which are most accessible to young people possessing both the interest and time that the commitments to the centers’ activities require. In addition to favoring younger people as the key members of the national cultural centers, the nature of participation in these institutions is also overwhelmingly gendered. Dancing, singing, and non-performative artistic activities appeal more strongly to girls, young women, and adult women. According to my observations, the membership of most national cultural centers depended upon the participation of women and girls (a woman directed every center in Sharbakti). A large number of boys participated, but a much smaller number of male teenagers and an even smaller amount of adult men (in most of the national cultural centers, with the exception of the Tatar and Chechen-Ingush Centers, very few men participate regularly).

A good number of the national cultural center directors have close ties to the local governing apparatus and are obliged to comply with state dictates regarding the operations and activities of their centers. Current or retired educational professionals who either worked or were educated in Soviet institutions directed nearly all of the cultural centers with which I am familiar.
For example, a retired elementary school principle oversees the Chechen-Ingush Center, the initial leader of the Tatar center is an English teacher at one of the local schools, and the current director is a music teacher at the regional House of Culture. In addition, the leader of the Kabardin-Balkar Center teaches Kazakh language at a local elementary school, the leader of the Ukrainian Center is the director of a House of Culture in a neighboring village, and the leader of the Slavic Center (i.e. the Russian Center) is the director of Rainbow. The Akim personally asked these women to serve as directors with the exception of Ableeva over the German Center. Given that the German Centers have a much more robust structure than the other centers, thanks in part to the involvement of the GTZ, regional level German National Cultural Centers typically appoint their local-level leaders. Therefore, the Pavlodar German Center director appointed Ableeva, who, as previously noted, owns her own cosmetics business in Sharbakti, allowing her to maintain financial independence from the local government budget.

All of the directors were well into adulthood at the time of my research; the youngest was in her mid-30s and the oldest was in her 70s. The credentials of these individuals, their ages, and their professional experiences in the Soviet Union and post-socialist Kazakhstan suggest they possess fluency in socialist labor discourses and practices. Therefore, using principles tied to socialism in their current duties as national cultural center directors would not be surprising. As educators, they are also state employees and therefore to some degree mandated to strengthen an allegiance to Kazakhstani citizenship among those they teach. In addition, with the exception of Ableeva, the national cultural center leaders maintain a relationship with the Akim quite similar to the manner in which socialist laborers answered to the kolkhoz and other economic enterprise directors. Hence, similar to the relationships I illustrate in chapter four in the Kirov Collective farm in Russia, the Akim is the local khoziain. It is interesting to note that as a private
businessperson, Ableeva does not recognize the *Akim* as her *khoziain*, and was at liberty to “quit” the Rainbow Center, as I explained in chapter three.

During my fieldwork, I often encountered these national cultural center leaders and others effectively employing a performative shift, using multiple discourses of post-Soviet culture and politics to meet their subjective needs, while simultaneously maintaining an affinity with it. Experiencing some enthusiasm upon viewing the Chechen youths dance at the cultural festival in Sharbakti, I reached out to the director of the Chechen-Ingush National Center. The director of the Center, Zura Khatzeva, is ethnic Chechen and was born in Kazakhstan. She speaks fluent Chechen and possesses a thorough knowledge of Chechen culture. Khatzeva recently retired as the principle of a local elementary school in Sharbakti and is well-versed in the Kazakhstani state’s official nationalities’ discourse, which she immediately expressed at the outset of our first interview by voicing its typical discursive tropes. For example, when asked to explain the Chechen culture-related activities she organizes, she explained the Center’s members aspire to revitalize the traditions and customs of the Chechen and Ingush people, such as dances, songs, weddings, funerals, and the Chechen language.¹¹⁸

Khatzeva further exemplified her command over the civic nation-building discourse through an article she wrote for Sharbakti’s weekly newspaper *Tribuna*. In her text, Khatzeva speaks to the enlightened nature of Kazakhstan’s nationalities policies through its accomplishment of creating a state in which “peace and harmony rule, and the imagination of its many different peoples can build a common future (Khatzeva 2008).” In addition to her praising

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¹¹⁸ The Ingush are a group culturally similar to Chechens (Khatzeva cited linguistic pronunciation forming one of the primary cultural differences between the two groups), both of which constitute the Vainakhs, a branch of the historic Nakh peoples. Chechens and Ingush traditionally resided in neighboring regions of the North Caucasus, both of which currently exist as federal districts of the contemporary Russian Federation.
of the state’s civic nation-building efforts in the article, Khatzeva also addresses the historical experiences of Chechens in Kazakhstan. Similar to the wartime experience of Germans during World War II, Soviet authorities also deported the entire Chechen population to the Soviet East, much of the population sent to the various states in Central Asia (Tishkov 2004: 33). She discursively frames Kazakhstan as a refuge, where multiple ethnic nations reside and harmoniously coexist. Khatzeva suggests this friendly ethno-cultural environment in Kazakhstan is particularly significant for the Chechen community, whose members are unable to return to their Caucasus homeland due to the political instability there (Khatzeva 2008).

In our later interactions, Khazteva increasingly expressed alternative positions from those implicit in Kazakhstani civic nation-building discourse. For example, in one discussion, Khazteva waived somewhat from the notion that Chechens in Sharbakti have successfully preserved traditions, expressing a sense of cultural failure that most members of the community ignore cultural preservation, neither learning the language nor performing traditions. She described her difficulty in mobilizing a sufficient number of Chechen youth to participate in cultural festivals and, in spite of her efforts, to teach the Chechen language to family and friends in the Center. According to her, most Chechen youth prefer to speak Russian over their native tongue, to the extent that most lack basic proficiency and have a closer affinity to Russian as a cultural identity. These notions of cultural failure and affinity with Russian culture and the Russian Federation were echoed in several of my interactions with cultural leaders and participants throughout the regions of the former Soviet Union where I conducted my research.

Cultural center directors and their members, in addition to Khatzeva, occasionally voiced a feeling of cultural failure when describing the activities (or lack thereof) among their centers’ participants and co-ethnics. Although, when expressing this alternative discourse to me, it was
usually after I had developed a more familiar relationship with them during the course of my fieldwork. In official and public settings, however, these same individuals expressed the customary points of Kazakhstan’s civic nation-building discourse, as they touted the robust efforts of ethnic cultural preservation taking place in their centers. I don’t perceive these instances of expressing state discourse as purely strategic and exclusively employed for the purpose of accessing material or social/political capital. Indeed, most of these cultural workers and participants truly enjoy their involvement with the respective ethnic cultures they represent and are enthusiastically aligned with the ethics of civic nation-building. Yet, those involved at the level of cultural leadership have a clear understanding of their rhetorical requirements and engage in performative shifts according to the expectations of state authorities.

Olga Steinhauer, an ethnic German and the Assistant Director of Sharbakti’s German Center, explained one reason for “failure” is the lack of institutional resources for any particular cultural undertaking. She suggested that whether or not young people participate in ethnic cultural activities is often purely dependent upon the financial investment provided for their efforts. Comparing previous years to the present, Steinhauer acknowledged that interest in the German Center programs was much stronger among teenagers when financial resources from Germany (through the GTZ) were more substantial. As Germany-based investment in culture programs has declined, so has youth participation in performance groups, language courses, and cultural activities (although the GTZ still provides the salaries for German language instructors).119 Other reasons that Steinhauer and her colleague Ableeva cited for low interest in organized forms of ethnic culture were lack of charismatic leadership in charge of youth cultural programs (a previous program coordinator at the Center had left Sharbakti two years earlier to

119 Personal communication with Ableeva.
take a job with Rebirth in Pavlodar and later in Almaty) and competition with western culture (such as the attraction to learn English as a second language rather than German). Finally, a rural setting in the former Soviet Union is a difficult social context within which to generate interest in activities beyond the myriad of economic-related duties everyone must undertake to survive.

Ableeva also suggested the decline in ethnic cultural participation is related to political pressures influencing the image local rayon governments attempt to portray to regional and national authorities. In one instance a few years ago, Ableeva assembled a group of youth dancers for an Oblast-supported cultural festival to represent Sharbakti’s German Center. Having seen the German dancers rehearse before the event, the head of the Rayon’s Department of Culture and Language Communication refused to allow them to participate, stating that they were poorly prepared and would embarrass Sharbakti in front of Oblast-level cultural officials. I later asked the Kazakh official responsible for the decision to explain her understanding of cultural preservation among non-Kazakh ethnic groups. She proceeded to discuss her perception of cultural failure, stating that one of the problems with including the various ethnic groups in festivals and performances is their underwhelming enthusiasm for participation. Her impression of local Germans (in addition to other “failing” ethnic groups prevalent in Sharbakti, such as Tatars and Kabardins) is they are unable to preserve their cultures. According to her, some groups (Kazakhs and Chechens) are better equipped than others (Germans and Tatars) to maintain social collectivities allowing for the maintenance of their languages and other cultural forms. Although she didn’t express it directly, I suspect that this attitude about cultural failure and how its occurrence subverts Kazakhstan’s civic nation-building discourse informed why she chose not to allow the Germans to perform.

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120 Personal communication with Gulsara Balakina.
Even as Germans and members of other ethnic groups acknowledge instances of cultural failure, those involved in civic nation-building (including cultural center leaders, their participants, and state authorities) employ discursive shifts to exemplify their culture-related activities’ calibration to the discourse. This occurred most explicitly during preparations and the execution of cultural festivals and holidays when authorities placed the most pressure on Centers to perform ethnic culture. One aspect of socialist life with which everyone is intimately familiar, is the concept and practice of socialist competition (especially in relation to labor), which expresses itself prolifically in various post-Soviet institutional and social contexts. Competition during festivals and holidays represents a process by which national cultural centers attempt to bolster their cultural credibility when a successful performance may signal to the public and local/regional authorities the fulfillment of cultural preservation. Socialist competition, as a familiar and highly popular set of practices and events employed in various cultural arenas, stands as an important influence on civic nation-building. Competition in this sense embodies the triangulation of cultural workers’ and participants’ ambivalence about civic nation-building, the utility found in ethnic culture and its performance, and the discursive expectations of state, regional, and local authorities. Finally, participation in competition allows members of the national culture centers and local authorities to signal their success in preserving local ethnic culture. I further address below the processes of performing culture in the context of civic nation-building in Kazakhstan and its reliance on the patterns inherent in socialist economic production.

**The influence of labor and socialist competition**

For Soviet authorities, the successful day-to-day performance and behavior within labor brigades relied upon key characteristics of the socialist labor process to encourage productivity
for members of the Soviet public. Socialist competitions encouraged maximum economic output by promising those providing the labor with gifts and benefits if they surpassed the output of other enterprises and brigades. The discourse of Soviet competition permeated the daily activities of a large number of workplaces, and continues to be pervasive in post-socialist life. One finds it certainly in educational settings, but it often arises in various other institutional environments.

The bulk of my research in Russia and Kazakhstan happened in institutionalized, built environments hosting government-sponsored organizations, including libraries, houses of culture, museums, government administrations, and national cultural centers. Activities in these settings illustrate the emphasis on competition occurring in everyday post-socialism.

For example, libraries in the former Soviet Union (especially in villages) function as highly significant community centers for the post-socialist public. The reason for this is they are state-funded and have become dependable sites for gathering people and conducting activities (especially with the collapse or disappearance of the various other institutions during the early post-Soviet period). For several residents of the post-Soviet village, the library is also a job, a reliable source of income, a place to conduct commerce, a site for public gatherings, and a social outlet. I spent a generous portion of my research at the local library in Sharbakti speaking with the employees and its patrons and attending nearly every activity the library sponsored. Local administrations are responsible for funding libraries in Kazakhstan and Russia and require their employees to organize and host various events throughout the year in support of state and local holidays, as well as for the promotion of government initiatives.121 In addition to the libraries,

121 As a side note, the head librarian also served as a delegate of the Sherbakti filial of the Assembly of the Peoples of Kazakhstan. This required her to travel to Pavlodar with the Akim and the local Minister of Culture and Language to attend meetings of the Pavlodar chapter of the Small Assembly of the Peoples of Kazakhstan.
regional Houses of Culture, local history museums, government administrations, and national cultural centers function similarly for public gatherings (although to a lesser extent than the libraries I frequented) and likewise served as valuable research sites.

At all of these institutional spaces in Kazakhstan, I participated in and observed numerous activities, events, parties, performances, and rehearsals – many of which were conducted in the name of ethnic cultural preservation and revival. At least the majority of the events I attended incorporated elements of competition as a component of the activities, and for events related to ethnic culture, some sort of competition was usually mandatory. Competitions often involved a youth performance, including youth dance ensembles, singing groups, costumes, and food preparation. Altogether, I attended literally dozens of cultural activities in various rural and urban centers involving youth, children, and adults, nearly all of which involved some sort of competition between pre-designated groups. In many of the events I attended, the competing groups represented the various national cultural centers of the village. In this way, Germans competed against Tatars, Chechens, Ukrainians and Russians. Sometimes, village authorities mobilize all of the national cultural centers of the village collectively to compete against the national cultural centers from localities in other parts of the region. At a higher level, the national cultural centers representing the regions compete against each other during national-level gatherings. Hence, traces of socialist competition arise in various institutional events and practices and significantly inform the activities in which the local national cultural centers participate.

I propose that the process of institutionalized labor in the Soviet Union has patterned these contemporary, small-scale community and statewide socialization practices in Kazakhstan. This exercise in promoting competitive events, as an example, services Kazakhstan’s civic
nation-building efforts, through employing those past regulatory practices associated with economic production and intimately familiar to post-Soviet audiences. At this point, however, I question the exclusive utility of Soviet labor processes and institutions as the primary influencers in Kazakhstan’s civic nation-building discourse. In the following paragraphs, I examine alternatives to Soviet labor practices. The Komsomol, Soviet clubs, ethnic culture, and other socialist organized forms of cultural recreation likewise represent sites of competitive engagement. My analysis here suggests that these institutional contexts were and are certainly influential to patterns of socialist and post-socialist life and often inform the discourse and practice of civic nation-building. Yet, the overwhelming influence of the Soviet labor process and its institutional structure served as a socializing influence over these other institutions and the manner in which they organized their activities.

**Leisure and the Organization of Soviet Youth**

The infusion of economic production conceptually into routines of everyday life and consciousness arose in the Soviet Union for myriad reasons. Firstly, Soviet authorities maintained a dogmatic sensitivity to Marx’s notion of economic materialism stipulating that the economic processes of a society greatly influenced its collective consciousness and culture.122 Accompanying this theoretical notion was the concern Soviet authorities had for the leisure activities of its citizens – particularly its young citizens – and the state’s desire to strictly control the time and space of those activities (Pilkington 1994: 81-82). The most likely site of state intervention into the leisure activities of its people was its primary socialization space, the workplace. The task for Soviet social engineers was to extend the socialist workplace into all

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122 I attribute this application of Marxist economic materialism to Sigrid Rausing (2004: 144-45).
facets of life and harness the energy expended in those facets for the building of socialism (Pilkington 1994: 50, 69).

With that said, however, it is misleading to compartmentalize the alternatives I describe as exclusive units, as all of them have strong linkages to labor and economic production through the patterns of regular Soviet life. A strong case in point is the structure and operations of the Komsomol, which extended beyond a Soviet institution representing the interests of youth, to a hierarchical structure designed to penetrate into daily institutional and leisure practice. The base of the hierarchical system making up the Komsomol consisted of cells housed in any Soviet institution maintaining members from the ages of 14 to 28. Hence, Komsomol groups were present in most Soviet labor enterprises and educational institutions. Individuals who joined the Komsomol typically utilized their membership to attain professional ambitions, such as admittance to university, becoming a party member or government official, and ascending in rank at work. Membership in the Komsomol required individuals to publicly express their dedication to communist principles, pay dues, engage in volunteer labor, and attend events. As a means of growing its ranks, Komsomol cells occasionally organized special interest clubs designed to engage the leisure time and interests of its members (Tsipursky 2016: 24-25).

In his work on leisure activities and fun among Soviet youth groups, Gleb Tsipursky argues that youth clubs functioned as the primary force to socialize young people into collectives of individuals expressing enthusiasm for the socialist system. This occurred as special interest clubs managed activities for Soviet youth in state supported physical settings offering leisure, relaxation, and socialization during what Tsipursky identifies as “socialist time,” or time spent within the Soviet institutional framework (Tsipursky 2016: 120). These state-recognized clubs existed in various officially structured forms according to their functions, including volunteer,
youth initiative, and interest-based clubs. Organizers of Soviet youth clubs typically organized them with assistance and oversight from local Komsomol committees, trade unions, and government administrations. The organization of youth clubs became a major undertaking for Komsomol leaders in the 1950s as it represented a primary tool to increase membership.

Although the clubs had relatively strict supervision from Soviet institutions, they represented a forum for youth to undertake creative activities and forms of expression stimulating a positive emotional response within the official Soviet cultural sphere even among youth who felt alienated from the restrictive nature of the socialist state (Tsipursky 2016: 124, 131-32, 150). For adult aged youth, the Komsomol and special interest groups existed as an extension to the site of one’s daily labor, the brigade or enterprise, fusing club activities to the patterns of daily life. Rather than an exercise of despotic power, therefore, Tsipursky suggests the establishment of youth-based special interest clubs represented the use of “infrastructural power” – a tool for Soviet authorities to normalize allegiance to socialist principles, labor, and citizenship (Tsipursky 2016: 159).

**Ethnic culture and folkloric practice as leisure activity**

Another mode of socializing non-Russians into Soviet life was with folklore for recreational activities employed to fortify the official concepts about ethnic identity in Soviet nationalities’ policies and discourses. The rehabilitation of Soviet ethnography following World War II informed how non-Russians practiced officially sanctioned ethnic culture in the Soviet Union as a set of recreational pursuits. In his work examining the experience of Russia’s Siberian peoples, Yuri Slezkine demonstrates that once Soviet ethnography reclaimed its academic legitimacy in the post-war years, ethnographers sought to illuminate contemporary cultural forms
and practices exercised among the USSR’s non-Russian populations. The ethnographic research undertaken during this period suggested that ethnic groups maintained contemporary cultural practices that fused historic traditions to present social and economic circumstances (Slezkine 1996: 309-11). The ethnographer’s task therefore was to identify those practices that exemplified this supposed cultural fusion and fully integrate them into Soviet institutions.

A limitation of post-War Soviet ethnographers’ emphasis on ethnic culture and its influence on socialist-appropriate leisure activities was the concern with historically based cultural survivals distracting from socialist ethics and practice (Slezkine 1996: 313). After all, Soviet authorities and ethnographers had customarily characterized non-Russian historic traditions as backward and impulsive. As such, authorities deemed many of these behaviors unsuitable for the development of contemporary, socially progressive cultural practices (Slezkine 1996: 317). An additional concern dealt with how the state sought to socialize non-Russians into Soviet patterns of labor and production, which required a redistribution of local resources and individual behaviors to establish large-scale mechanized forms of production. With this process in flux, authorities distributed time and resources away from leisure activities, especially in the avenue of ethnic culture (Slezkine 1996: 313). For these reasons, authorities cast non-Russian ethnic culture as “in transition” from the backwardness of old forms into cultural expression valorizing the institutions of Soviet labor, specifically the kolkhoz and plan-fulfillment, rather than cultural practice emphasizing ethnic-based folklore (Slezkine 1996: 317). At the same time, Soviet ethnographers ascribed great importance to folklore, or what they identified as “spiritual culture,” particularly when its practice articulated socially appropriate routines of everyday life (Slezkine 1996: 318, 47). Ultimately, these attempts to integrate acceptable forms of non-Russian “spiritual culture” into the daily lives of socialist workers expressed themselves through
a Russian/Soviet idiom of behavior and practice with the intent of synthesizing non-Russian cultures together into one unified Soviet culture rather than a genuine reflection of ethnicity (Slezkine 1996: 344, 369).

If Carol Silverman is correct in her assertion that “all cultural phenomena are in some way affected by politics (Silverman 1983),” I suggest that the politics of socialist labor and economic production structured how groups and individuals practiced ethnic folklore in the Soviet Union (as well as other forms of leisure activity). In his consideration of the Nivkhi on Sakhalin Island, Bruce Grant exemplified this notion, arguing that a Marxist-Leninist theoretical framework predicated non-Russian conceptualizations of traditional folk culture in the Soviet Union. As a result, the manner by which non-Russians expressed their traditional cultures in the USSR was in itself a Soviet construct (Grant 1995: 14-17). Likewise, Caroline Humphrey contends that Buryat Mongols managed to maintain a sense of traditional culture in the Soviet Union, yet their cultural behaviors and practices were deeply integrated into the socialist political economy and thereby significantly transformed through that process (Humphrey 1983: 443-42). Hence, the experiences of participating in those practices entrenched in the synthesis of Soviet labor (such as socialist competition) and folk culture have become systematic and intuitive to the extent that they have formed the fabric of contemporary official cultural practice in Kazakhstan and are thereby attached to the discourse of civic nation-building.

**Considering folklore and folkloric practice conceptually**

At this point, I should clarify how I conceptualize contemporary practices of folklore and folkloric tradition. Certainly, folkloric practice maintains a basis entrenched in past traditions. However, those who compose contemporary folkloric practices undertake it under the constraints
of politics, social discourse, fashion, and other factors. Hence, cultural practice based on folklore is truly a modern phenomenon, which historic traditions and customs inform, but have less influence on behavior and performance. Rather, as Silverman argues, while cultural models persist, they do so in malleable forms existing in a persistent dialectic of endurance and transformation (Silverman 1998). As such, as Handler and Linnekin argue, the contemporary practice of cultural traditions relies upon an interpretation of the past as a symbol of historical traditional practices. The act of interpretation, however, undoubtedly transforms those practices cultural revivalists endeavor to restore into something that, although models the past, is ultimately a portrait of the present (Handler and Linnekin 1984).

What, however, do Soviet and post-Soviet people practice exactly in the name of ethnic culture? Richard Handler’s discussion of folklore politics in 1970s Quebec informs my impressions of cultural practice in contemporary Russia and Kazakhstan. Handler considers how some French Canadians, who perceive their daily lifestyles displaced from cultural traditions, objectify certain behaviors and practices as folklore precisely because of their separation from them. Hence, they see parents, grandparents, and other members of older generations unselfconsciously performing these practices, which they accordingly objectify as folkloric (Handler 1988: 61). This understanding implies a category of practices existing as authentic insofar as those who carry them out do so unselfconsciously. Others, however, can only reproduce these practices inaccurately, because of their quality as something “others” consciously objectify. Once folklorists objectify a quality as reproducible cultural tradition, the quality loses its authenticity as cultural authorities conceptualize it as folklore and an object of folkloric practice. Handler adds that the practitioners of folklore in its objectified form
undertake, produce, or possess it with the intent of preservation rather than employing it in the subjective, unselfconscious routines of daily life (Handler 1988: 77).

With this in mind, I define folklore conceptually as cultural practices or things derived from the unselfconscious behavior of the “folk,” which practitioners objectify and reproduce in the service of cultural preservation. It is certainly this sort of objectified behavior and action, which many with whom I worked in Kazakhstan and Russia meant when they referenced folklore and ethnic cultural tradition. What then constitutes the “lore” of folklore, in other words, what exactly are those practices and things that folklorists objectify and practitioners reproduce (at least in the case of the Soviet Union and its contemporary successors)? I argue that ideas influencing the things of ethnic folklore for Soviet and post-Soviet cultural authorities originated from the ethnographic scholarship that Russian imperial orientologists produced in the late 19th century. Understandings about ethnic culture and folklore these scholars maintained and passed on to Soviet ethnography and other contemporary understandings and productions of folklore (including what Handler observed in Quebec) owes much to the 18th century romantic writings of Johann Gottfried von Herder.123

Herder conceptualized folklore through what he identified as “folk poetry” (Volkslieder), specifically referring to “poems” produced and maintained through the German peasantry (Wilson 1973). What Herder substantively meant by these Volkslieder, however, was virtually a plethora of media. Initially, the materials Herder and those he inspired gathered as examples of folk poetry were oral folk narratives consisting of songs, legends, tales, poems, ballads, and other rural-level articulations constituting peasant “lore.” As the gathering of these cultural forms was often intended for political purposes, some German folklorists began to recraft the narratives into

123 See my thorough discussion of this point in chapter two of this dissertation.
a literary discourse signifying and reproducing a common set of German values, manners, and virtues (Linke 1990). While subsequent examples of collecting and reproducing oral folk narratives for such purposes are plentiful,\(^\text{124}\) the products of these efforts to assemble and publish texts are often the substantive objects articulated as folklore. Certainly, collected texts comprised of oral folk narratives represent much of what Soviet ethnographers and contemporary post-Soviet nation builders understood/understand as folklore.

Jennifer Cash significantly contributes to my attempt at locating the “things” of folklore in the Soviet and post-Soviet contexts by pointing to the authentic nature of “songs, dance, and a variety of rituals,” as state-confirmed practices officially identified as folkloric in the Soviet Union (Cash 2012: 60). Cash’s informants in Moldova identified folkloric practice as employing “accuracy” in its interpretation of “traditional materials.” These traditional materials might include music, dance, dramatic ritual, and a variety of performance ensembles with folk-inspired repertoires with bands and choirs (Cash 2012: 63, 65). Cash also includes what she identifies as “visual dimensions” and “elements of production,” including choreography, costumes, and arrangements (Cash 2012: 71). For Cash’s informants, practitioners might “reproduce” or even “copy” traditional folkloric materials from villages and propagate these reproductions through performance (Cash 2012: 67). In this sense, similar to Handler’s conceptualization, cultural specialists derive folklore by “objectifying” the unselfconscious, subjective practices of the rural folk. My point here, however, is that folklore might include any sort of “traditional materials” (from dances, to songs, to food), so longs as they are invested with authenticity based on the location of their production and/or performance and the state of consciousness with which the

\(^{124}\) See for example, Michael Herzfeld (1982); William Wilson (1976); Stuart Blackburn (2005).
authentic folk produce them. What ultimately “folklorizes” such traditional materials, however, is their subsequent objectification and reproduction.

Continuing my attempt to define folklore as both a concept and a repertoire of practices and materials, I propose the following. Folkloric practice in the Soviet Union and its contemporary post-Union republics constitutes the performance or display of “cultural materials,” ostensibly performable or demonstrable in public as a didactic exercise (for both the performer and audience). Such content in these cases most often includes the presentation of crafts, preparation and serving of food, the performance of dance and folksongs, and dramatic performance reflective of an ethnic culture. These efforts are, however, reproductions of the “traditional materials” cultural experts have objectified and deemed to derive from the rural folk. Practitioners in the form of professional and amateur ensembles, as well as individuals, publicly perform or display these materials for didactic and recreational purposes. These reproductions constitute what I mean when referencing “folklore” in the Soviet Union and its succeeding states.

I experienced directly how individuals and institutions employ such forms of collected folklore while working with Lydia Ableeva and Olga Stenhauer to compile materials for the Art of the Peoples of Kazakhstan Cultural Festival held in November of 2008. During the initial preparations to perform at the Festival, Ableeva had gathered a selection of German songs from Bohemia (historically, a German cultural region located in the contemporary Czech Republic). Ableeva acquired the texts from a recording she possessed of Bohemian folksongs, which she transcribed (with my assistance) from multiple listens of the recording. The recording originated from a CD-ROM she acquired from the German Cultural Center in Pavlodar. In addition to the folksongs, Ableeva and the other members of the German Center prepared to perform a German
dance (with accompaniment from pre-recorded German folk music) as well as a short dramatic skit Stenhauer composed.

Examining the German performance within the context of the cultural festival as a whole is interesting and instructive to conceptualizing a larger picture of how folklore is practiced and presented to the general public as part of Kazakhstan’s larger civic nation-building strategy. The integral event of the festival I attended in Sharbakti was a performative competition between two rayony within the Pavlodar Oblast (the Sharbakti and Pavlodar rayony), which took place in the auditorium of Sharbakti’s House of Culture. Officials from the Oblast-level Small Assembly of the Peoples of Kazakhstan attended the festival to judge the performances of each rayon and rate the quality compared to the performances of all the rayony in the Oblast. The overall winner would eventually compete against other groups representing each Oblast in a statewide cultural festival. The groups comprising Sharbakti’s offering to the festival each represented a national cultural center and performed in a pre-scheduled sequence as one choreographed whole. The Pavlodar rayon began the festival, after which the groups representing the Sharbakti rayon performed. Singing, dancing, and dramatic skits comprised the activities of all the individual group performances. In addition to the activities on stage, each rayon stationed women outside of the auditorium with baked goods and handicrafts on display, which the members of the jury panel evaluated as part of the overall rayon performance.

In preparation for the year’s round of cultural festivals, state-level cultural authorities identified a theme that each competing rayon was to incorporate into their performances, which in this case was the 10-year anniversary of Astana as the capital of Kazakhstan. Sharbakti’s performance employed a narrative woven throughout the individual performances that consistently referenced Astana. The program depicted a Kazakh family living on the steppe in a
traditional yurt, who through the course of the performance encountered various individuals representing Kazakhstan’s other ethnic groups. The friendly interactions between the family and their non-Kazakh interlocutors suggested the interethnic harmony and friendship and occasionally referred to the glories of Kazakhstan’s capital city. In the German portion of Sharbakti’s performance, two adult German woman took to the stage and invited the Kazakh family to “to enjoy some of their delicious baked goods.” Following the offer to partake of their strudel and bread, the German dance ensemble entered the stage to begin their performance. After the dance number, three German woman appeared to perform two of the folksongs I had helped Ableeva transcribe. The program then transitioned from Germans to the Chechen-Ingushetian group, as their representatives interacted with the family and then offered a traditional dance. Performances such as these (consisting of folksongs, dances, ethnic food, drama, handicrafts, and even the use of German language) are, as reproductions of objectified cultural forms, nice exemplars of how folklore becomes in a very public sense the tools for civic nation-building in Kazakhstan.

Before I connect what I witnessed at the cultural festival in Sharbakti, as well as the several other festivals I observed in Kazakhstan and Russia, to my argument about Soviet labor’s lingering influence on contemporary civic nation-building, I want to differentiate between Soviet/post-Soviet and other instances of the political employment of folklore. While other sites of state-influenced folklore similarly emphasize Silverman’s contention that all forms of culture are inherently political, their objectives differ considerably from Soviet authorities’ interests in establishing and maintaining the coalescence of cultural and economic production. For example, in accounts from Bulgaria, Quebec, and Finland (Silverman 1983; Buchannan 2006; Handler 1988; Wilson 1976), state authorities employ folklore as an exercise in establishing or
maintaining the very integrity of the state. In these cases, integrity of the state implies territory, sovereignty, and even the “authentic” cultural practices and understandings of its citizens. Therefore, the state-sponsored folkloric exposition (and subsequent competitions) outside of the Soviet and post-Soviet Union creates, authenticates, and maintains a standard discourse about national culture, which is as much for individual citizens as it is for outside observers. In contrast, the cases I consider below in the Soviet Union and contemporary Kazakhstan depend upon performers to exemplify the individual as an inherent and organic citizen of the state (regardless of cultural identity).

**Competition and folklore**

As I move to a discussion of the means by which the socialist labor process employed ethnic culture and folklore, I would also like to comment on the use of competition in the context of folkloric practice. As I have defined it, folklore extends beyond the leisure activity of the folk in that it is a self-conscious reproduction of rural folk behavior. While competition for the purpose of leisure activity certainly constitutes a practice common across human communities and historical periods, the forms of competition with which I am concerned are those associated with those cultural practices authorities objectify and relocate from their original social contexts and purposes. As an illustration, Buchannan describes instances of pre-socialist, rural Bulgarian youths engaging in singing competitions to tease and flirt with the objects of adolescent romantic interest. In terms of both scale and intent, such competitive activities stand in stark contrast with Silverman’s discussion of state-organized folk dance competitions designed to delineate national cultural authenticity (Buchannan 2006: 84-85). I argue then that when organs of the state organize folkloric competitions, they do so for strategic, explicitly political purposes, rather than
to simply exemplify long maintained cultural traditions. An inquiry into the historical
development of Soviet-style socialist competition offers a case in point.

Although my position on folkloric competition rests upon the notion that such activity is
a modern, political phenomenon, features of competition very likely originate from older forms
of cultural practice. For example, the Buryat Mongol archery festival, suur-kharbaan (which I
discuss below), represents a case where friendly competition represents a popular practice
happening within a cultural frame. I argue, however, that “competition” as a systematic and
institutionalized practice, which Stalin programmatically established in the 1930s,
overwhelmingly informed Soviet leisure throughout the existence of the Soviet Union (including
both general leisure practices and those deemed ethnic). The advent of socialist competition as
leisure exists conceptually in the context of what Anne White identifies as “cultural
enlightenment.” According to White, Soviet attempts to organize leisure led to a political
philosophy of cultural enlightenment privileging activities that were collective, voluntary, and
involved individual participation instead of passive spectating (White 1990: 26). Institutions
most suitable for employing cultural enlightenment were those associated with sports, the
military, and labor.

An early precedent of socialist competition occurred within certain Komsomol activities
of the 1920s, as youth leaders attempted to mobilize their ranks to participate in class struggle.
For this purpose, Komsomol committees organized sporting activities and military training
emphasizing competition (Pilkington 1994: 55). This emphasis on competition also arose from
related forms of public organization in the 1930s. For example, an early prerogative for Soviet
officials was to establish socialist cultural traditions and ceremonies clearly divorced from
religious practice, leading to the design of public cultural activities for the masses that were
explicitly secular in nature (Binns 1979). Stalin was keen to infuse the structure and practice of Soviet militarism into public events due to the image it conveyed of physical discipline and the uniting of men from various social and cultural groups throughout the Soviet Union (Petrone 2000: 28). Other prized unifying institutions for Stalin were those associated with labor, particularly industry, education, and agriculture. These areas represented prime sites within which to organize secularized leisure and cultural activities. Another sector of attractive cultural activity for Stalin was sport and physical fitness, for which officials organized entire demonstrations and parades to celebrate Soviet athleticism (Petrone 2000: 30).

To publicly recognize the significance of these secular institutions, officials organized a series of festivals through the 1930s associated with labor groups (such as Miners’ Day and Railwayman’s Day), the military (Tank Forces Day and Navy Day), and physical fitness and sport during Physical Culturalists’ Day (Binns 1979). Tsipursky suggests that this emphasis on sports and military structures encouraged the institutionalization of competition in Soviet leisure within Stalin-era youth sports contests and amateur arts competitions. The use of competition in youth events ultimately emerged in a genre of the “youth festival” (festival’ molodezhi), which strictly adhered to a format incorporating arts and sports competitions (Tsipurski 2016: 140). Eventually, Soviet authorities employed competition as both a leisure pursuit and a motivation for production in its most coveted stratum of social organization, the institutions of economic production. In the following section, I examine a few ethnographic and historical accounts illustrating how Soviet authorities melded ethnic and folkloric culture with labor and economic production, some of which employed socialist competition.
In Humphrey’s description of cultural expression taking place in collective farms comprised primarily of Buryat Mongols, she discusses certain Buryat rituals and their ties to agricultural and pastoral labor, which Soviet labor practices had replaced. Among those, Humphrey specifically cites traditional tasks related to livestock herding and agriculture, such as the customary regulation of time and processes of production. Within the context of the collective farm, authorities discursively reinterpreted these Buryat practices as “labor campaigns” for herding cycles, “accounting periods” for the reckoning of time, and “socialist competitions” for the traditional process of economic production (Humphrey 1998: 374-75).

Another example of cultural substitution stems from the Buryat archery festival, *suur-kharbaan*. Soviets officials appropriated the archery festival as an event designed to celebrate labor-related accomplishments of socialist workers. Under this guise, authorities combined the undertaking of sporting activities (primarily archery) with a ceremony including the formal recognition of labor achievements, awarding prizes for outstanding work performances, and announcing official proclamations. What is most striking about the socialist transformation of *suur-kharbaan*, however, is how the festival organizers transformed the nature of competition to something distinctly Soviet. From what was formerly an event offering friendly competition between patrilineal kin groups, the Soviet-oriented version of the *suur-kharbaan* festival pitted members of work brigades against other brigades, mimicking the process of economic production-motivated socialist competition (Humphrey 1998: 380-81).

Given the relationship between economic production and ethnic culture, it is instructive to consider what Soviets understood non-Russian culture to be and the most appropriate modes of its practice. Ali Igmen considers the fashioning of “Kyrgyzness” in the Soviet Union by
offering Soviet houses of culture as important sites where traditional Kyrgyz culture fused with Soviet practices to assemble a distinctly socialist Kyrgyz identity (Igmen 2012: 6). The primary medium within which authorities chose to undertake the task of reviving Kyrgyz culture was through certain celebrations and festivals where organizers performed official ethnic culture (Igmen 2012: 84-85). These performances blended forms of expressions that locals considered indigenous (in the Kyrgyz case these were primarily the playing of music with traditional instruments and singing, epic storytelling, carpet weaving, and ceramics) with foreign elements, most prominently Western-style theatre (Igmen 2012: 96-97, 100). The key legitimating factor of these cultural performances was the element of socialist-tinged political education that the performances suggested, signaling a merging of Soviet ethics with the revival of past aesthetic expressions within a didactic context (Igmen 2012: 84-85). A primary educational point the merging of culture and socialism made was the prominence of labor in the cultural lives of the various Soviet peoples. As exemplars of such ideals, cultural celebrations emphasized the praising of local “heroes of labor” (or Stakhanovites, idealized as indigenous versions of the original Soviet hero of labor, Aleksei Stakhanov) as the best representations of any given Soviet nationality, and hence, a model of non-Russian cultural achievement. Artistic expressions in celebrations also included odes to the prosperity of labor achievements in collective farms and other economic enterprises (Igmen 2012: 90).

In addition to how Soviets encouraged the revival of acceptable ethnic culture in festivals and celebrations, the manner by which authorities exhibited the cultural distinctiveness of Soviet minorities in performative mediums foreign to non-Russian populations demonstrates efforts to synthesize the socialist and indigenous into collective Soviet identities. A major tool Soviet authorities used in this vein was theatre productions, whereby images of ethnic culture (such as
stage costumes representing nomadic pastoralism for Central Asians) were projected into the narratives fusing together a national image with the socialist content expressed in the texts of the plays (Igmen 2012: 99). Expressions of ethnic culture blended into European-style theatre performances included the use of “literary versions” of native languages in theater pieces, indigenous folkloric themes, and the incorporation of epic stories, such as the Manas legend among the Kyrgyz (Igmen 2012: 105-10). Soviet theatre organizers and playwrights likewise emphasized themes conveying socialist ethics of collectivized economic production. Administrators recommended that plays should pay tribute to Soviet labor, typically using the trope of indigenous peoples rising from humble experience of native economic practices (such as hunting or herding) to become Stakhanovites (Igmen 2012: 109). In this way, the crafters of traditionally stylized songs, poetry, and storytelling would lace their texts with praises for Soviet laborers and the economic achievements of the state – expressions of ethnic culture therefore changed in content, but not in structure or spirit (Igmen 2012: 114).

In her historic account of Swedes in Estonia, Sigrid Rausing also describes the intersections of ethnic culture and Soviet labor, but surprisingly presents an argument counter to mine, namely that local appropriation of folk culture on collective farms in Estonia (primarily folk song and dance) was not associated with Soviet policy (Rausing 2002: 132). In spite of this assertion, she references the practice of ethnic folk culture in Estonia occurring explicitly in Soviet contexts, heavily dependent upon the themes of socialist labor. For example, when describing images of peasants assembled within a Soviet publication of photographs depicting

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125 Igmen’s exact quote is, “Consequently, Kyrgyz revolutionaries and the first generation of Kyrgyz theatre professionals managed to shape the Kyrgyz State National Theatre so as to project a national image but also incorporate Soviet ideology (Igmen, 99). My paraphrase of this passage expresses my mindfulness of Stalin’s nationalities’ policy mantra “nationalist in form, socialist in content.”
the cultures of Estonia, Rausing suggests that Estonian national costumes served as a major icon for Soviet “folk culture.” She revealingly highlights a particular image in the text of agrarian villagers posing in traditional dress next to “modern harvesters on vast fields forming diagonal lines, as if posed for an agricultural march (Rausing 2002: 136-37).” The message arising from this publication, as well as similar coffee-table books published around the same time that Rausing describes, appears to be that ethnic folk culture was an inherent aspect of the broader Soviet culture and thereby practices associated with labor.

Jennifer Cash shows that Soviet cultural policy in Moldova emphasized raising the cultural standards of the population to enhance progress in technological development and the organization of economic production. To serve these purposes, cultural authorities cultivated amateur folk ensembles beginning in the 1930s within institutions such as factories, farms, schools, pioneer houses, and houses of culture (Cash 2012: 56-60). Cash cites a 1953 article published in Sovetskaya Moldova applauding amateur folk ensembles’ creation of new dance repertoires espousing the themes of labor and socialist competition. In describing the practice of Moldovan folklore, Soviet discourses emphasized socialist values and goals, such as economic production, rather than cultural preservation and the endurance of tradition (Cash 2012: 74).

Since the collapse of the Soviet Union, a marked discursive shift has occurred in how the Moldovan authorities conceptualize the nation, transforming priorities underlying folkloric performance. Cash identifies this shift as a change in emphasis on economic production under the Soviet regime to a contemporary preference for cultural authenticity expressed in folkloric repertoires and styles (Cash 2012: 79). Recent Moldovan legislation stipulates the requirement for folklore to demonstrate cultural authenticity, granting folkloric ensembles an official “model status” based on accomplishing certain performance standards. Moldovan cultural authorities
invest folkloric ensembles with this status through state-appointed festival juries’ estimation of authenticity in their performance (Cash 2012: 68-69). In contrast to Kazakhstan, Moldovan cultural authorities reject the category “ethnic group” as the ultimate source of authentic tradition. Rather, cultural specialists view the village as the source from which cultural authenticity derives, contingent upon behaviors related to kinship and neighborhood relations, rather than ethnicity. Jurors of folkloric cultural festivals therefore judge performances based on their ability to reflect local styles from the originating villages (Cash 2012: 73, 166). I would argue that this discursive move outlined through competition shifts the narrative of the nation from an ethnic to a civic framework, grounding national identity in rural styles and behaviors constituting the life experiences in Moldovan villages, regardless of ethnic identity. Hence, Moldovan authorities employ the well-understood adherence to competition (albeit outside of the economic context) to qualify their vision of the nation.¹²⁶

I now contribute an example from my research to this discussion/review of how Soviet economic production objectives made use of folklore. A notable case is that of Valentina Del, the director of the House of Culture and the Sharbakti rayon’s Ukrainian National Center. Del grew up in a mixed German-Ukrainian village in Kazakhstan, where she met her husband, and later received a university education focusing on the dramatic arts in Semipalatinsk. Once Del and her husband completed college, they landed positions in the Orlovka kolkhoz, located in the Sharbakti rayon. Del was quickly engrossed with Orlovka upon arriving at the kolkhoz and learning that peasants from Ukraine originally settled the village in the late nineteenth century during the Stolypin imperial agrarian reforms. Del worked in the village’s House of Culture, and

¹²⁶ Cash does not view Moldovan political discourse regarding the nation reflected within a civic nation framework. Rather, she argues the state has adopted the image of a multicultural state, largely because of pressures from the international community (2012: 166).
through its support, collected Ukrainian folksongs from the kolkhoz’s older members. From the influence of her collected texts, Del has composed several original songs and poems, reflecting themes such as the landscape of the northern Kazakhstani steppe and experiences from World War II. Del assembled a group of singers in the village to perform the songs from the poems she gathered and composed. The singing group has since become a locally celebrated musical ensemble, often performing at events throughout the Pavlodar Oblast.

I want to emphasize with Del’s case that the Orlovka kolkhoz, which the House of Culture managed during the Soviet period, supported her efforts in the preservation and performance of Ukrainian folk culture. Hence, a socialist labor institution was intrinsically responsible for ethnic cultural production. Interestingly, once the kolkhoz became a private agricultural enterprise known as Pobeda in 1991, it continued to financially support the Orlovka House of Culture and Del’s efforts to teach and perform Ukrainian folklore. Del, herself, insists that without Pobeda’s support, the House of Culture and her efforts to develop and preserve Ukraine folklore would have collapsed soon after Kazakhstan became independent. In addition to Del, I have gathered similar accounts among rural culture workers in the former Soviet Union identifying Soviet economic enterprises’ close involvement with ethnic cultural production. The processes of ethnic culture tied to economic production (in terms of both traditions and institutions) continue to have an influence on ethnic cultural workers and enthusiasts.

This convergence of ethnic culture and economic production happening in the Soviet Union did not necessarily imply the two were intrinsically related (meaning that belonging to an economic enterprise such as a factory or collective farm did not imply an ethnic identity). However, discourses relative to non-Russian culture often conflated ethnic cultural expression with economic production, as socialist ethics and institutions manifested themselves through
folkloric performance and other forms of “ethnic behavior.” A discussion of the local social actors and processes associated with civic nation-building in contemporary Kazakhstan illustrates how the ethics and structures of socialist economic production express themselves in the official forms of ethnic cultural practice. I now undertake an ethnographic exploration of the primary organs of ethnic activity and expression in Kazakhstan, the national cultural centers.

**National cultural centers and socialist economic production**

A close observer of the activities and membership of the national cultural centers might question the extent to which the centers echo the form and function of Soviet labor institutions. After all, national cultural centers are not positioned within economic enterprises nor are they expected to reach some pre-planned production target. They are, however, placed in an administrative domain in which the state can often exert direct control – namely within the sub-organs of the Assembly of the Peoples of Kazakhstan. In addition, all of the national cultural centers I have observed (from the national, regional, and local levels) have relied primarily upon the participation of children and teenagers, rather than adults, to carry out their activities (although many adults do indeed participate). One might therefore think of Soviet organizations specifically designed for teenagers and children, such as the Young Pioneers or the Komsomol, as closer socialist parallels to contemporary national cultural centers.

Although the national cultural centers’ activities place a significant emphasis on the participation of young people, their institutional goals and practices differ sharply from those youth organizations of the Soviet past. The new ideologies stem from the state-sponsored principle of cultural restoration and preservation, primarily associated with learning languages and forms of aesthetic cultural expression, such as dancing, signing, and craft-making. In this
way, the ideology of the ethnic nation is implicit in the activities undertaken in the centers rather than being explicitly presented to an audience of members on a regular basis. An additional ideological discourse implicit in the centers is the manner in which practice aligns the practitioners with the goals of the state—namely, ethnic practice in the national cultural centers is designed to facilitate the notion of civic unity in the context of cultural diversity. This happens primarily through the various competitive events taking place between national cultural centers.

Labor, as the underlying ideology of any Soviet site of economic production, was treated in a similar manner. Although Soviet enterprises possessed personnel dedicated to providing information about socialist ideology, such training was not integral to the activities of production. The enterprise, fundamentally, was a place where its members carried out routine labor responsibilities, but it also functioned as a site where individual laborers performed and resolved the matters and problems of daily life. Sarah Ashwin identifies Soviet labor brigades as the forum where workers established their social identities, albeit using socialist principles, such as the dignity of labor and the value of production that met planned output targets. In addition to functioning as a “cell working towards the construction of the communist future,” the brigade also operated as a crucial social support system. The collective became for many Soviet laborers a second family, where individuals drew upon their fellow brigade members to provide necessary goods and services and look to their leaders to defend their interests in the face of often coercive institutional forces (Ashwin 1999: 148-49). In a similar vein, Humphrey observes that the practice of labor making up the primary activity of the enterprises allowed workers to perform the ideology of the state through socialist competition. The form and timing of competitions made it appear that the brigade was inspired by events of state importance, constructing an imagined alliance between brigade members and the state (Humphrey 1998: 166-68).
Although local national cultural centers do not identically replicate the structures of labor brigades operating within Soviet economic enterprises, they do maintain some of the functionality of the former collective labor system. Authorities expect the centers to maintain consistent activities and membership and to perform ethnic culture in a very public way for various pre-determined occasions, such as national and regional holidays and government-sponsored cultural festivals. In this way, the practice of ethnic culture largely revolves around the major periods of commemoration for the state. These include Navruz (Persian New Year), May Day (the Day of the Unity of the Peoples of Kazakhstan), and Kazakhstan’s Independence Day, among others. For all of these commemorative events, local authorities expect leaders and members of the national cultural centers to prepare ethnically-styled dancing and singing performances as well as ethnic cuisine that local authorities judge and award recognition and sometimes prizes to the winners. During the fall and early winter months leading up to Kazakhstan’s Independence Day in December, people throughout the state prepare for statewide cultural festivals and national cultural centers compete in them against the national cultural centers of other localities. As a capstone and celebratory event for Independence Day, the best performing localities compete at the regional level festival in the Oblast capitals.

In the same fashion Humphrey describes brigades and enterprises engaging in socialist competition, performing ethnic culture during major state commemorative events creates the appearance that these expressions of ethnic culture are state-inspired. Accompanying these apparent acts of devotion to the state are manifestations of the civic nation-building discourse, which participants and organizing authorities repeatedly express during any given event at which the national cultural centers perform. For example, the texts that participants recite between and sometimes during performances of cultural events and festivals often evoke sentiments of ethnic
diversity, unity, and love for the state. Local authorities responsible for the execution of commemorative events and festivals make sure to strategically place messages expressing civic nationalism throughout the events. As state authorities routinely incorporate state rituals and the messages they convey into instances of ethnic practice, a non-ethnic, political context is imposed on ethnic acts transforming them into expressions of committed citizenship. In this way, as the organizers, performers, and audiences commune with state discourses, they simultaneously undertake a performative shift, re-signifying their agency as necessity to meet the requirements and claim the benefits associated with civic nation-building. A description of the proceedings of the May 1st, Day of the Unity of the Peoples of Kazakhstan, illustrates this phenomenon.

**May Day and state ideologies**

The Republic of Kazakhstan has reimagined and transformed May Day from an annual socialist ritual commemorating Soviet workers to an event called the Day of Unity of the Peoples of Kazakhstan celebrating the alleged ethnic diversity and interethnic unity of the state. Although Kazakhstani authorities have redirected the discursive focus of May Day away from labor, this reorganization closely resembles its Soviet manifestation, which endeavored to connect a powerful site of socialization and source of identity (the labor brigade and economic enterprise) to the aspirations of the state, both in terms of meeting its economic production goals and endearing its citizens to its ideology and legitimacy. In the holiday’s post-socialist guise, the national cultural centers act as the socializing institutions and represent the principal ethnic identities of any given locality. The very participation of individuals in the festivities directly connects them to the official state discourse regarding the Kazakhstani civic nation. In this way,
the events of post-socialist May Day preserve some of the activities and logic of Soviet “International Workers’ Day,” but camouflage them underneath the façade of ethnic identity.

Transforming May Day from a commemoration of labor and labor institutions to a recognition of ethnic diversity and civic unity is an incredibly pragmatic scheme to maintain the event’s meaningful nature. After my first experience observing and participating in Kazakhstan’s May Day festivities, an acquaintance from the library explained to me that the public commemoratory events were much grander in the Soviet period as all of the villages’ workers (theoretically all adults) were obliged to participate. With the dismantling of most economic enterprises after Kazakhstan’s independence, the number of laborers and employers in Sharbakti and throughout the country significantly shrank, so the number of unemployed in any given locale is potentially enormous. Transforming the event from a commemoration of labor to a celebration of ethnic diversity insures that everyone, as bearers of an official ethnic identity, can at least identify with the proceedings.

Similar to its Soviet manifestation, the ceremonial events began with a procession down the village’s main avenue, which traveled past the local administration offices and terminated in the central village square. While the Soviet procession was made up of the membership of the various local labor brigades marching in columns together with the other brigades from their enterprises, the post-Soviet variant adds the participation of the village’s national cultural centers. Each national cultural center formed a column made up of its leaders, active participants, and notable members of the ethnic group each center represents. In addition, employees and managers from the village’s major economic enterprises and public institutions joined the

127 I collected accounts of Soviet May Day events in Sharbakti from several village inhabitants residing in the village during the period of late socialism.
national cultural centers’ columns. The procession was followed by a series of events including speeches from various public notables, performances by several dance ensembles and singing groups, poetry recitals, and continuous games and competitions for children and teenagers.

In addition to representing the local national cultural centers, the commemorative events exemplify the official state civic nation-building discourse through the reading of texts that accompany the procession and other activities taking place throughout the day. During the procession, designated speakers with pre-prepared texts identified the national cultural centers, their notable members, and the other institutions whose members joined the column. In addition, the speakers mentioned past activities and achievements of each center. The text describing the Chechen-Ingush Center as it proceeded by the village administration building is as follows:

“The Chechen-Ingush National Cultural Center opened in 2001. The Center’s director is Khatsiyeva, Zura Mukanovna. The Center’s members consistently perform in local and regional events and often receive awards for their efforts; the Center has also earned numerous certificates of appreciation for their performances.”

The script then goes on to list the names of the Center’s leaders and most active participants. The speakers read from similar texts for each Center with variation regarding their achievements, activities, and accolades.

Following the procession, from a stage positioned in the middle of the village square, the Akim read from a text conveying the state’s civic national discourse. I provide a portion of his speech below to demonstrate how state authorities publicly express this discourse.

Pain and blood in many regions of the former Soviet Union was the result of the enormous country’s collapse … In this difficult time, however, Kazakhstan distinguished itself among all of the countries rising from the Soviet Union as a symbol of tolerance and unity among the citizens that populate our multi-national state…The experiences of independent Kazakhstan demonstrate that inter-ethnic harmony promotes political stability and guarantees the steady positive development of the country…Residents of
Sharbakti, representatives of our nationalities, always carry yourselves as living examples of unity, nobility of thought, and love to our small motherland.128

After these pronouncements, several young women from each of the national cultural centers dressed in costumes representing their national groups converged on the square to perform a dance entitled, “Friendship of the Nations.” As part of the number, all of the dancers formed a circle, and the representatives from each group took turns performing a “national dance” in the center. Thereafter, members from each national cultural center performed a set of songs or dances on the stage that regional authorities judged, and the event concluded with the bestowal of rewards and warm words directed to the participants.

From the authorities’ perspective, these events and declarations are important for the state’s civic nation-building project, because they disclose official ideologies about citizenship, ethnic identity, and interethnic relations, and manage the public’s ambivalence about these ideologies. For members of the cultural centers, the events require performances and utterances supporting the legitimacy of the state and its ideologies. Regardless of how the actors really conceptualize these notions, their actions often require a performative shift, appearing to confirm the alleged friendships between ethnic groups and affinity with the state and its leaders, whose policies and actions have facilitated the attachments. As evidence suggesting the occurrence of performative shift for some, participants and spectators of such events occasionally expressed ambivalence to me about whether the ideology actually represents social reality. For example, a teacher for the German national cultural center in Pavlodar once remarked to me after a cultural festival that nobody who takes her German classes is necessarily interested in preserving German culture. She argues that most have ulterior motives such as passing a German language test so

128 I acquired the actual texts after the event from a local official responsible for cultural events.
they might get a visa to move to Germany. Yet, she herself, however skeptically, participates in nearly all of the German Center’s events. Members of national cultural centers therefore participate in the activities that Kazakhstan’s civic nation-building ideology establishes for them, but at the same time recognize it as a discourse reflecting ethnicness.

**Reflecting “ethnicness” through competition**

As I argue above, Kazakhstan’s approach to civic nation-building is nothing new, as authorities have selectively appropriated from the socialist past to meet the needs of the post-socialist present. The ideology’s designers have taken careful notice of the socialist labor process and how participation in it informed subjectivity and one’s perceived relationship with the state. The primary difference between attempts to craft allegiance to the state in the USSR and contemporary Kazakhstan is that Soviet authorities required all adults’ involvement in the labor process intimately tying them to the ideology of the state. Although actual participation in national cultural centers may be humble, their existence and operation nicely illustrate the processes of ethnicness that depend upon institutions operating within the context of state politics, magnifying the impression of ethnic cultural identity and behavior. These impressions of ethnicness are critically significant to work of civic nation-building.

My observations indicate that the *traces* of ethnicness emitting from the activities of the national cultural centers transfer knowledge to the population that cultural restoration and maintenance is taking place within them. These *traces* are communicated to the general population through the various commemorative events, forms of mass media, such as newspapers and television news broadcasts, and word of mouth. Thus, the work of civic nation-building depends less upon actual participation in state-sanctioned institutions of ethnicness than
on the general acknowledgment that national cultural centers exist and ethnic kinsmen are
restoring and preserving ethnic culture. In this way, “the masses” are included in the process of
civic nation-building, in spite of their ambivalence toward the discourse.

As an illustration of how these traces proliferate throughout a community and enfranchise
its members, I refer back to those youthful Chechen dancers who seemingly broke from the state
structure of the festival to act subjectively through an expression of traditional culture. Witnesses
to the breakaway performance spread the word with friends and coworkers, and the subject arose
multiple times after the festival during my visits to the local library. The rayon newspaper even
mentioned the impromptu performance in its reportage of the cultural festival, heightening local
Chechen pride in their communities’ local cultural impact. The young people most certainly
intended the performance to serve as a fun expression of their talents for friends and neighbors.
However, the dance also served the needs of the state’s civic nation-building discourse by
authenticating the existence and mission of the village’s national cultural centers.

Although the actual membership and participants of the national cultural centers in
Sharbakti are small compared to the entire population of the village, these centers discursively
and officially represent a community’s ethnic groups. How the torchbearers of ethnic identity
represent themselves in performances of ethnic culture often matters to those who are otherwise
uninvolved in ethnic culture. A highly significant aspect of these events is the competitive nature
of the national cultural centers’ performances. In her description of Soviet labor competition,
Humphrey asserts that authorities employed socialist competition to improve efficiency and
increase the amount of production among underperforming enterprises and brigades by providing
material incentives (Humphrey 1998: 164). I would argue that the same logic applies to those
who do not participate in the activities of the national cultural centers. As I have suggested, the
number of ethnic non-participants is vastly larger than the membership of the national cultural centers. In this context of ethnic underperformance, competition is employed to at least attract the attention of the underperformers. The notion of ethnic competition mobilizes the public as the national cultural centers represent them in competitions. When a given ethnic group’s national cultural center wins a competition at a regional cultural festival or commemorative event, members of the ethnic group have also won and many take pride in the victory. In this way, competition increases the amount of “ethnic production” as the non-practitioners of ethnic culture appear to be inspired by the events of state importance.

The extent to which Kazakhstan’s civic nation-building discourse and accompanying institutions are genuinely fostering a stronger sense of citizenship among non-Kazakhs remains to be seen. Emigration rates illustrating the large numbers of Europeans still departing for Russia and further west and expressions of dissatisfaction among people of European descent regarding how their cultural identities are gradually becoming more marginalized place the discourse in question. Ultimately, the success of further civic nation-building attempts in Kazakhstan rests with the country’s ability to generate a national discourse to which the entire population can intimately relate, as the Soviets largely accomplished with the ideology of socialist labor.

Another aspect of practical life contributing to the state-based aspirations of civic nation-building arises from people’s daily relationships with friends, neighbors, and kin. In the context of northern Kazakhstan and western Siberia, much of the region’s population has witnessed a mass exodus of people of German descent and their spouses and children to the Federal Republic of Germany. This phenomenon has turned the attention of intimate relations from the local community to the global as most folks (regardless of their ethnic credentials) possess close intimate links with family and friends throughout the former Soviet Union and Western Europe.
Chapter 6
Sustaining Intimacy Between Kazakhstan and Kaiserslautern: Long Distance Relationships and Local Modes of Expression

Intimacy and transnational kinship

Evgeniy, the young man I introduced in chapter three, considers the preservation of German cultural traditions and language in Kazakhstan to be necessary and applauds the work of Rebirth and the Assembly of the People of Kazakhstan. Although the level of Evgeniy’s involvement with this work is marginal at best, there are aspects of German culture to which he and many others in northern Kazakhstan closely relate. Evgeniy claims his genealogical ties to Germandess through his mother Elsa, who identifies as a “pure” German because both her parents were of German descent and born in the Volga region before the war, and she fluently speaks the German *dialekt* her parents spoke. Elsa has several aunts and uncles who have migrated to Germany over the past fifteen years with whom she maintains consistent relations through telephone calls, letters, and occasional packages. These members of Evgeniy and Elsa’s extended family, and other acquaintances living in Germany, intermittently visit Sharbakti for short stays in the summer giving Elsa and her children a chance to renew their kin ties with these far-flung faces from the past. It is through these relations from Germany that Evgeniy and his nuclear family engage forms of German culture. The particular culture Evgeniy experiences through these relations, however, does not represent the discursive, institutionalized forms I have heretofore examined and over which state authorities have control (such as ethnic folklore). Rather, these are transnational processes and things, including products of globalized consumption, technology-based communication, and long distance transportation.

This chapter examines how people in northern Kazakhstan who foster intimacy with friends and family in Germany experience their long distance relationships and the reception of
the material resources sent from Germany. I also address the effects of these long distance relations on those who have remained in Kazakhstan and their associates. By intimacy, I mean the intense intellectual and emotional communion that can occur between human beings (Cox 2008: 8-10). Theoretically, I look to Meyer Fortes’ description of kinship amity and Arlie Hochscild’s notions of “emotion work” and “feeling rules” as conceptual tools to understand intimacy.129 In terms of setting the boundaries in which such intimacy (or amity) might be established, I also have in mind Michael Herzfeld’s notion of cultural intimacy, which suggests the recognition of common identity within a group (in Herzfeld’s formulation, a state) whose aspects are at times considered sources of embarrassment for group members. Although embarrassing, these aspects serve group members as readily acknowledgeable symbols of common sociality. In this sense, intimacy extends from kin and close friends to strangers with whom one maintains instantly recognizable common bonds that stretch beyond mere citizenship and upon which relationships might be constructed (Herzfeld 1997: 3).

Aside from its romantic and sexual implications, intimacy exists as a product of close relations usually between kin and others often considered kin. Outside of studies related to sexuality, however, addressing intimacy as a concept has been a task that anthropologists of kinship have largely avoided. Classical conceptualizations of kinship usually served as a means for investigating the legal norms and institutions of a social group rather than the behaviors between individuals. Elucidating this primarily institutional and legal approach to kinship in anthropology, Edmund Leach once declared, “two individuals can only be said to be of the same kinship group when they share some common interest – economic, legal, political, religious as the case may be – and justify that sharing by reference to a kinship nexus (Leach 1961: 66).”

129 Michael Peletz identifies this link between the work of Fortes and Hochschild (2002).
Certainly, the families I consider in this chapter rely upon Leach’s variables and the institutions they imply to distinguish themselves as coherent, stable groups. However, I am also interested in how intimacy between individuals, located both in close proximity and by wide separations, shapes social relations within communities.

The sections of this chapter undertake an inquiry into transnational kinship relations and the implications of those relations for individuals and communities in Kazakhstan who maintain them. I examine the manner by which people in Kazakhstan sustain, manage, and imagine intimate relations with kin and friends in Germany in the contexts of international separation, long distance communication, and rapidly transitioning communities. A major aspect of these relations relies upon the transfer of goods from intimates and institutions in Germany. While these remittances may appear as expressions of international humanitarian aid to areas ravaged by meager economic opportunities (which they are), the materials from Germany perform other kinds of work for the Kazakhstani state and its citizens. For example, consistent relations with people in Germany through the reception of material goods also influence the imaginations, daily practices, and ways of speaking and thinking among those who remain in Kazakhstan. Given how these ties impact individuals and communities, I also consider how transnational kinship and the humanitarian efforts it engenders meet the geopolitical goals of both the recipient and donor states involved. Through permitting the massive German institutional efforts, for example, Kazakhstan showcases its desired international image as a multiethnic, civic nation strongly recognizing and responding to the needs of its minority citizens. This more public dimension of transnational kinship further buttresses the state’s civic nation-building discourse by reflecting the energies invested into Germanness as a meaningful social category inhabiting Kazakhstan.
Transnational kinship for people in northern Kazakhstan with family and friends in Germany extends beyond biological relatedness to include cultural affinities for those abroad and at home created through the collective experiences of socialism and post-socialism. Although people in Kazakhstan represent family and acquaintances living in Germany as people “over there,” whether or not these relations are blood kin, they imagine a bond with them based on their equivalent possession of the cultural experiences and nostalgic memories associated with Soviet socialism (a historical identity that some may consider embarrassing, but nonetheless as having forged bonds of familiarity). Cultural understandings of kinship and intimacy also arise as people of German descent sense relatedness to the German state and its citizens through the acts of patronage Germany officially sponsors in Kazakhstan. These notions of relatedness exist independently from blood kinship, and construct a cultural intimacy among those who possess kin and friends in Germany or who might otherwise expect resources from Germany because of their official cultural identity. In some cases, intimacy leads to the development of social networks, often providing security, empathy, or even opportunities to those sensing the detrimental effects of perceived kazakhification.

As this chapter addresses kinship, I consider traditional and contemporary anthropological kinship theories’ applicability to cases in the former Soviet Union. Concerning contemporary anthropological studies, I examine patterns of transnational kinship, domestic and transnational understandings of non-biological kin, and the impacts of globalized commodity consumption on these conceptualizations. I argue that the notion of domestic production as an expression of the economic resources that members of kin networks produce and share fails to capture the extent to which some post-socialist people address needs for themselves and their families. Rather, I view production among kin extending far past the domestic realm to
opportunities for globalized forms of real and imagined consumption providing access to tangible consumer goods and new ways of thinking and acting in post-socialist communities. Migration and the subsequent creation of transnational kin networks has indeed opened access to international markets and their products to post-socialist communities. Along with the availability of globalized capitalist consumption through intimates abroad has arisen new kinds of identities, social networks, and modes of expression about them.

In the following section, I discuss how socialist policies and post-socialist economic realities have organized relations within soviet and post-soviet kin groups in northern Kazakhstan with family members in Germany. As I have touched on in past chapters, the opportunities for immigration to Germany for citizens of the former Soviet Union have arisen through claims of relatedness that individuals make to authentic German, lineal kin, or what Verdery refers to as “vertical kin” (Verdery 2003: 160-61). In this section, I consider the elements qualifying individuals to make such claims through the institutionalized conflation of kinship and ethnicness. I examine how the construction of ethnicness through Soviet policies and traditions, combined with German law, has served to qualify or disqualify individuals from migrating to Germany since the 1980s, and the creative strategies some have employed to achieve qualification. I subsequently address the scale of migration to Germany from the former Soviet Union taking place in the 1990s, and the transnational relationships these immigration patterns have fashioned. My intention here is to background a discussion of transnational kin networks between Germany and Kazakhstan and the social relations they have facilitated in Kazakhstani communities by illuminating the origins of these networks.

Kazakhstan is the recipient of massive amounts of humanitarian aid from both public and private sources within Germany. In chapter three, I discuss one of the primary institutions...
involved in the cultural aspects of these efforts – the GTZ. Subsequently, I examine here the nature of non-institutional humanitarian aid sent to these communities from Germany, and how Kazakhstani authorities discursively treat these resources. The main purpose of this section is to complement my discussion of transnational kin networks by showing how individuals and institutions confirm transnational intimate relations through the transference of humanitarian aid. I also show how Kazakhstan has used this international flow of consumer products and good will to bolster its image as a civic nation dedicated to fostering the well-being of its multiethnic population through encouraging transnational kinship ties. In this sense, the civic nation-building discourse serves as an enabler of transnational kinship and occasionally offers resources to create and maintain informal communities around the globalized relationships.

Finally, I consider what happens subjectively within the confluence of these forces. The changing social environment in Kazakhstan since the collapse of the Soviet Union has left much of its non-Kazakh (and some of its Kazakh) population dissatisfied with the available economic, political and cultural opportunities, often leading to the perceived threat of kazakhification. I examine here how villagers establish social relations through the modes of expression they use to identify their intimate relations in Germany (or the intimacy that some perceive with Germany whether or not they possess relations there), as well as the material and emotional products of these relations. I argue that the arising modes of expression often serve to create moral communities, exclude non-intimates (particularly “new Kazakhs” arriving in Kazakhstan’s northern villages to fill the spaces left by those who immigrated to Russia or Germany) and resist the forces of kazakhification this new population evokes. These instances of social intercourse are intriguing, as they exist independent from the institutionalized discourse associated with civic nation-building that I have heretofore examined. Rather, these interactions fall much closer into
line with Brubaker et al.’s “modality of experience” in which people reproduce a collective world through social-relational, linguistic, and socio-cognitive forms of expression (Brubaker, Feischmidt, Fox, and Grancea 2006: 207-08).

Whether or not Evgeniy behaves as the institutionally constructed cultural German that the discourses of Rebirth and the Assembly desire to make of him and others identifying as ethnically German, the relationship he has with Germanness and Germany produces something culturally tangible for him, as well as his family and friends. This cultural reality is built upon the intimate relationships that channel consumer goods, cash, and images of the West into the homes of northeastern Kazakhstan. However, there is something more intrinsically interesting and significant than the occurrence of western-style consumption taking place as a result of these intimate relationships, namely the extent to which transnational kinship creates bonds and intimacy amongst those receiving the remittances. People in northeastern Kazakhstan who possess intimate relationships with close kin and friends in Germany maintain a deep sense of familiarity and trust with others who have intimates in the West. These domestic relationships created by common experience often translate into the means to challenge the perceived collapse of opportunities brought on by the formation of a titular national state.

A great deal of what I have offered in my dissertation to this point revolves around the operation of institutions and my research subjects’ involvement with them. I sense that this positionality may shroud their actual subjectivity. Hence, this chapter seeks to capture a more nuanced portrait of who my interlocutors actually are. I make a point to illuminate the more subjective, intimate social interactions by referring to them as “modes of expression,” as differentiated from the method of communication within and about institutions (particularly those associated with civic nation-building) as discursive. I believe this approach also spotlights
the significance of the state’s civic nation-building efforts by offering an image of how people may be enmeshed or connected within its institutional web, while they simultaneously balance allegiances with other sites of social connectivity. In this sense, the subjectivity I attempt to capture is not necessarily a resistance to the institutions and discourse of civic nation-building (or an embrace of them). Rather, there exists a symbiosis of social belongingness and adherence to institutional discourse and its resources that informs personal subjectivity in which tensions and submissions reside together amongst the choices and opportunities of everyday life. I now begin my inquiry into transnational kinship networks and the local communities these networks build by identifying what I mean conceptually by kinship and intimacy.

**Anthropology, kinship, and post-socialist states**

Since the demise of socialist regimes beginning in 1989, anthropologists have largely neglected kinship in the former Soviet Union. Within this social, political, and economic context, a handful of social scientists have studied informal networks, privatization, decollectivization, transforming gender roles, and ethnic identity. However, outside of discussions about kinship’s role in maintaining informal exchange networks and property, as well as examinations of revitalized non-Russian/European kinship systems such as Kazakh “clans” (Schatz 2006), anthropologists have largely avoided close considerations of kinship in the former socialist states of Eurasia. Many of those anthropological studies paying closer attention to post-socialist kinship tend to conceptualize kinship groups as possessing stable, but flexible structures, which adjust to help their members cope with the pressures of political and economic transformations, particularly in rural regions.\(^{130}\)

\(^{130}\) See, Francis Pine (1996); Tommaso Trevisani (2011); Deema Kaneff and Lale Yalçın-Heckmann (2003); Caroline Humphrey (1998). Schatz also bases much of his arguments about
Although I don’t question the extent of general kinship structural persistence in this chapter, I do argue that in certain social contexts in the former Soviet Union family groupings have completely transformed themselves through socialism and its collapse. The result has been that rather than a reemergence or stable maintenance of traditional kinship alignments, understandings and practices of what constitutes family have changed in unique ways to meet individual and group needs. One of the primary factors contributing to these changes is the largescale migration across new and old state boundaries beginning in the early 1990s as the Soviet Union collapsed, resulting in myriad of transnational kinship networks and new sensibilities regarding what constitutes kin. Given these trends, I suggest that recent anthropological kinship studies have contributed useful concepts for addressing family relationships in the former Soviet Union.\(^{131}\) While the countries of the former Soviet Union are, for the most part, isolated from the technologies associated with these studies, anthropology has been slow to consider post-socialism from the lens that these fresh outlooks offer.

A focus on “family making” in the midst of migration, transnationalism, adoption, geneticization, and reproductive technologies represents an important trend occurring in the past two decades of anthropological kinship. Significant works in this vein include Daisy Daomampo’s consideration of transnational reproduction and surrogacy (Deomampo 2016: 66) and Sara Dorow’s examination of universalizing kinship in the context of international adoption (Dorow 2006). These studies are important for my purposes, as they suggest family making associated with a socioeconomic-based cultural affinity that pushes against the narrative of

\(^{131}\) See Boris and Salazar Parreñas (2010); Sara Dorow (2006); Christine Gailey (2010); Salazar Parreñas (2005); Rayna Rapp (2000); David Eng (2003).
genetic replication (Gailey 2010: 56-57). My examination of family making and transnational kinship in the post-socialist world considers those living in communities experiencing large-scale emigration but who have stayed behind. I am specifically interested in the relationships and networks forming around the common experience of dispossession, departing friends and family, and maintaining ties with intimates abroad.

The disruption of community is further exacerbated for northern Kazakhstanis by an altogether different pattern of migration. As families move out of villages for Russia and beyond, new folks arrive to settle in the homesteads maintained within the same families for decades. Many of the new arrivals are ethnic Kazakhs who accepted President Nazarbayev’s invitation to return to Kazakhstan from states such as Mongolia, China, and Uzbekistan where their parents and grandparents fled in the wake of Stalinist repression or were displaced through its coercive measures. All of these factors contribute to family making dependent upon socioeconomic and cultural factors significantly separated from biological relatedness. While conducting my research in northern Kazakhstan, I observed that a realignment of kinship understandings and practices was prevalent among non-Kazakhs, especially as they reacted to expressions of Kazakh kinship (such as clan system) on new and developing political structures. Under these pressures, I consider how attitudes of belonging to transnational groups and the collective “othering” of non-Kazakhs coalesce to create bonds of intimacy and form wider communities of interest. I now turn to a discussion of classical and more recent anthropological kinship theories that most effectively contribute to my conclusions about family relations and intimacy in the context of long-distance relationships between northern Kazakhstan and Germany.

Among the classic works dedicated to conceptualizing kinship, I believe Meyer Fortes most effectively recognizes the role of intimacy by separating it from other forms of normative
family relations and behaviors. In a fashion that has suffered from boundless and necessary critique, Fortes divided kinship into two realms – the “domestic,” or the spaces and relations of nuclear families (what he identified as the “reproductive nucleus of the domestic domain”) and the “politico-jural,” or the public roles, rules, interactions, and institutions extended kinship relations circumscribe. Rather than use the term “intimacy,” Fortes employs “kinship amity,” or the sense of morality and altruism rooted in the familial domain characterized by generosity towards others (Fortes 1966; 1969: 232). He also identifies “unquestioning amity,” as a more intense expression of amity occurring when individuals act out of concern and a proper attitude for a person. Although Fortes hesitates to use the term emotion to qualify this concept of unquestioning amity, he hints at the linkage when quoting Douglas Oliver that, “Among themselves relatives should feel and express emotions of affection or at least amity (Fortes 1969: 249).” Given that statement, if unquestioning amity is not the expression of emotion or love in Fortes’ mind, it at least represents an analogue. In any case, Fortes locates amity as operating between family members through both action and thought as individuals feel “altruistically” and act “generously” toward their kin.

The actions and feelings implicit in unquestioning amity seem to most acutely arise in Fortes’ work when close kin face tension produced from the intersection of the domestic and politico-jural realms of family life. I find Fortes’s thinking about the intersection of the politico-jural and domestic dimensions of social life instructive to a discussion of intimacy implicit in kinship. I want to emphasize here that I am not incorporating this binary uncritically and am aware of its weakness as an obfuscation of cultural behaviors that possess considerably more

132 Fortes exemplifies the notion of “unquestioning amity” using the concept namununu, practiced by the Islamic Garia people of northeastern India (1969: 241).
complexity. I reference Fortes’s model only as a formative step in conceptualizing slippery, unpredictable facets of social life such as feeling, emotion, and amity, within an established, albeit flawed, framework. It is not the universal asymmetry dimension of the framework I am accepting, however, but rather Fortes’s suggestion that when societal norms and institutions become connected to close interpersonal relationships, feelings of amity between individuals may significantly increase. As John Comaroff argued, there is tremendous diversity within domestic relations and many functions attributed to politico-jural institutions occur consistently within the domestic context and possess “deep institutional and ideological foundations (Comaroff 1990).” With that in mind, I argue that the functionality implicit in the politico-jural’s presence among domestic relationships strongly contributes to the sort of close intimacy that I associate with kinship and observed during my research.

The experience of a brother and sister, Galina and Alexander from Sherbakti (both of whom are young adults, independent from their parents), illustrates the juncture of domestic intimacy and the politico-jural dimensions of social life I have in mind. People of German descent in Kazakhstan often compile information about deceased ancestors to qualify for material benefits from Germany, while carrying on close and intimate relationships with others who may or may not fit within the rubric of Germanness. Alexander and Galina’s paternal grandmother was a “pure” German, but their mother, Masha, is Russian. The siblings’ father, Ivan, lives in Pavlodar, and due to his severe alcoholism and intermittent incarceration, they have infrequent contact with him. Alexander and Galina rely on their legal tie to Ivan as a person of German descent to receive material benefits from German organizations like Rebirth and to maintain their status as potential migrants to Germany. Contact with their father is therefore limited to collecting information from him about relatives either deceased or living in Germany.
While Alexander and Galina maintain a connection to their father primarily for politico-jural reasons, they base their relations with their mother on affection, responsibility, and mutual support. Masha and her live-in boyfriend are unemployed alcoholics, and her children use the benefits available through their status as ethnic Germans to support her. Masha, in turn, occasionally provides childcare for Galina’s infant son when she is working and allows Alexander to live in her home whenever he can’t stay at his girlfriend’s place. True to Comaroff’s point about the intermingling of politico-jural and domestic factors within the household, the case of these siblings represents an interesting interplay of reliance on institutions, drive to meet material resources, and the unquestioning amity experienced among close relatives. In the case of the family in question, all of these forces seem to coalesce to produce intimacy. An additional factor with which residents of northern Kazakhstan are grappling is the consistent loss of kin and friends with whom they share intimacy. This is a reality for which Masha is preparing, as Galina and Alexander seek to eventually move to Germany. Under these circumstances of loss, Masha (who is not eligible to legally migrate to Germany) will be left detached from her closest kin.

In her study of Filipino women migrants working as nannies in the United States, sociologist Arlie Hochschild identifies emotion and feeling as complex forces individuals express toward others with whom they share close social bonds that go beyond acts of generosity and altruism. Hochschild describes emotion as “the awareness of bodily cooperation with an idea, thought, or attitude and the label attached to that awareness (Hochschild 2003: 75).” In this way, she attaches emotions to physical forces and behaviors, enacted as responses to the subject’s awareness of expressive norms (the labels attached to social rules), which might include notions such as love, hate, happiness, and sorrow (Hochschild 2003: 81-82). These social
rules of experiencing emotions (or what Hochschild calls “feeling rules”) dictate their properties (the extent to which one experiences emotion), direction (the type of emotion, i.e., anger or sorrow), and the duration (Hochschild 2003: 97). Hochschild posits the notion of “emotion work,” which is the act of trying to change or redirect emotions and feeling in regards to others with whom one shares relations. Of interest to my case study is how Hochschild understands the redirection of emotion in the face of social change (Hochschild 2003: 93-94). This redirection of emotion is precisely what folks in northern Kazakhstan have undertaken as they experience the loss of family and close friends though migration. To cope with these circumstances, they redirect emotions and form relationships with others experiencing similar losses.

Speaking to how Filipino mothers experience the disconnected relationships with their children after arriving in America, Hochschild suggests emotions are distributable resources. Therefore, these women face an economy of “emotion work,” redirecting intimacy to others (usually, the American children for whom they nanny) in the face of losing those close relationships with their own children. It is important to understand in this context the forces of global capitalism at play guiding individual choices regarding migration and the subsequent redirection of emotion. In this sense, love as an emotion is a resource that undergoes a redistribution upon the relocation and transformed economic circumstances of the subject. However, just as we often neglect the social forces separating the commodity from its individual producer that Marx imagined, we also tend to separate the redirection of love and other emotions from the global forces (often contingent upon capital flows) that engender them (Hochschild 2003: 193-94). How and why post-Soviet subjects undertake this emotional redirection toward others in the formation of new, non-biological kinship relationships in the face of social pressures in northern Kazakhstan represents a primary interest of this chapter.
David Harvey’s understanding of flexibility freeing up formally rigid social structures in the face of global transformations informs the current nature of intimate relationships for people in northern Kazakhstan. As he suggests, late 20th century capitalism created a need for greater flexibility, mobility, and connectivity leading to the shrinking of temporal and spatial horizons (Harvey 1990: 147). This compression of time and space has occurred with the rise of telecommunication technology and decrease in global transportation costs, allowing people in northern Kazakhstan to maintain perpetual contact with their intimates abroad. For example, Heinrich from Podsosnovo (whom I introduced in chapter three) once told me he speaks with his brother living in Bavaria daily using a rather inexpensive phone card and his cell phone. Several people I met throughout Russia and Kazakhstan with intimates in Germany (most of whom subsist on relatively humble incomes) have visited Germany through inexpensive flight and bus tickets, purchased with remittances from relatives abroad. The technological advances provoke a redeployment of emotions using the communication technology through which people express them, such as long-distance telephone calls, emails, text messages, and social media platforms.

In spite of the connectedness these economic and technological transformations enable, they also imply dispersions of people, capital, systems of production, and information (Harvey 1990: 147, 156, 159). Harvey argues that such fragmentation and the insecurity it entails creates the desire for stability leading to a heightened emphasis on the authority of societies’ base institutions, such as the family and the values it represents (Harvey 1990: 171). Using a similar argument in the context of Kazakhstan, Schatz argues that certain mechanisms of modernization, particularly economic mechanisms that create uncertainty and scarcity, might work to strengthen non-biological kinship to establish mutual support and security (Schatz 2004: 7). Under these circumstances of loss, as well as economic and social uncertainty, individuals are likely to
redirect their emotions to establish close relationships with biologically unrelated individuals who share similar socioeconomic circumstances.

Speaking to the creation of kinship among communities of people not sharing procreative relatedness, Kath Weston’s analysis of gay kinship shed some conceptual light on how and why groups and individuals construct non-biological kinship. Weston argued that gay kinship contests the notion that procreation alone constitutes family and non-biological kin must pattern their relationships after biological models or forfeit their claim to kinship status. For Weston, the primary issue at play was the cultural valuation placed on intimate ties based on procreation and the meaning biological connection confers upon a relationship. Accordingly, gay women and men have renegotiated the meaning and practice of kinship by defining chosen families in opposition to biological ties believed to constitute “conventional” families (Weston 1991: 34-35). Hence, Weston’s actors employed a degree of creativity and flexibility, not necessarily to subvert social norms, but to establish stable and consistent intimate relationships providing emotional and material support. These fluid boundaries mean membership of chosen family groups varied with often non-replicable or inconsistent formations. Weston treated these alternative kinship ideologies and practices as historical transformations rather than as derivative of other kinds of kinship relations (such as those patterned on procreative families), further stressing the influence of shifting historical, environmental, and institutional forces on the patterning of intimate relationships (Weston 1991: 103-09). I now turn to kinship scholarship devoted to examining families since the collapse of the Soviet Union to consider how the shifting forces that Weston, Harvey, and Hochschild imagine might contribute to understanding the family in post-socialist contexts.
In his study of clan politics in contemporary Kazakhstan, Schatz argues that socialism and the collapse of the Soviet Union have necessitated flexibility among kin-based networks as a strategic resource to mediate the restrictive or uncertain political and economic conditions. In this way, the experience of Soviet modernization and post-socialist transformation has significantly altered the forms and functions of past kinship practices in Kazakhstan (Schatz 2004: 45-47). Similar to Schatz’s consideration of Kazakh clans, research on kinship and relatedness in the former Soviet Union has for the most part proposed models of kinship (whether resurgent, resilient, or new) as primary sources of social and economic stability in the face of post-socialist transformation. These positionalities certainly seem reasonable and relatable to Harvey’s argument implicating largescale social fragmentations in the embrace of familiar, instrumental institutions and structures, such as the family. I argue that such inclinations do not exclusively imply the fortification of family bonds for practical political and economic purposes. Rather, I suggest that amity and the emotion work it requires additionally guide the formation of kinship relationships in the context of socioeconomic change, in whatever procreative or non-procreative form these relationships may take.

Several anthropological studies involving kinship in post-socialist contexts perceive family structures as static formations that maintain stability and provide resources in the face of uncertainty and disparity. In her study of Poland’s Gorale communities, Francis Pine suggests that the basic structure of the household possesses an instrumentality for its members and therefore persists in the face of tremendous social transformation as it has provided a strategic response to the pressures of socialism and its collapse (Pine 1996). Tommaso Trevisani similarly argues that the traditional structure of the rural Uzbek family as the main unit of production has
maintained its essential features. Rural Uzbek kinship has thus become further entrenched and strengthened through post-socialist agricultural reform now that the rural family finds itself more dependent on their kin for access to services once provided by collective and state farms (Trevisani 2011: 163-64). Lale Yalçın-Heckmann and Deema Kaneff maintain that post-Soviet land reform in Azerbaijan has facilitated the reemergence of traditional rural households as the central unit of production for families (Kaneff and Yalçın-Heckmann 2003). The inherent line of argumentation in this literature demonstrates an overreliance upon conceptualizing kinship as a practical instrument to address political and economic needs. Although material instrumentality is certainly an important consideration for any category of social interaction, my ethnographic observations suggest that kinship also represents a flexible sphere in which individuals express amity, undertake emotion work, and establish new models for what it means to be family.

A consideration of Soviet-era population shifts in Kazakhstan offers a case in which a reformulation or preservation of past kinship patterns has not been available to a significant portion of the population. Through the tremendous population relocation occurring before and during World War II, kin groups were not only broken up and scattered throughout Eurasia, they also experienced a unique blending. In northern Kazakhstan, for example, Soviet authorities threw together people from various ethnic groups, such as Russians, Ukrainians, Tatars, Chechens, Germans, Koreans, and Poles in freshly established collective and state farms. This ethnic intermixing often led to intermarriage, further complicating kinship-based group identification. As a result, the kinds of traditional extended families reasserting themselves after the collapse of socialism, such as those Pine and Trevisani describe, were much less prevalent and even impossible in northern Kazakhstan and other regions of the former Soviet Union. Schatz, however, argues that socialist economic and political pressures produced “access
networks” exhibiting characteristics of kinship groups, even in those areas in the Soviet Union freshly populated with people from throughout the country with diverse cultural backgrounds (Schatz 2004: 61). The formation of these networks exhibits an alternative to the manner by which people in northern Kazakhstan imagine group identities. Another alternative occurred as people created bonds of amity through the common experience of socialism and Soviet citizenship, or what some scholars of Slavic language communities refer to as nash identity.

Amity, as I understand it in the context of the former Soviet Union, is not completely dependent upon actual blood relations. Rather, it also exists as a sense of common morality found among community members affording group inclusion. Gerald Creed identifies this mutual attitude of inclusion as “nash” – the word for “our” in Russian and other Slavic languages (Creed 2011: 189). NASH is often evoked to identify a group of “insiders” ranging from members of an extended family to a local community and can even extend to all citizens of a state (such as the former citizens of the Soviet Union). According to Melissa Caldwell, the inner logic of nash operates as a strategy for individuals to recognize and maintain intimacy by emphasizing social familiarity, reciprocal assistance, and trust, while simultaneously deemphasizing other differences (Caldwell 2004: 142-44). Those associated with any given “nash” rarely form cohesive collectivities, but rather membership shifts depending upon the contingent needs and interests in any given social context. However, the collective performance of nash identities may produce a distinctive social group whose members actively recognize and possess similar traits and behaviors (Caldwell 2004: 154). The evocation of nash therefore does not necessarily express blood kin relations, but it does signal a sense of amity shared by those who use the term to identify imagined group members.
The strength of *nash* is the power it carries to instantly transform anyone associated with it into an imagined network of closely united insiders possessing preconfigured social bonds. The *nash* identity thus resembles Herzfield’s notion of cultural intimacy as individuals cognitively construct relationships with others (potentially strangers) based on a source of imagined and assumed familiarity and intimacy (Herzfeld 1997: 3). Imagined groups based on *nash* identity are therefore extraordinarily flexible and hence closely correspond to Fortes’s understanding of amity versus enmity among kin groups. According to Fortes, feelings of amity toward kin – as opposed to the sphere of strangerhood that merges with enmity – may vary widely according to the particular social environment. In this sense, intimate groups form “an *ad hoc* structural polarization of allegiances for the actor (Fortes 1969: 232).”

For example, while traveling on a train from Pavlodar to Almaty, the members of my train car (all of whom were citizens of Kazakhstan except for me) made up of three Kazakhs and two Russians engaged in a discussion about Kazakh carpets. An elderly Russian women in the car remarked “*nash* Kazakhs make the most beautiful carpets, which are known from here to Europe.” By evoking the term *nash*, the woman created an immediate, intimate community of people to which everyone in the car, except for myself, belonged regardless of their cultural differences or attitudes. Individuals might also employ *nash* as a strategy to distinguish between intimate groups. While discussing Kazakhstani holidays and national traditions with Maria, a worker at the Sharbakti library, she remarked; “We only celebrate Kazakh holidays now. *Nash* traditions have been forgotten.” By invoking *nash* in this instance, Maria distinguished between Kazakhs and a community of mostly European, non-Kazakhs and anyone else maintaining a nostalgic Soviet identity. In both instances, the actors formed internal fields of moral relations
against an imagined outside world notwithstanding any normatively established rules determining where the boundaries of the fields lie.

My experience with the use of *nash* in villages and towns in Kazakhstan facing large-scale migration to Russia and Germany revealed that individuals with intimates abroad invoke it to maintain bonds of familiarity with members of their home communities. I often overheard terms such as “*nash* Germans” or simply “*nash* in Germany” to identify intimates and acquaintances living in Germany, and as a general description of former Soviet peoples who had migrated to Germany. Individuals usually use the term to distinguish those with whom they share a familiarity based on the common experience of Soviet socialism from those whom they referred to as “real Germans” – Germans born in Germany possessing no ties with the Soviet Union. As individuals use the term *nash*, however, they also differentiate between those who possessed kin and other intimates in Germany, and those who didn’t. The “have-nots” were typically ethnic Kazakhs who moved to the village sometime after Kazakhstan’s independence and were excluded because their residence in the village began after the larger waves of migration to Germany hence depriving them of the opportunity to form intimate relations with potential migrants. Those finding themselves within the circle of *nash* in relation to intimates abroad comprise a somewhat exclusive community that its members might utilize for various purposes. Although most bonds formed through references to *nash* in relation to intimates in Germany do not reflect actual blood relation, they do occasionally meet certain needs for individuals that kin ties met in the past. In what follows, I examine the complexity of kinship for communities in northern Kazakhstan through the formation of transnational kin relations since the collapse of the Soviet Union.
I begin with a discussion about how individuals officially choose to be ethnic in Kazakhstan. I do this initially because choices about ethnicness are contingent upon kinship, but they are also strategic, as they enable opportunities and foster relations between various groups from Kazakhstan to Western Europe. To identify this process, I use the term “ethnic selection” to describe the procedure of determining an ethnic identity under the political conditions in which one must officially make such a choice. Most villages in northern Kazakhstan offer a rich range of ethnic identities, from Tatars to Chechens, and Germans to Kabardinians. The reason for this primarily stems from large-scale, Soviet-managed deportation during World War II to sites throughout Central Asia. As the various Soviet peoples came together in this culturally diverse environment, they also intermarried, producing later generations whose members often express ambivalence as they make their ethnic selections. A myriad of historical and contemporary factors coalesce into the choices that people make when they officially select their ethnicities.

According to article 19 of Kazakhstan’s constitution, every citizen has the right to indicate or decline to indicate an ethnicity. The constitution’s article 57 (On Families and Marriage), however, states that children must select the ethnicity of one of their parents. Therefore, technically anyone may refuse to select an ethnicity on applications for state identification cards and passports for international use. Of the literally hundreds of conversations I have had with Kazakhstani’s about the choices they made regarding their official ethnic identity, I have yet to meet anyone who declined to make an ethnic choice for their state ID card. This is true even among those who generally prefer not to identify ethnically, but rather use the marker “Soviet” as an identifier.
Having to choose one’s ethnic identity is not simply a means of self-perception in Kazakhstan but a government imposed obligation for every Kazakhstani citizen. When Kazakhstani citizens reach the age of 16, authorities provide them with a state identification card. Prior to receiving their state ID, each individual completes an application on which they are required to indicate their ethnicity (or *natsional’nost’*). For some, and perhaps even most, the *natsional’nost’* printed on the card is relatively un-meaningful in the course everyday life. Yet for others, this marker represents a strategy potentially providing benefits from various state and international institutions. At the very least, the “ethnic selection” requires calculation and necessitates a certain amount of cultural and genealogical knowledge to make the most appropriate choice, especially in the ethnically mixed social context of northern Kazakhstan.

People’s reasons for making their ethnic selections might be explicitly apparent and unquestioned, or ambiguous, and indeterminate. The selection becomes complicated for those who must choose from several options. Although the law stipulates that one must select the *natsional’nost’* of a parent, selection is often not policed, enabling individuals to go as far back as their grandparents to make their choices, or choose a default category such as “Russian” or “Kazakh” if one is uncomfortable with her genealogical lines of ethnic descent. It is common for an individual to have four grandparents each possessing a different *natsional’nost’*. Under these conditions, an understanding of descent conditions how an individual makes an official ethnic selection. The majority of those I interviewed stated that the father passes ethnicity patrilineally to his children, while a smaller number believed that the mother passes it

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133 I consistently employ the term *natsional’nost’* from this point because it is the actual name of the category identifying a person’s ethnic selection on Kazakhstan’s state identity card. See chapter two for my introduction of the term.

134 Will Kymlicka identifies former Soviet Germans as a group quite likely to identify biological descent as a factor in determining national identity (1995: 23).
matrilineally. Others, however, have made the choice based on more pragmatic reasons, such as the desire to move to Germany. In these cases, officially claiming German on one’s passport stands as a marker of one’s Germanness to those granting the opportunity to migrate to Germany. For others who perceive themselves to be of European stock, the complexity of their ethnic lines of descent combined with their cultural sensitivities caused them to select a default natsional’nost’, which is most commonly Russian.

The ethnic selections made by members of the Salzburg family illustrate the dilemma. Eduard and Elena Salzburg have five children – three sons and two daughters. Eduard’s father was Estonian and his mother was German. Eduard’s wife Elena is Russian (both of her parents were Russians). Although Eduard selected Estonian as his natsional’nost’, his sons claimed Russian. Both of his daughters, however, claimed German and currently live in Germany. Given that most people I interviewed suggested ethnicity is determined patrilineally, I suspect that the Salzburg brothers’ choice of Russian had more to do with sharing a cultural affinity for Russian as a default natsional’nost’ than as a preference for matrilineal ethnic descent. A factor determining the selection of German for the daughters appears to have been their desire to relocate to Germany, for which having German marked on their identity cards was helpful. It is certainly possible that conditions exist rendering the German ethnic selection a detriment for those desiring to remain in Kazakhstan. However, I never encountered reservation about selecting German on the grounds that individuals feared a possible disadvantage regarding the choice. Rather, my associates in northern Kazakhstan indicated their choices were based on strategy or familiarity (whether through descent or experience) with their chosen natsional’nost’. A major force for enabling this official ethnic marker has been the migration of former Soviet peoples to Germany.
The key text granting people of German descent permission for migration to Germany is the 1953 Federal Expellee and Refugee Law (*Bundesvertriebenengesetz*), which defined German nationals as persons identifying as German, certified by ancestry, language, education, and cultural practice. This law qualified persons for West German citizenship who were driven from their homes through expulsion measures during and after World War II. The legislation was to apply especially to groups of Germans whom foreign officials had forcibly removed from their homes and expected to relocate to Germany, such as Germans expelled from regions ceded to the Soviet Union and Eastern European countries after World War II. German officials initially intended for the law to serve as a transitional provision granting secure legal status to people whom foreign governments had driven away from their homes. Years later, the same law facilitated an open door immigration policy and automatic citizenship for ethnic Germans from Eastern Europe and the former Soviet Union desperate to escape economic and political uncertainty for relative prosperity and security available in the Federal Republic of Germany (Brubaker 1998). Since Soviet officials began permitting the large-scale legal emigration to the Federal Republic of Germany in 1985, Germans started to leave the Soviet and former Soviet republics, particularly Kazakhstan and Russia, in increasingly larger numbers until the late 1990s. This trend began in the era of détente when Soviet and Western officials agreed upon a restricted right of emigration granted to Jews, Germans, and Armenians, with all limitations lifted for Germans under glasnost in 1987 (Arel 2001). By 1996, immigration to Germany decreased significantly, due to stricter quotas and the introduction of a language exam that applicants must pass in order to qualify (Polian 2004: 207).

Officials in the Federal Republic of Germany allowed non-German spouses and children from the former Soviet Union to accompany their ethnic German kin and likewise receive
citizenship. According to German statistics, between 1986 and 1999, over 2 million people of German descent or people linked to them through marriage or kinship emigrated from the former Soviet Union to the Federal Republic (Klekowski von Koppenfels 2002). A substantial number of those immigrating to Germany therefore represent an array of non-German ethnics leaving behind friends and family who otherwise would have no opportunity to possess social ties to Germany but who now share citizenship with Western Europeans.

**Intimate relations with kin in Germany**

In Sherbakti, nearly every resident of this ethnically diverse village has kin, friends, or acquaintances currently residing in the Federal Republic of Germany and possessing German citizenship. My discussions with German community leaders suggest that such ties to Germany are pervasive throughout northern Kazakhstan. One reason for this stems from the large-scale migration of peoples, many of whom are of German descent or intermarried with Germans, from the southern regions of Central Asia into northern Kazakhstan and southern Siberia. Another is that many people residing in these communities remained in Kazakhstan, watching their friends and neighbors move to Germany. As a result, communities in northern Kazakhstan possess heavy concentrations of residents with relatives and friends living in Germany. People of German descent remaining in Kazakhstan whose families have moved to Germany stayed either because their non-German spouses were unwilling to leave their homes and family in

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136 I have confirmed this notion through numerous interviews with people who have migrated from the southern regions of Central Asia to northern Kazakhstan and Siberia.
Kazakhstan, they were not permitted entrance into Germany (usually because they couldn’t pass the language exam), or they were simply not interested in relocating. Without exception, every person of German descent whom I interviewed had relatives living in Germany.

In addition to people of German descent, nearly all of the village’s inhabitants have friends and acquaintances (and many have close family members) living in Germany – with varying degrees of intimate contacts between them. The Shegel’kov family exemplifies a typical model of intimate contacts between Germany and Sharbakti. Valery Shegel’kov is Russian and has no ancestors or living kin who have claimed German descent. Valery’s sister, Ludmila, married a man of German descent, and they moved to Germany in 1993. Ludmila and her family visit Sharbakti every two to three years. In addition, Valery has a grandson living in Germany. This individual is the son of Pavel, Valery’s oldest son. Pavel’s son was the product of his first marriage to a woman of German descent. After their divorce, Pavel’s ex-wife remarried and moved to Germany taking his son. Pavel is now married to Galina, who is not German, but her adult children officially identify as ethnic Germans thanks to their paternal grandmother who was German. Pavel’s stepchildren have several cousins, aunts and uncles living in Germany. Finally Valery’s youngest child, Yulya, married a person of German descent who has relatives in Germany. Among all of his kin relations in Germany, Valery most frequently communicates with his sister, Galina, as she often calls, sends letters and packages, and occasionally visits.

Valery’s experience is typical, as it fits into a much larger network of villagers who share multiple, intimate and consistent relationships with German citizens living in Germany. People in Kazakhstan maintain close ties with intimates in Germany through telephone calls, letters and packages, emails and text messages, electronic social media, and occasional visits. In the late summer, visitors from Germany can be seen strolling the village’s streets, shopping in its stores,
and relaxing in the yards of relatives and friends. Some of the more wealthy villagers find affordable opportunities to travel to Germany (usually involving a train ride to Moscow and then a bus ride on to Berlin). Such communication and physical movement between Germany and Kazakhstan generates stories back to the village of western consumption, high quality health care, pensions, employment, struggles with the German language, and lamentations about grandchildren and other younger kin unable to converse in Russian.

The dismantling of close kinship relations that no one imagined would be impermanent before perestroika has created a large degree of ambivalence associated with the departure of kin to Germany. Watching close family members leave for Germany has produced disappointment, loneliness, and a feeling of social instability accompanying the political and economic instability characteristic of the post-socialist period. This departure is especially marked in a historic social context where people often depended upon close kin and friends to help them capture scarce resources in a socialist economy of shortage. With the increasing disparity of the post-socialist period, people have become even more dependent upon their social networks. As members of those networks have moved to Germany, however, their relatives possess fewer people to draw upon in order to gain access to the resources they need to survive. While remaining in close contact with departed kin through letters and telephone calls, people with family and friends living in Germany are left to imagine the lives of their intimates in the West and to consider if they themselves should attempt to join them. Most of those who have failed to emigrate were held back by failed German exams, the reluctance of significant others, the inability to produce the required documents, and the death of family members who qualified their kin to migrate (such as spouses or parents). A recurring expression that I encountered in my fieldwork was talk about the failure to properly “organize” the move to Germany. This pronouncement often
accompanied the resolve to continue trying to properly organize and the tacit recognition that moving to Germany will probably never happen. Many of those left behind in Kazakhstan and other former Soviet republics are recipients of the various material resources supplied by family and friends who have settled in Germany, as well as the German state.

**Humanitarian Aid, chocolate, and snail mail – the commerce of intimacy**

As I discussed in chapter three, the GTZ has provided a great deal of humanitarian aid to people of German descent residing in the former Soviet Union. Since the GTZ’s arrival into the FSU in 1993, it has implemented projects designed to provide credit to the German population for economic projects and entrepreneurship, housing for Germans and non-Germans immigrating to the Russian Federation from Central Asia, and medical resources for those with serious ailments. Besides this large-scale transfer of material resources from government sources in Germany to people in Kazakhstan, relatives and close friends in Germany often remit cash and material goods to their intimates. Most people with close relations in Germany anticipate the arrival of international packages shortly before holidays and birthdays consisting of a wide array of material goods such as clothes, shoes, sweets (chocolate), toys, cosmetics, and other gift items. Neatly hidden in many of these packages are stacks or rolls of cash in the form of Euros or dollars. Some of my respondents indicated the sending of packages with gifts and money for Christmas and Easter is a mandatory gesture for their intimates in Germany. This is such a general and popular phenomenon in Kazakhstan’s northern regions that when the mail truck

\[\text{137 BMI, http://www.bmi.bund.de/cln_007/nn_121894/Internet/Content/Common/Anlagen/Broschueren/2003/Informationsdienst\_Nr\_44\_Id\_24757\_de,templateId=raw,property=publicationFile.pdf/Informationsdienst\_Nr\_44\_Id\_24757\_de (accessed December 2006).}\]
arrives from the city before a holiday, villagers regularly refer to it as the “Red Cross truck” knowing it is full of packages from Germany.

An additional element to the commerce between the two states is the volume and variety of communication between people in Germany and their intimates in Central Asia. Telephone contact between Kazakhstani and close relations in Germany is frequent. Many respondents indicated that special international cell phone plans and calling cards offering low rates for calls made to the former Soviet Union make telephone communication more affordable than it has ever been. Several respondents indicated having at least weekly telephone contact with friends and family in Germany and some with very close relations reported daily contact. The reception of letters and cards is also at least a monthly occurrence for some people, and those with dial-up internet connections count on frequent emails and posts on the Russian-language version of Facebook called vkontakte.ru.

Certainly, the foreign commerce between Germany and Kazakhstan in the form of official humanitarian programs and informal exchanges between intimates amounts to the heightened welfare for many Kazakhstani citizens. The import of materials and communication also provides benefits for the state in terms of its wider geopolitical goals. Official accounts in Kazakhstan involving Germany’s influence within its borders have never shied away from identifying Germany as a major source of humanitarian aid for its German population. This position is not surprising given the need for a favorable international impression of human rights and the treatment of minorities in Kazakhstan that its leaders have fostered. The desire to portray Kazakhstan’s multiethnic social environment as one exemplifying peace and harmony on the international stage has increased recently for several reasons. In 2003, Kazakhstan launched a campaign for the presidency of the Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe
(OSCE), which it achieved in 2010. The bid to chair the OSCE, however, was not a smooth ride, and formal approval was not received until 2007 after a delay caused by concerns among OSCE members regarding Kazakhstan’s commitment to human rights, democratic institutions, and a legitimate civil society (Stupakova 2008 & Tumat 2007).

Kazakhstan’s precarious geopolitical position as both a close ally of the Russian Federation and partner with various western institutions and countries has also received scrutiny in the wake of violent conflict between Georgia and Russia over South Ossetia and Abkhazia in 2008 and Russia’s annexation of the Crimean Peninsula in 2014. Some analysts suggest that the status of Kazakhstan’s large Russian ethnic minority in the north may provoke similar political conflicts, especially if Russia perceives their southern neighbor to be breaking ranks to strengthen its ties with the West. Kazakhstan’s reluctance to recognize the independence of Abkhazia and South Ossetia while canceling planned economic partnerships with Georgia after the conflict reflect the balancing act Kazakhstan must often perform (Kassenova 2009 & Laurelle 2008). With these geopolitical concerns in mind, Kazakhstan has aggressively promoted its civic nation-building discourse outside of its borders, demonstrating its ability to handle internal questions regarding non-Kazaks to both Russia and the international community. The public recognition of foreign aid from Germany, suggests how such aid is a useful tool for the Kazakhstani government to demonstrate these efforts on the international stage. Beyond the material significance for those receiving humanitarian aid from Germany or remittances from friends and relatives, these transfers often foster close relationships and social networks among their recipients in Kazakhstan. I next examine how such relationships and discourses about them arise to produce associations based on emotion work and amity.
The communal experience of intimate relations

As most people with close kin and family in Germany are in the present more likely to remain in Kazakhstan than those in the past, a common idiom focusing on the intimate nature of the relationships abroad and strategies to maintain them has increasingly replaced those indicating the desire simply to move west. I refer to this mode of expression as the “idiom of intimacy,” as it powerfully accentuates the collective experiences its users share. The strength of these expressions related to long-distance amity rests on their familiarity and accessibility for most members of the public in northern Kazakhstan and therefore represents a topic in which many people are conversant. The consistent features and general accessibility of the idiom of intimacy about friends and family abroad is noteworthy, because it illustrates how individuals in northern Kazakhstan undertake emotion work to establish amity with others whose closest kin have likewise left for “greener pastures” in Russia and elsewhere in Europe. A discussion in which I took part with employees of the Sherbakti library exemplifies some key characteristics of this familiar idiom.

In the afternoons, I often shared tea with the library’s staff, whose members constituted a typical mix of post-Soviet ethnicities. On one occasion, three Ukrainian women, two Russian women, and one Kazakh man comprised the group relaxing around the tea table. Once the library employees reached the topic of grandchildren (three members of the group are grandmothers) they eventually transitioned to identifying and discussing their closest intimate relations in Germany. Two of the Ukrainian women have children and grandchildren living in Germany. The other Ukrainian woman and the Kazakh man have no close kin there, but both have several close friends and associates who do (including their library colleagues). One of the Russians has a maternal German grandmother, and therefore several maternal cousins, aunts, and uncles living
in Germany. The other Russian’s mother-in-law is German, and her own children have
unsuccessfully attempted to move to Germany. Every individual present possessed a thorough
familiarity with the idiom of intimacy about German relations and could substantively participate
in the conversation.

Having observed and participated in several similar conversations in villages and urban
centers in northern Kazakhstan and neighboring regions of southwestern Siberia, I argue that
discussions among villagers about intimate relations in Germany are pervasive in this community
and countless others. For Kazakhstaniis living in communities where these intimate relations are
common, stories that people tell about friends and relatives in Germany share several
characteristics and follow particular structural patterns relying on a stock of conventional details.
These expressions might include voicing concern for grandchildren who haven’t learned to speak
Russian, wonder at the levels of consumption and leisure that relatives and friends in Germany
have attained, and remorse about loved ones whom they may never see again. Such talk is often
filled with comparisons to daily life in Kazakhstan and material concerns regarding employment,
the prices of consumer goods, the accessibility and quality of health care, the benefits provided
in pensions, and the differences in social security programs. In this way, such representations of
life “over there” foreground the challenges and struggles of daily life in Kazakhstan that
community members collectively share.

In her discussion of urban Russians coping with economic hardships in the 1990s, Nancy
Ries argues that spontaneous conversational expressions of familiarity are a primary mechanism
by which people shape and maintain ideologies and cultural stances. As individuals engage in
familiar forms of talk, they reproduce cultural identities and practices associated with those
identities (Ries 1997: 3-4, 25). Similarly, villagers with intimate relations in Germany often extol
their identities as those who have remained in Kazakhstan compared to family and friends who have left by declaring themselves, often jokingly, “patriots.” Those who evoke this notion of “patriotism,” however, do not intended to express allegiance to the Kazakhstani state, but rather to a Soviet historical identity grounded in Russian language, socialist culture, and fond memories of life in the USSR. The expression of familiarity related to intimates in Germany implies the emotion work that those remaining in Kazakhstan undertake as they cope with their comparably scarce material conditions at home while searching for new sources of amity they previously shared with departed loved ones. In other words, the shared experience of intimates abroad offers new possibilities for intimacy between those remaining behind.

**The idiom of intimacy as reaction and resistance to “kazakhification”**

Through my research period in Kazakhstan, I observed informal communication networks of people bonded through having intimates in Germany and sharing the idiom indicating ambivalence about their minority status vis-à-vis the titular Kazakhs. Talk about intimates in Germany as an expressive device has also produced a moral community incorporating those who share these intimacies and excluding others who do not. In this way, the idiom of intimacy may serve as a means to articulate resistance to kazakhification and the growing inequalities to which non-Kazakhs perceive themselves subject. Membership in these “communities of expression” may also generate material benefits and opportunities for their members. Speaking of intimacies with people in Germany as a community and potential form of resistance arises specifically in the context of a Kazakh population that has recently arrived into villages and urban centers in northern Kazakhstan from abroad and the southern regions of the state. The introduction of a new population of Kazakhs has materialized thanks to the
Kazakhstani government’s concern about its demographic situation shortly after becoming an independent state.

In the early 1990s, ethnic Kazakhs found themselves a numerical minority in Kazakhstan provoking government-based initiatives to address the imbalance. Authorities invited ethnic Kazakhs to move to Kazakhstan and funded their resettlement (Brill Olcott 1995: 290). This project focused on those Kazakhs who had left (or whose parents or grandparents left) Kazakhstan in the 1920s and 30s for neighboring republics as well as China, Mongolia, Afghanistan, Iran, or beyond. The policy also aimed to attract Kazakhs who found themselves citizens of other former republics after the breakup of the Soviet Union. Several million Kazakhs have since migrated to Kazakhstan facilitating an influx into the formerly dominated Russian, or at least European, villages and urban centers in northern Kazakhstan (Dave 2007: 77). In addition, Kazakhstani authorities have imported ethnic Kazakh political cadres into villages to serve in regional and local political posts. This new Kazakh population has begun to occupy the homes that long-time villagers’ friends and relatives now living in Germany abandoned.

From the perspective of much of the European population, the introduction of a larger Kazakh population into their towns and villages has contributed to rising economic inequalities, as local non-Kazakhs are barred from certain employment opportunities in the local public sector (Dave 2007: 151-52). In Sherbakti, and other locales I visited, the bulk of these new Kazakhs are Russian-speaking former Soviet citizens from other regions of the former Soviet Union. Others, however, migrated to Kazakhstan from China and Mongolia and upon arrival were less conversant or completely lacked fluency in Russian. It is important to note that many Kazakhs in northern Kazakhstan are extremely localized, having strong relationships with non-Kazakhs living in their towns and villages. Some even possess fluency with the idiom involved with
intimate relations in Germany. With this variability of relationships and allegiances, the influx of new Kazakhs has produced a spectrum of accessibility to the social networks based on intimate relationships. It has also further necessitated the civic nation-building discourse to counter the impression of Kazakh nationalism the new population implies. After spending time with several of these new Kazakhs as well as the Kazakhs who had lived in northern Kazakhstan for most or all of their lives, I conceptualized a spectrum of familiarity and usability with the expression of intimacy for people with close relations in Germany.

The case of Rustam Bekov nicely illustrates the side of this spectrum representing lack of facility over the idiom of intimacy and hence inaccessibility to the network. The house in which I resided in Sharbakti was for sale, as its previous occupants had vacated in order to move to Germany. I met Rustam and his family while they were house hunting and were visiting my residence to consider purchasing it. The Bekovs had moved to Sharbakti from Karakalpakstan (a region in Uzbekistan) a few months after I arrived. Rustam’s family had resided for generations in the Aral Sea region, eventually settling in a village in Karakalpakstan during the Soviet Union’s push to sedentarize its pastoral nomads and completely collectivize the population in the 1930s. In the post-Soviet period, as part of a national initiative to bolster the ethnic Kazakh population in Kazakhstan, President Nazarbayev formally invited all ethnic Kazakhs residing in other countries to relocate in the “national homeland.” As an incentive to move to Kazakhstan, the state provided Rustam with a $2,000 stipend for each member of his family. When I met him, Rustam and his family lived in a house in Sherbakti that they had purchased with the stipend money. After a few months, the Bekovs felt the house was too small for their needs and eventually began searching for a new home. A few months later, Rustam landed a job with a construction company in Pavlodar, and he was considering a move to the city. During my
research, I met several ethnic Kazakhs who had similarly moved to northern Kazakhstan from countries varying from Mongolia and China to Turkmenistan and Russia.

I shared acquaintanceship with several other non-localized Kazakhs, most of whom were from places in Kazakhstan that had significantly smaller European, and especially German, populations. Oblast officials had recently settled some of these acquaintances in Sherbakti to administer the rayon. The local Akim is an example of a high-ranking figure positioned outside the network of intimate relations in Sherbakti. Another is his assistant, Gulnara Dzhakesheva, a person with whom I shared a friendly relationship. Gulnara and her husband moved to Sherbakti so that she could serve as the Akim’s assistant there. She and her husband grew up in villages near the Caspian Sea in the Mangistau Oblast and had resided in Sherbakti for approximately five years before I arrived. Although Gulnara possesses a few acquaintances who moved to Germany, none of them represented a close relationship, providing her with a very low fluency with the discourse based on those relations.

The social experience of Gulnara and Rustam in Sherbakti differs sharply from other more “localized” Kazakhs. Kanat Dzhusupov and his wife Zagipa are artists and became good friends of mine during my stay in Sharbakti. Compared to Gulnara and Rustam, the Dzhusupovs are localized in northern Kazakhstan as they possess membership in the network of intimate relations stretching all the way to Germany. Both Kanat and Zagipa are originally from the Semipalatinsk Oblast and met at the university there. After finishing college, they relocated to a village in the Pavlodar Oblast, taking jobs as cultural workers. During perestroika, both lost their jobs in the village, but found positions in Sherbakti (Kanat in the library and Zagipa as a dance instructor and choreographer for the Rainbow Center and House of Culture). Having lived in
ethnically mixed villages in northern Kazakhstan for most of their adult lives, Kanat and Zagipa have numerous friends residing in Germany, some of whom are Kazakh, German, and Russian.

Similar to Kanat and Zagipa, Zoya Syetakhmyetova grew up in a village in the Semipalatinsk Oblast, surrounded by numerous German families. She moved to Sherbakti with her husband before perestroika to work in the village’s state farm (sovkhоз). Although she is an ethnic Kazakh, when she arrived in Sherbakti, Zoya couldn’t speak her native tongue, as she had primarily grown up around Russian-speaking Ukrainians and Germans. When she first settled in the village, she established her closest relationships with other European Russian-speakers (the leader of the Ukrainian Center I referenced in chapter five, Valentina Del’, is one of her oldest and dearest friends). Zoya has numerous close friends of various ethnic backgrounds currently residing in Germany with whom she has maintained contact. Through the years, she has also developed friendships with ethnic Kazakhs and learned to speak the Kazakh language fluently (with which she and her family occasionally and casually conversed when I visited their home). Zoya is also the leader of the Sherbakti branch of the League of Women Muslims, which maintains status along with the rayon’s other cultural centers as a member organization of the filial of the Small Assembly of the Peoples of Kazakhstan.

An important factor distinguishing new Kazakhs from the long-time population in northern villages like Sherbakti, therefore, is the ability to engage in expressions of intimacy with kin and friends in Germany – a predilection for which incoming Kazakhs are not equipped. This idiom of intimacy for the slowly, but surely, disempowered non-Kazakh population represents a form of challenge to the perceived irrationalism of state projects that appear to promote a kazakhification of society, especially as the narratives about family and friends in Germany highlight stories of those who have “escaped” the economically unstable post-socialist
state for a “civilized western utopia.” I found that those more localized Kazakhs, such as Kanat and Zoya, were equipped to engage in the idiom over cups of tea with work colleagues focusing on intimate relations in Germany, which engendered a sense of trust and intimacy among those who likewise shared these linkages. While Kanat and Zoya held membership in this network and could engage with it conversationally, a tension certainly existed where refraining from certain subjects was necessary, such as the perceived inequalities that non-Kazakhs have experienced since perestroika. Kanat and Zoya thus held a place somewhere near the middle of the spectrum in terms of their capacity to fully immerse into the community of intimacy. Although they are lifelong residents of mostly Europeanized northern Kazakhstan and maintain amity with both friends and relatives in Germany and non-Kazakhs in Sherbakti, addressing the subject of kazakhification with them might appear offensive.

Some ethnic Kazakhs within the intimacy network were equipped to engage at the more critical level of its idiom, as they felt a closer association with the Soviet Union and the russified internationalist culture it promoted. These folks yearned for a return to the Union when international borders with Russia and Uzbekistan were absent, economic conditions were brighter (or at least more palatable than at present), and the pressure to become more culturally Kazakh was less prevalent. Ina Karabaeva is a prime example of this positionality. Ina is related to Valery through marriage (Valery’s wife and Ina’s mother are sisters). She has numerous relatives living in Germany, with some of whom she maintains close contact. Ina’s father is Kazakh and her mother is Russian, and through an ambivalent sense of patrilineality she identified officially as Kazakh on her passport. She is monolingual, speaking only Russian.

138 In one instance, Ina expressed to me, “I think a person’s natsional’nost’ comes from the father’s side of the family.”
and has little interest in learning Kazakh, as Ina’s father and his Kazakh relatives are either unable to speak the language or speak it infrequently around her. Ina is strongly reluctant to identify with any ethnic group, claiming that she considers herself a Soviet and wishes the Russian Federation and Kazakhstan were politically unified. Ina represents the opposite side of the spectrum of ethnic Kazakhs from Rustam, acting among those who fit snugly into the network of intimate relations with close friends and family members in Germany. As a result, Ina can comfortably dive into the idiom of intimacy at the level of voicing disappointment and concern for the kazakhification she observes taking place in her village.

The reason I have employed this description of ethnic Kazakhs and the spectrum of their level of accessibility to the community of intimacy is twofold. First, I seek to represent the perspective of some members of the titular majority of Kazakhstan, particularly those who feel ambivalence about political attempts to kazakhify the institutions of the state. I also wish to illustrate the tremendous cultural complexity existing among both Kazakhs and non-Kazakhs. Intimate relationships existing between individuals generally possess a multitude of contingencies beyond concepts such as natsional’nost’ and biological relatedness. My spectrum of accessibility to the community of intimacy suggests that although these are important factors for relationships and social networks, there are many other factors at play. These range from length of residence in a village or urban neighborhood, nostalgia for former political and economic practices, occupation, and generation. Therefore, the basis of these intimate relationships and networks is what Schatz refers to as “subethnic,” but they have not explicitly arisen through a sense of biological relatedness upon which his study relies. Rather, the backbone of the closest of these relationships is mutual amity, and their members have often established them through undertaking emotion work.
My use of “social network” to classify how individuals cluster into broader communities possessing various commonalities might suggest the formation of identity-based groupness. My intent, however, with this line of inquiry is not to establish a new identity category for analysis based on the collective sharing of a popular idiom of intimacy. Rather, I aim to consider these relationships in a manner that emphasizes their contingent and variable natures, but avoid the reductive exercise of suggesting a coalescence into a cohesive identity group across northern Kazakhstan. Therefore, this phenomenon I have chosen to identify as network creation and maintenance around a particular idiom lends itself poorly to quantification. This is because these networks can at times be concealable and private and at others explicitly public.\textsuperscript{139} With the frequency of migration between and out of communities, the networks can often cease to exist, but might spontaneously reemerge within or outside the same villages and towns. I also want to be clear about my personal ambivalence regarding the terms and concepts I employ in my analysis. I identify the social interactions I observed during my research in terms I have chosen with concepts I have imposed, and as such, much of what I represent are abstractions of my subjects’ realities. Nonetheless, I do believe my observations and conceptual analyses of them demonstrate a trend of socialization that is emotionally, economically, and politically meaningful in the lives of many residing in northern Kazakhstan.

Following Brubaker and Cooper’s concern about conceptualizing all experiences of commonality in the idiom of identity, the phenomenon to which I refer goes beyond categories of identity or groups, but relates much more strongly to “affinity of affiliation, commonality or connectedness to particular others…,” but lacking a sense of collectivity in relation to some constative other. In this sense, “commonality” signifies the sharing of some common attribute

\textsuperscript{139} I attribute these points to a similar argument Schatz makes about Kazakh clans (2004: 109).
and “connectedness” the relational ties that link people together (Brubaker and Cooper 2000: 19). This sense of commonality and connectedness engender what Max Weber called Zusammengehörigkeitsgefühl – a feeling of belonging together contingent upon the common experience of events, socioeconomic transitions, and prevailing discursive frames (Brubaker and Cooper 2000: 20). In his description of social network creation and maintenance, Schatz posits that many networks form exclusively for the purpose of gaining access to and exchanging scarce goods (Schatz 2004: 97). I argue that the forces of commonality and connectedness Brubaker and Cooper describe likewise provide the environment for the rise of social networks that offer tools for their members to make sense of everyday reality, experience support from and affinity with others, and resist the kazakhification they sense and the distress it invites. For some, the network of relations this zusammengehörigkeitsgefühl creates also provides opportunities to gain material benefits and opportunities. In order to contextualize the possible form and function of the social networks forged through the discourse of intimates in Germany and how they might support a productive reaction to kazakhification, I illustrate a few relationships constituting the network fashioned among Ina and her close friend Roza Mylnikova.

When I first met them, Roza and Ina were in their mid-twenties and had recently graduated from the Pavlodar State University. Ina managed a family-owned store in the village and Roza worked as an administrator for the rayon’s sanitation department. Roza’s parents were Tatar and Russian (Roza claimed Tatar on her passport) – she has no relatives residing in Germany, but several childhood friends. As a public employee, Roza felt some pressure from higher administrators regarding her inability to speak Kazakh. Given her enthusiasm for studying languages and culture, Roza was happy to concede to the administrative request that public employees study the language. At the same time, she expressed dissatisfaction with her job and
her perceived inability to advance to a position of more responsibility and authority. Although she never expressed active resistance to kazakhification, she acknowledged that her cultural profile and russified identity was a constraint to her career aspirations in Kazakhstan. For this reason, Roza was attempting to move to Germany by acquiring a student visa for graduate study in hydrology. Roza spoke German at the intermediate level, which she learned from lessons at the village’s German Center as a teenager and rigorous language courses later at university. Roza was also interested in learning about the culture of her Tatar roots, but the intermittent activity of the village’s Tatar Center frustrated her efforts. Later, Roza and Ina moved to Pavlodar, where she joined the Tatar National Cultural Center there and began taking German language courses at the Goethe Institute. I once asked Roza why she did not take the German language courses offered free at the Rebirth Center in Pavlodar, rather than paying for them at the Goethe Institute. She was concerned that the level of instruction would be below her ability, since some of the language instructors took German courses with her at the university. Although Roza never explicitly expressed her concerns with kazakhification, I believe her frustration regarding career mobility and attempts to relocate to Germany tacitly demonstrate them. Roza is a member of the community of intimacy, and I describe below how she has effectively employed it, particularly through her relationship with Ina, to pursue her career objectives.

Ina has assembled a host of friends and family members with whom she can comfortably engage the idiom related to her connections to Germany, concern with kazakhification, and ambivalence over her citizenship. I argue that this collection of individuals with whom Ina might express this represents a social network of intimates from which she might draw both empathy and material resources. Like Schatz’s clan formations, the network I identify here represents merely one of several overlapping social complexes and involves tremendous fluidity and low
exclusivity of relationships compared to other groups contingent upon biological relatedness and cultural identity (Schatz 2004: 97). Therefore, Ina’s network comprises a collection of friends, acquaintances, and blood relatives, who might move into and out of the network depending upon emigration, levels of amity, and instances of personal conflict. All of those taking part in the network must at least possess a degree of fluency over the idiom associated with intimates in Germany. In order to demonstrate the instrumentality of the network relations of which Ina is a part, I illustrate some network relationships below.

Having spent significant time in Sharbakti’s German Center, possessing several childhood friends currently living in Germany, and harboring the desire to move there for graduate school, Roza maintains a high fluency in the idiom of intimacy and represents a primary member of Ina’s related social network. Another outlet for Ina’s expressiveness is her Russian uncle Valery. A significant proportion of Valery’s family resides in Germany, including his sister Lyudmila, a granddaughter, and several nieces and nephews. Valery gains substantial benefits from these relations, especially through his sister. Lyudmila has been a consistent source of material resources for Valery and his nuclear family, not only providing cash remittances, but also arranging for his son’s admittance into an alcoholic rehabilitation center in Pavlodar. Although Roza’s acquaintances in Germany are childhood friends with whom she has not maintained contact, people in Germany do represent a potential resource for her through her place in Ina’s network. Given that Ina and Valery’s son Pavel are cousins, Ina was close with Pavel’s ex-wife Tatiana before she moved to Germany with her second husband (of German descent) and Pavel’s son. Through the years since Tatiana departed for Germany, Ina has maintained contact with her. Tatiana has also connected with Roza, and through Ina’s influence, Tatiana committed to help get Roza settled in Germany if she gets her student visa. Material
benefits aside, Ina may safely express her concerns about kazakhification and dissatisfaction with the political circumstances in the Republic of Kazakhstan with all of her network members.

The civic nation-building discourse and the more localized, idiom of intimacy I reference in this chapter are at times complimentary and at times competitive. State-supported civic nation-building occasionally appears incongruous with the lives of non-Kazakhs in Kazakhstan, as the ethnicness upon which it depends is often massively out of sync with the pressures and patterns of everyday life. However, given its technique of promoting equity and harmony, the discourse for the most part offers an attractive message. For these reasons, any passivity or inaction afforded the civic nation-building discourse on the part of non-Kazakhs is not a form of “passive resistance (James Scott 1987: 31).” Certainly, threatening state policy abounds for non-Kazakhs (as well as some ethnic Kazakhs) sensitive to kazakhification, yet civic nation-building discourse and its subsequent policies are not the culprits of these sensitivities. What the idiom prevalent among intimates like Ina, Roza, and their associates often resists is the appearance of social equity among all Kazakhstani citizens, which civic nation-building discourse represents, but the perceived kazakhification contradicts.

People in northern Kazakhstan sometimes employ the expressions of intimacy to voice resistance, not to the state’s attempts at civic nation-building, but to the hollowness of its discourse and ineffectual outcomes of its policies and programs. Thus, the resistances I observed are not the acts of foot dragging and false compliance, but intimate speech acts and the attempts at emigration that expose the spuriousness of civic nation-building and the professional and economic limitations that some within the networks perceive public kazakhification to engender. Yet, amidst these resistances to the outcomes of civic nation-building, there remains an ambivalent dependence upon its discourse, the associated actors, and the activities they sponsor.
For example, I have observed the German Center leader, Lydia Ableeva, publicly and privately praise the merits of the discourse. Yet, her ability to “quit” the Rainbow Center and thereby sever local state control from her actions and the management of the German Center was an open, albeit unspoken, defiance of Kazakhstani civic nation-building.¹⁴⁰ This is so inasmuch as the functioning of the *filial* of the Small Assembly of the Peoples of Kazakhstan, to which Ableeva belongs, largely depends upon her concessions to the village Akim (who is the executive of the *filial*). Given that Ableeva became independent from this public institution (upon which others depend for material assistance), she became free to choose whether to comply with the Akim’s requests regarding the German Center, and she often does.

Ableeva’s behavior reflects Zizek’s notion that actual social relations between people mask ideology’s reality. Thus, personal relationships compel individuals to continue “doing things” associated with a discourse, including those who do not take its ideology seriously (Zizek 1989: 26-29, 32-33). This awareness of ideology combined with the material practicalities of the everyday and emotional reliance upon one’s intimate relations instills tremendous complexities concerning how individuals behave in the context of social life. Hence, Maria can unambiguously criticize civic nation-building with a remark regarding a recent cultural festival where “Kazakh traditions are taking over, and *nash* European culture has been forgotten,” but enthusiastically participate in the festival. My neighbor Evgeniy may also disassociate himself from civic nation-building discourse, participate in the activities of the German center (an act of compliance with the discourse), and undertake that activity as a preparatory step in moving to Germany (a tacit act of resistance). Amidst these touch points of social ambivalence toward public discourse, more intimate expressions flourish that serve to connect, comfort, and support.

¹⁴⁰ See page 146 for a description of Ableeva “quitting” the Rainbow Center.
The language of policy and the policy of language

Ultimately, the expressions that fashion informal and unstable modes of non-biological intimacy frustrate the underlying objective of civic nation-building to create an imagined community of Kazakhstani citizens. This has much to do with the authorities’ conceptual approach to instilling a sense of collective citizenship. A primary characteristic differentiating Kazakhstan’s civic nation-building discourse from the Soviet socialist discourse that preceded it is the tenet authorities employ to consolidate the population into a unified, Kazakhstani polity.

For Soviet socialism, the unifying concept was the labor process, which became an all-encompassing aspect of people’s lives in the USSR. Through the everyday experience of working alongside comrades in labor brigades, participating in socialist competitions, and frequent involvement with a myriad of leisure activities inherently associated with official institutions of labor, Soviet authorities largely succeeded in aligning people’s identity with the employer state. In spite of the many former Soviet concepts, practices, symbols, and institutions Kazakhstani authorities have incorporated into their civic nation-building discourse and practices, the state has largely failed to consolidate its citizenry into a polity imagining itself as a single civic national community. I would argue that in addition to reliance on networks of non-biological intimacy, a leading factor frustrating Kazakhstan’s success in this regard is the unifying principle underlying its discourse – the state language policy.

Kazakhstan’s language policy coincides with the liberal, internationalist approach to which Soviet discourse concerning its nationalities’ policies always aspired. Kazakhstan maintains three official national languages, including Kazakh, Russian, and English. Nazarbayev first introduced this policy in 2008, which he identified as the “Trinity of Languages” project to “improve the quality of Kazakh language instruction, as the state language that unites our society
As a coda to my research stay in Kazakhstan, I taught English in Kazakh-language secondary schools in Pavlodar. During this period, I often heard fellow teachers and school administrators emphatically express Nazarbayev’s aspirations for the entire population to be fluently trilingual. Kazakhstan’s language policy states that Kazakh is to serve as the primary language of the state, Russian as the language of interethnic communication, and English as an integrative tool into the global economy and society (Nazarbayev 2011). The stated objective of the language policy, however, is to preserve the languages of all ethnic groups in Kazakhstan and ensure the extensive use of Kazakh as a means to strengthen national unity (Baiteliyeva 2015).

My work as an English language instructor among a population of Kazakhstani citizens in the more russified, northern reaches of the state was an instructive exercise, as it demonstrated the tremendous ambiguity over the precepts of Kazakhstan’s language policy and the practical limitations on its prescribed outcomes. My year of experiences accumulated in these schools most certainly represents an entirely separate dissertation delving into the outcomes of education policy in post-Soviet Central Asia. In relation to my current concerns, I informally asked students, teachers, and administrators to discuss their perceptions of the language policy and its fundamental goals. What I found was a spectrum of attitudes regarding the prospect of Kazakh to supplant Russian as the majority language of the state (even among non-Kazakhs) and English becoming a prominent aspect of the national education system.

On the topic of Kazakh serving as a tool for national unification, the majority of people with whom I addressed the topic expressed ambivalence. For most, the notion that the heavily russified northern Kazakhstanis would learn to speak Kazakh fluently (even among the younger generations) and facilitate an imagined community of multiethnic Kazakhstanis seemed an unlikelihood. I suggest that implicit in this ambiguity is the lack of a palpable process – the glue
fomenting common experience within the bounds of the state – for unifying the population as the labor process was for Soviet citizens. Therefore, given the large number of Kazakhstani citizens (including ethnic Kazakhs) who resist the tenets and requirements of Kazakhstan’s language policy, the policy’s chances of serving as a unifying agent harbor very little chance of success.

The Nazarbayev regime clearly understands the futility of creating an imagined national community through the use of the Kazakh language and has accordingly employed more flexibility in its nation-building discourse (Kudaibergenova 2016a). Nazarbayev has lately placed a great deal of emphasis on modern economic development and Kazakhstan’s participation in the global community, intermingling those priorities into the nation-building discourse. The nature of the communities I have illuminated throughout this chapter suggests the potential effectiveness of his approach. The expressions of intimacy powerfully resonate with numerous people in northern Kazakhstan, creating robust bonds between individuals and their social networks. The power of common experiences and values existing among people with close family and friends in Germany largely forms and buttresses those bonds. Nazarbayev’s recent emphasis on internationalism and liberal economic development nicely complements the core values and processes present within this discursive community, potentially acting as a more stable site for civic nation-building. As a conclusion to this dissertation, I return to this discussion of discursive flexibility and consider some current political, economic, and social trends in Kazakhstan and Russia, speculating on new conceptual directions civic nation-building may take in the states’ efforts to better consolidate their citizens.
Chapter 7  
Conclusion: Complementing Civic Nation-Building in the Pursuit of a State Monoculture

**Civic nation-building, social complexity, and discursive flexibility**

On a June day a few weeks before departing from Sharbakti, I received a surprising communication while typing up some interview notes in the village’s library. My friend Kanat handed me a piece of paper, indicating it contained a telephone message left by an official from the Pavlodar Ministry of Education. The message was simply a woman’s name and a telephone number. Kanat said the person called the library searching for me, and was interested in discussing a job with the Oblast’s school district as a social science teacher. Intrigued with the prospect of teaching high school in Kazakhstan, I called the official, who made an appointment for me to meet at her office in Pavlodar City. During our meeting, the official described a new national program, which President Nazarbayev had inspired, inviting native English speakers to Kazakhstan to provide English instruction at the secondary school-level. The purpose of the program, according to the literature she provided, was to train Kazakh youth to be globally competitive. The President reasoned that Kazakh citizens possessing fluency in English could either capture jobs in the global marketplace or successfully enter into higher education in the West to get training for such. Enticed with the surprisingly large salary the Ministry of Education was prepared to offer me, I chose to remain and throw my lot in with the President’s plans to internationalize the state.

This emphasis on exposure to the West in Kazakhstan as an educational and economic development strategy is curious, especially compared to attitudes regarding the West currently prevalent in Kazakhstan’s closest ally and greatest friend, Russia. In examining the styles of civic nation-building the two countries undertake, I find presidential initiatives illustrative of their general directions. While President Nazarbayev is courting western institutions and
personnel (such as me), to take part in Kazakhstan’s economic and intellectual development, a
great deal of Russia’s nationalist discourse emerging from Putin and the Kremlin relies upon the
rejection of the West, the United States, and liberal values. Speaking to this approach, the
journalist Peter Pomerantsev suggests Putin’s primary discursive aim is to define Russia as an
equal-sized alternative to the West, similar to the foil that democracy and capitalism provided for
communism. Ironically, Russian authorities communicate their opposition to the West on the
platforms of Western advertising, reliant upon the success of television formats purchased from
Western producers (Pomerantsev 2015). For Nazarbayev in Kazakhstan, nationalizing discourse
is less about promoting the country’s supremacy vis-à-vis the West and more about placating
both the Russian-speaking and Kazakh populations with promises of interethnic unity, economic
prosperity, and Kazakh-language promotion (Kudaibergenova 2016a).

I had perceived my role as a native English teacher to be a supportive component of
Kazakhstan’s civic nation-building discourse through the program’s adherence to the values of
internationalism (although my intent was by no means to express a political objective or
statement). As I illustrate below, I experienced the inadequacies and ultimate failure of the
English-teaching program, through its subjugation to the financial interests of government
employees, private language school directors, and entrepreneurial-minded intermediaries. I
likewise encountered the mixed reception with which the multiethnic public in Kazakhstan
treated civic nation-building and its agents affiliated with the Assembly of the Peoples of
Kazakhstan. As Diana Kudaibergenova has shown, certain doctrines of Kazakhstani civic
nationality have also incited dissatisfaction among the Kazakh national-patriotic faithful
(Kudaibergenova 2016a). In the case of the Russian Federation, civic nation-building discourse
has not exactly failed, since the discourse exists and the regime reproduces it for hegemonic
political purposes, as I have shown in chapter four (an illustration of the reproduction of the discourse, for example, is the maintenance of ethnic territories). However, the political center applies very little attention to empowering the discourse through actual policy. Reflecting back to the period of my research and the prominent political discourses and practices at play then versus those that leaders are currently undertaking, I have observed a certain discursive flexibility that has allowed political leaders to maintain their adherence to the principles of civic nation-building, while pursuing other interests more geopolitical in nature.

In the face of these transformations, what remains at stake for Russia and Kazakhstan is the establishment of a common political idiom and the ideological assumptions upon which the idiom rests to enfranchise their entire multiethnic populations.141 Ideally, this common idiom would incorporate itself into the shared public consciousness, forming a monocultural political community similar to how the discourse and practice of socialism worked to bind Soviet people to the state. I want to make clear that this notion of “monoculture” is not an absolute value that states achieve among their citizens, as voices and social forces always exist to repel any established national identity. As much as I have touted the relative success of Soviet nationalities policy in unifying a culturally disparate population into one socialist imagined community, ultimately the system failed to sustain itself. Clearly, civic nation-building has not enjoyed the success of Soviet discourse and practice as tools of reference for imagining common citizenship among the non-titular public and Russia and Kazakhstan.

Even as authorities have maintained civic nation-building discourses, there are reasons for their ineffectiveness in meeting their objectives. Laura Adams argues that one of the challenges of inheriting discourses (which Russia and Kazakhstan arguably did from the Soviet

141 I borrow this particular phrasing from Laura Adams (2010: 146).
Union in the case of civic nation-building) is the commitment on the part of elites to the ideologies powering them (Adams 2010: 5). According to Juan Linz, when a dedicated ideology is absent from the nationalizing discourse, the state’s capacity to mobilize its citizens to establish an identification with it is constrained (Linz 2000: 164). It is also important to remember that the political authority requires a commonly accepted cultural frame to advance its claims (Geertz 1983: 143). Hence, any ideology serving as the content for a nation-building discourse must offer everyday relevance (as socialism had) for those whom the state might mobilize as citizens. What the civic nation-building actually offers its multiethnic public is not necessarily everyday relevance but ethnicness, in terms of both descriptive discourse and the material things I identify at length in these chapters. In the current political moment, ethnicness is not enough, especially compared to the sense of sovietness that the USSR’s citizens experienced in practical, reifying ways nearly every day of their socialist lives. As I have suggested, the Soviet identity persists among Kazakhstanis and residents of the Russian Federation as a tangible quality factoring into how these people value their current state citizenship.

This dissertation has portrayed these attempts of social inclusion in the face of tremendous economic and political limitations, transformations, and complexities. My work has offered a thorough illustration of civic nation-building in the post-Soviet world and its implications on how diverse groups and individuals understand and employ concepts and things related to ethnic culture. In undertaking this task, I have demonstrated conceptually and practically the process of civic nation-building in terms of how it is theorized, legislated, translated into discourse, and employed in the public. I have also exemplified in detail the manner by which the public engages the efforts of civic nation-building. My arguments offer an alternative to Brubaker et al.’s understandings of the more cognitive nature of ethnicity. In the
cases I illustrate, ethnicity is very much a conscious and rational choice undertaken at certain times and in certain places that are discursively deemed ethnic. What makes these instances significant is the social complexity when they occur, because of which I argue that ethnicity and the civic nation-building discourse that supports it are not simply a reflection of cultural construction through inventing and imposing tradition. What they do reflect is a synthesis of familiarity, habit, and identification from previous social configurations with new political structures and leadership desperately attempting to harness the good will of a diverse and potentially volatile public.

In the midst of these forces, I show how the personal relationships with intimates in Germany represent a significant pull on the sensibilities of the northern Kazakhstani communities I studied. These multinational relationships establish a common idiom of experience for the people who share them in northern Kazakhstan. I don’t mean to suggest that these intimate relationships and local social connectedness built around them have outcompeted civic nation-building discourse for the allegiance of non-Kazakhs. Rather, they demonstrate an additional layer of complexity to which local leaders must adjust as they undertake the pursuit of strengthening their non-titular public’s adherence to citizenship. The challenges of such social complexity posed to civic nation-building in Russia and Kazakhstan have influenced a certain discursive flexibility to employ complementary discourses (in the case of Russia), or the development of new complements (in Kazakhstan) to achieve the desired sense of a state monoculture. As a coda to this dissertation, I examine how authorities in Russia and Kazakhstan have undertaken this flexibility to demonstrate the breadth of civic nation-building’s evolution from the period during and subsequent to my research there. I begin this examination by returning to my experiences teaching English in Kazakhstan.
Kazakhstan’s national discourses and the West

After meeting with the official from Pavlodar’s education ministry, I visited with the administrative staff of a few schools in the city designated as targeted institutions for the President’s English language-teaching project. The school directors were initially enthusiastic with the idea. I visited their schools and met with instructors, as I planned the curriculum for English-based social sciences courses for second language learners. Several weeks later, I received a call from my contact at the Education Ministry, who explained the initial plan to place me as a social science teacher had changed. Apparently, the legal logistics of hiring foreign educators to teach in public institutions was insurmountable for the mid-level bureaucrats charged with managing the presidential program. Rather than attempting to navigate through prescribed institutional regulations necessary to hire foreigners, such as requiring apostille stamps attached to educational diplomas and transcripts, or doling out the bribes necessary to have such standards overlooked, the education personnel opted to outsource the process.

At the time, private, for-profit schools offering English-language instruction were popping up throughout the countries of the former Soviet Union, and Kazakhstan was no exception with approximately a dozen schools operating in Pavlodar alone. Having perceived the inability to legalize the work of prospective foreign language teachers, the Oblast governments (which state-level authorities tasked with managing the project) opted to privatize the program. In doing so, they turned the operation over to the private schools to undertake the work of providing work visas for the teachers, as well as advertise the venture and recruit foreign teachers from English-speaking countries. This initiative offered a fascinating portrait of capitalistic forces within a highly bureaucratic and authoritarian regime that relies upon corruption necessary to circumvent policy and achieve mandated outcomes. Using their
relationships with officials within the Education Ministry, the owners of these language schools (many of whom previously worked for the Ministry) vied for lucrative contracts to recruit and employ English teachers for the presidential program. In effect, the ministries gave the large salaries the program was prepared to offer foreign teachers to the language schools for recruitment and legalization, leaving it to the schools themselves to negotiate the teachers’ salaries. With this structure established, my contact at the Education Ministry put me in touch with Meruyert Shikova, the owner of the Interteach Language School in Pavlodar.

The presidential English language program to which I have referred is part of a much grander plan for the political, economic, and social development of Kazakhstan officially entitled, “The Strategy for development of the Republic of Kazakhstan until the year 2030” (Nazarbayev 1997). Deeply nested within the official description of the Strategy lie the precepts informing the state’s civic nation-building discourse and the subsequent structures and programs the discourse implies. President Nazarbayev initially prescribed the Strategy as part of his October 1997 national address, in which he identified seven “long-term priorities” to facilitate “transforming the country into one of the safest, most stable, ecologically sustained states of the world with a dynamically developing economy” (Nazarbayev 1997). Of those stated priorities, the primary influence on civic nation-building discourse was the second, mandating “domestic political stability and consolidation of the society” (Nazarbayev 1997). A few years later, the Strategy transitioned into shorter programs identified as “Kazakhstan-2010” and “Kazakhstan-2020” for achieving the necessary development at a faster rate than the “Kazakhstan-2030” Strategy implied (Kudaibergenova 2016b). It is within these programs and related doctrines that the maintenance of Kazakhstan’s civic nation-building discourse becomes the most apparent.
While I was conducting my fieldwork in Kazakhstan in 2009, the Assembly of the Peoples of Kazakhstan circulated an initial version of its “Doctrine of National Unity,” which officially confirmed a Kazakhstani civic identity, intent on integrating all of Kazakhstan’s ethnic minorities as citizens of the state. This publication experienced a backlash from various parties, especially opposition groups and Kazakh nationalists who contended that the political elite were attempting to create a false unity, while simultaneously separating the population into Kazakhs and non-Kazakhs. Following this public critique of the civic nation-building discourse, Assembly members amended the Doctrine to confirm that official ethnic identification remained a voluntary choice, and to affirm the state’s dedication to promoting Kazakh language and culture (Kudaibergenova 2016a). When Nazarbayev officially approved the Doctrine in 2010 the term “Kazakhstani” was completely absent from the document and replaced with “Kazakh,” as an identifier for both civic and ethnic identities. In addition, the Doctrine asserts that Kazakh ethnic culture should become the basis for social identity in Kazakhstan (Laruelle 2015). This instance of Kazakh nationalists’ public resistance to the civic nation-building discourse and the state’s conciliation with their position reflects the challenges of resonance with a significant and influential segment of the Kazakhstani citizenry, namely culturally invested ethnic Kazakhs.

In spite of this resistance, the “Kazakhstan-2020” program, published on February 1, 2010, resolutely adheres to the notion of civic nation-building. A segment of the program, entitled “The State program for the development and functioning of languages in the Republic of Kazakhstan,” is illustrative. Aside from the numerous “key tasks” set aside to accomplish the promotion of the Kazakh language, the document also mandates “the functioning of the Russian language,” “preservation of language variety,” and “studying English” (Nazarbayev 1997). To achieve these directives, the policy requires that by 2020, 90% of the adult population speaks
Russian, 90% of all non-Kazakhs engage in native language courses offered in national cultural centers, and 20% of the entire population speaks English (Nazarbayev 1997). Certainly, these are lofty, largely unachievable goals, and officials have accomplished little to translate these policies into behaviors (Fierman 2009).

An essential point for my purposes is the manner by which the state discourse frames the intersection of civic nation-building and the proliferation of comprehensive Kazakh language learning. According to “Kazakhstan-2020,” the Kazakh language is to function as a “major factor” in strengthening national unity through its ability to meet “spiritual-cultural and language needs of the citizens of Kazakhstan” (Nazarbayev 1997). This is a critically significant declaration as it accentuates my discussion regarding language policy in chapter six and the arguments in chapter five regarding Kazakhstan’s need to generate a civic nation-building discourse as powerful as the socialist labor discourse was for the Soviets. The proposal that the Kazakh language serve as the adhesive binding its citizens into a cohesive imagined community appears plainly unviable. Rather than dismissing the President’s rhetoric as illogical, however, O’Beachain and Kevlihan suggest that proposing such mutually contradictory goals demonstrates Nazarbayev’s performance of “strategic ambiguity,” in which he shrewdly employs multiple discourses while simultaneously adjusting himself to the varied audiences his policies target (O’Beachian and Kevlihan 2103).

I agree with this assessment of the President’s position and further propose that a complementary discourse has consequently risen from the ruling apparatus as an analog to civic nation-building, potentially filling the integrative role of socialist labor. Kudaibergenova

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142 Diana Kudaibergenova’s comments regarding the “strategic ambiguity” that state authorities in Kazakhstan employ greatly influence my understanding of the phenomenon (2016a).
identifies her view of the president’s approach in her discussion of a 2012 interview the Central Asian Monitor conducted with Sultan Akimbekov, director of Kazakhstan’s Institute of World Economy and Politics. In his discussion of state ideology, Akimbekov evokes Malaysia and Singapore’s effective management of interethnic stability through economic modernization (Akimbekov 2012). Kudaibergenova argues that Akimbekov’s position on the economy is reflective of the president’s recent use of multiple nation-building discourses to deflect his opponents, representing another instance of “strategic ambiguity” (Kudaibergenova, 2016a). Whether or not Kazakhstan’s current nation-building discourse is as insecure as Kudaibergenova suggests, Nazarbayev has most certainly undertaken a strategic shift in his discursive priorities regarding civic nation-building. In addition to an emphasis on economic development, I propose (and argue further below) that shift is oriented strongly towards internationalism.

The manner by which the state has emphasized policies concerning the economy and its position in the global community within the text of “Kazakhstan-2020” demonstrates the weight assigned to this new discourse. The program proposes “five key directions” towards fulfilling the primary goal of increasing “the national economy’s stability” (Nazarbayev 1997). Buried beneath a detailed elaboration of how these key directions might be accomplished is a description of the program’s proposals for civic nation-building within the realm of education and language acquisition. The positioning of policy descriptions is notable, as it represents a value adjustment in comparison to how authorities ordered the program in 1997. In the initial document outlining “Kazakhstan-2030,” “domestic political stability and consolidation of the society” preceded the section on economic growth (Nazarbayev 1997). This change in priorities obviously casts Kazakhstan’s current economic needs in relief (especially in the context of the global economic recession taking place when authorities crafted the policy). Yet, it also
demonstrates the President’s attempt to integrate multiple (and at times contradictory) discourses as an approach to establishing the desired state monoculture.

“Eurasianism” represents another potential integrative discourse that Kazakhstan’s authorities proposed, but it likewise failed to meet its architects’ expectations. Eurasianist discourse has been a long interest of Nazarbayev, who first proposed the notion of Kazakhstan as the “heart of Asia.” He suggested the state’s geographic and historical positioning represents a site where “European and Asian roots are intertwined” through the country’s absorption of both continents’ best cultures and traditions (Laruelle 2009). The President has also conceptualized Eurasianism as the basis for regional economic and political cooperation. In 1994, he proposed the establishment of a Eurasian Union to resemble the structure of the Commonwealth of Independent States as a platform for regional cooperation among post-Soviet states. When Nazarbayev proposed the Union, other regional leaders more interested in establishing transnational partnerships disconnected from post-Soviet space disapproved of the project. Nazarbayev managed to establish a regional economic union in 2000 with the creation of the Eurasian Economic Community to include Russia, Belarus, Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, and Tajikistan. The Putin administration in Russia further revived the idea of the regionalist concept in 2010 with the proposal of a new Eurasian Economic Union and the subsequent formation of a Customs Union including Russia, Belarus, and Kazakhstan (Laruelle 2009).

Since establishing these structures, many in Kazakhstan have soured on the country’s integration with its larger neighbor, especially in the wake of Russia’s annexation of the Crimean Peninsula and role in the 2014 Ukrainian crisis. The subsequent sanctions levelled by the international community on Russia have had a detrimental impact on Kazakhstan’s economy, leading the state to curtail further regional integration. Aside from the practical and political
dimensions of Eurasianism, Marlene Laruelle argues that its discursive elements lend more credence to the Kazakh nationalist position than to integration, given its inherent critical perception of Russian colonization and its championing of the historical legacy of Turkic cultures (Laruelle 2009). Yet, the position also demonstrates the administration’s inclination toward internationalism, which might also yield a compelling integrative discourse for the country’s non-Kazakh population.

The drive to establish relationships and gain leadership roles in the transnational realm demonstrates another strategy that Kazakhstan’s leaders are using to establish a narrative pertaining to future development and growth, both at home and in the international community. Kazakhstan’s internationalist aspirations have resulted in a developed public relations campaign to present an attractive profile of world leadership to both global and domestic audiences. Such attempts include the previously mentioned successful bids for the 2010 presidency of the Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe, the 2011 chairmanship of the Islamic Cooperation Organization, and a non-permanent seat on the UN Security Council in 2017-2018. These instances of global leadership have solidified Nazarbayev’s narrative of “internationalist Kazakhstan” as an integral aspect of Kazakhstani citizenship and national identity.

This narrative facilitates the idea of a monoculture for which the state has been striving since the mid-1990s in various ways. First, it transcends ethnicity without deemphasizing ethnic identity through its absolute inclusivity – regardless of language and culture, every citizen of Kazakhstan maintains equal access to the accomplishments and prestige of the state as a global actor. The internationalist discourse is also highly germane to Nazarbayev’s drive for economic development and the higher standards of living it promises (Kudaibergenova 2016a). In support of Kazakhstan’s internationalist approach to economic development, authorities have invited
significant foreign investment from companies specializing in new and sustainable technologies (Laruelle 2009). The President-sponsored English language education program in which I was employed represents yet another marker of Kazakhstan’s efforts to gain recognition as a viable member of the international community. Given the recent success Kazakhstan has experienced in transnational leadership and participation, I suspect the discourse reflecting these efforts will feature as a primary tool to support the integration of Kazakhstan’s multiethnic populations as self-conscious citizens of the state. Nevertheless, these complimentary discourses, and the manner in which they express themselves as policies, encounter severe limitations in Kazakhstan’s bureaucratic culture with its multiple interests. To further illustrate the state’s accumulation and deployment of these multiple discourses and their subsequent shortcomings, I return to my stint as a high school teacher in Kazakhstan.

Once the Interteach Language School offered me an English teacher position in a local Kazakh-language lyceum, our primary task was to figure out how to legalize my activities. Given the bureaucratic processes in place regarding foreign labor and the institutional mindset of most government officials, this proved to be an incredibly tall order. Meryuert assigned one of her best English-speaking employees the task of facilitating the appropriate permissions necessary to secure the foreign work visas, and we embarked on a series of visits to the Education Ministry. Somehow, we eventually succeeded, and I happily travelled to Bishkek to receive my work visa in Kyrgyzstan’s Kazakhstani embassy. Once I began teaching, however, I soon sensed the ambivalence and mistrust embedded in how local educators, school administrators, and even students received the program and its agents (meaning me). Although most of my local colleagues were friendly and supportive, several of them continually questioned my credentials as a *bona fide* teacher of English. A few fellow teachers and administrators expressed concern
about my lack of rather trivial qualifiers (such as an apostille stamp on my diploma) rather than my ability to teach an effective language curriculum (which I felt was the more questionable aspect of my credentials). After several months of working in the public school system, Interteach ultimately lost its contract with the Education Ministry due to a less expensive bid for its services. The Ministry justified its decision, however, not exclusively on the cost of services, but on the grounds that none of the American and Canadian teachers possessed apostille stamps on their diplomas. The Language School that won the contract had at its disposal a force of English teachers largely from the Philippines, who were much less expensive to employ (largely due to their lack of student debt), but more importantly possessed the highly coveted apostille stamps. In this sense, rigid bureaucratic structures, self-interest, and strategic entrepreneurship superseded state aspirations regarding cultural development.

I offer this anecdote to demonstrate how discursively influenced policy translates into practice under the circumstances of bureaucratic processes and requirements. In this case, the state’s policy of strengthening English fluency (facilitated through native English teachers), once translated into local practice, became a struggle for government authorities to manage expectations while conforming to inflexible, strictly institutionalized policies and personal self-interest. Although cost effective, I suspect that staffing public schools with Filipino English teachers was not the President’s initial intent. As an additional example of how well-intentioned public policies fail to serve their constituents, I offer an example of the problematic attempts to implement Kazakh language policy.

In his discussion of the state’s efforts to conform to the language policy requiring the transition to the use of Kazakh in government institutions, documents, and office work, Fierman demonstrates a similar set of challenges local authorities experienced to integrate state policy
with local reality. According to Fierman, even in Kazakh-majority localities, policies designed to raise the level of Kazakh-language fluency fell drastically short. In several instances in which authorities vigorously employed the policy, government workers undertook the easier task of first composing documents in Russian and then having those translated into Kazakh. Many respondents to a government-organized study reported that very few workers even read the Kazakh translations, highlighting the lack of practicality for producing these texts (William Fierman 2009). One might draw parallels from these challenges of employing policies to the outcomes of civic nation-building discourse-based policies found in my ethnographic accounts in northeastern Kazakhstan. I now return to the question of discursive flexibility and civic nation-building in Kazakhstan’s much larger neighbor to the north. Even though civic nation-building represents an approach Russian authorities have at their disposal to employ, I would suggest a much stronger political discourse has recently emerged as a tool for establishing national unity.

**Russia as the “other Europe”**

As I argue in chapter four, Russia’s employment of civic nation-building discourse resides largely in the concept and structure of ethnic territorialization. Although Russian leaders continue to frame the state discursively as a multiethnic civic nation, the rate at which authorities espouse this discourse and produce policies to support it is significantly less than in Kazakhstan. With the exception of the Caucasus, this may be due to the comparatively low pressure Russia experiences from its minority populations. Given that Russia is home to a multitude of non-Russian cultural identities, languages, and practices, it would seem clear that the state possesses a somewhat effective national discourse for attracting allegiance to the Russian Federation (i.e., a strong sense of being rossiiskii rather than russki, or ethnically Russian). Putin’s harsh critique
directed at the West, and particularly the United States, might suggest Russia’s strategy for forging a state monoculture (as effective as socialist labor was in the past) exists through a well-established narrative of anti-Westernism.

During my research stay in Siberia, I encountered traces of official anti-Westernism in relatively subtle ways, largely because the sleepy hamlet of Podsosnovo was so detached from the larger urban centers of western Russia (or even of those in western Siberia). In addition, many of the people with whom I interacted had constant contact with the West through relatives and close associates residing in Germany and were therefore less susceptible to negative depictions. However, anyone with a television and a satellite dish (which nearly every household in Podsosnovo possessed) was subject to the constant barrage of anti-Western representations (Pomerantsev 2015). As a result, I often heard assertions regarding the United States’ positioning itself against Russia that seemed rather absurd. For example, during the 2008 U.S. presidential election campaign, one of my coworkers at the collective farm’s brewery insisted that American authorities had already rig the election in favor of John McCain due to his anti-Russian position. When I asked how he came upon such information, he replied that he had seen it on a documentary the night before reporting on how the United States opposes Russia becoming a strong country. That Russia’s anti-Western rhetoric permeated the consciousness of average folks became consistently clear whenever I was in the company of intoxicated men. In numerous instances when vodka was present, some acquaintances verbally attacked or aggressively questioned me over American hatred of Russia, usually regarding why U.S. political and economic representatives conspired to destroy the country during perestroika. These interactions left me with the impression that a major discursive tool Russian authorities employ to align the population with the state is mass media espousing an ominous Western threat.
Putin’s approach to creating a comprehensive identity for the Federation’s citizens is
certainly much more sophisticated than simply vilifying the West. As Marlene Laruelle argues,
Russia not only uses its anti-Western stance to establish a monocultural, collective frame within
which its ethnically diverse citizens might unite, but he also offers a variety of other discourses
around which Russians might align. Yet, underlying this diversity is a vague conservatism,
containing positions directed toward anti-Westernism, anti-liberalism and the advancement of
traditional Russian moral values (Laruelle 2017). As of late, Putin has increased the promotion of
Eurasianism as a potential integration tool both at home and the near abroad. Considering the
formal actions and pronouncements regarding nationalities’ policy established over the last five
years since Putin regained the presidency, one might identify his nation-building strategy as
“Russo-centric but non-ethnic (Blakkisrud 2016).”

In chapter four I noted that the term “rossiiskii” people expresses a sense of civic nation,
whereas the term “russki” conveys an ethnic understanding. From the point that Putin reasserted
himself as president in 2012, and especially with the annexation of the Crimean Peninsula,
Russian authorities have significantly wavered from the rossiiskii discourse. A major sign of that
departure occurred during Putin’s address to the two houses of the State Duma in March, 2014 in
the wake of the Federation’s annexation of Crimea and the city Sevastopol. In his speech, the
President used the term russki when referencing the annexed “primordial Russian land (iskonno
russkaia zemlia),” characterizing citizens of the recently expanding state as members of an ethnic
rather than civic nation (Alexseev 2016). As Helge Blakkisrud argues, a civic “rossiiane”
identity represented a less useful tool for Putin to legitimize expansion into the borders of
Ukraine for both the majority of Russia’s citizens and the residents of the Crimean Peninsula.
Once Putin cast state identity in ethnonational terms, an official discursive text ascended with
which to rally the average Russian concerned with their separation from “ethnic kin” in Ukraine as well as ultra-conservative nationalists – a task the civic nation-building discourse could never accomplish. In spite of this discursive turn, Russian authorities leave plenty of room for a continued emphasis on the civic nation. A notable case in point is the “State Strategy on Nationalities Policy for the Period through 2025.” A committee of presidentially appointed political and cultural leaders drafted this document, which Putin formally approved in 2012. The Strategy maintains civic nation-building discourse as an underlying unifying principle for the state, conceptually identifying the population as a “Russian civic nation” or rossiiskaia grazhdanskaia natsiia (Blakkisrud 2016).

According to Blakkisrud, Putin asserts core common values and conservatism entrenched in primordial Russian culture and institutions to which closely aligned non-Russians have contributed and helped to fashion for centuries. Specifically, Putin has declared Russia as an exemplar of traditional virtues, family values, strict heterosexual sexuality, and adherence to religious faith, all of which he espouses to be integral to a multiethnic Russian culture (Blakkisrud 2016). This notion of “multiethnic Russianness” might seem oxymoronic, but the mixed nature of the discourse reflects a political strategy intent on appealing to an extraordinarily wide spectrum of interests and identities. The approach and its associated discourses are also not entirely new, but harken back to Russian imperial orientologists’ attempts to frame Russia as a place within which the peoples of the East and West have intermingled, developing “pan-Russian” traditions and identity (a point I highlight in chapter two regarding how civic nation-building discourse has developed in Russia during and since the imperial period). Similar to Putin’s emphasis on values, Russian culture and language from this perspective represent a long-developed site of communication for all people living within Russia’s political boundaries.
This idea pertaining to Russian values and their natural, historically-based connection with regional non-Russian peoples fits comfortably within Putin’s relatively recent interest in Eurasianism. Damaged by Ukraine’s refusal to take part in the Eurasian Economic Union and Russia’s annexation of its territories, this regionalist position has for the most part failed to take root both in Russia and in the near abroad (with the exceptions of Kazakhstan and Belarus). Alternatively, the emphasis on Russian values also reflects a much stronger, quite recent proclivity of the president to frame Russia as an integral member of Europe, but steadfastly travelling along a non-Western path of development. This discursive course expresses itself in politically conservative terms using the aforementioned trope of Russian moral values as a rejection of Western liberalism and an alternative for other European countries and their conservative, sub-national actors to emulate (Laruelle 2016). Policies in relation to the national economy also signal how Russian authorities attempt to align their citizens to a state-based identity. A major challenge to the Eurasianist model, which the Putin-supported Eurasian Economic Union accentuates, are the limitations that Western sanctions and the drop in oil prices have imposed on Russia’s economic prowess. Russian ethnonationalists have also expressed violent opposition to Eurasianism (especially the Eurasian Economic Union), claiming that its open border policy risks inviting an even greater dependence on labor migrants from Central Asia and subsidizing Russia’s poorer neighbors (Rutland 2016).

With these points in mind, I would argue that a dimension of Russia’s strategy to align its population within a singular state monoculture, is not so much “anti-western” (in spite of the harsh rhetoric Putin persistently directs toward the United States and its partners), but rather proposes an alternative version of European values and political behavior belonging to both ethnic Russians and the non-Russians who have contributed to it. It also important to remember
that much like Nazarbayev, Putin must maintain a variety of discourses at his disposal and deploy them strategically and sometimes ambiguously according to factors ranging from geopolitics to the national economy. In this sense, Russia presents not so much a case of divergence from civic nation-building, but of discursive flexibility, enabling authorities to employ it strategically during specific political moments and within particular communities. Putin’s drawing back of Tatarstan sovereignty while simultaneously espousing civic nation-building at highly politicized events (such as the Kazan Millennium Celebration in 2005) demonstrates the strategic employment of discourse. Tolerance of foreign investment from Germany in the Halbstadt Rayon in Siberia and the support for cultural and political German institutions (such as the various ethnic German administrations operating within the cultural autonomous region) and local economic development, likewise represent civic nation-building discourse accommodating both regional and national interests. Hence, as I argue in chapter four, Russia’s civic nation-building discourse enables individuals to draw upon the institutions that civic nation-building discourse validates to accumulate political, social, and economic capital at varying levels of the state’s infrastructure.

**Discursive flexibility and the local experience of ethnic citizenship**

After spending an extraordinarily frustrating year teaching in the Nazarbayev-sponsored English language program, facing relocation to various cities around the country to teach in public schools, having to embark on numerous trips to neighboring Central Asian countries for visa renewals, and ultimately losing my job to a competitor school with less expensive teachers from the Philippines, I sought an alternative source of employment as an educator. After a few short stints teaching for other language schools around Pavlodar, I landed an offer with the
Pavlodar State University’s History Faculty to teach courses in “cultural ethnography.” Upon receiving the offer, I was quite enthusiastic with the prospect of teaching courses akin to anthropology to Kazakhstani students. That enthusiasm quickly dissipated, however, once Gulnara, the department representative, cheerfully explained that all the university required to sponsor my work visa was a copy of my diploma with an apostille stamp. Gulnara was incredulous at my explanation that I was more likely to strike gold in my bathtub than to acquire the stamp on a document I would never think to carry around in my suitcase. Envisioning the exhausting bureaucratic hoops ahead were I to pursue the university position, I ultimately declined the offer and prepared my return to New York.

I direct my final remarks to how discursive flexibility regarding civic nation-building might impact those programs and projects I have examined in this dissertation. In comparing the two states, it is notable that both have a tricky geopolitical balancing act to manage. Both Russia and Kazakhstan maintain a sensitive awareness of their international perception and leverage their nationalities’ policies accordingly in order to capitalize on those perceptions, but in vastly different ways with varying strategies. As Laurelle argues, the annexation of Crimea has far more to do with Russia’s strategies vis-à-vis the West as a torch bearer for an anti-liberal Europe and counterweight to the North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO), than as a bid to mobilize the Russian ethnic nation (Laruelle 2016). For Kazakhstan, civic nation-building discourse represents the country’s commitment to internationalism and showcases its treatment of its non-Kazakh citizens as a model for other multiethnic states to follow. In both cases, civic nation-building discourses serve geopolitical interests just as much as they attempt to facilitate a monocultural, civic identity among the state’s local subjects.
While some observers of Kazakhstani politics argue that the project of civic nation-building has failed because the multietnic public seems no closer to a monocultural political identity (O’Beachian and Kevlihan 2013), I would argue that whether or not a monoculture identity has developed through the state’s discursive efforts is not the point. Rather, my interest has been to illustrate how those discourses have established actual institutions, programs, and opportunities for those they target as constituents. Given the ambiguous, and hence flexible, nature of civic nation-building discourse, I suspect it will maintain a comfortable position within the discursive toolkit of Russia and Kazakhstan’s leaders, intermittently deployed depending upon the particular circumstances of the state. With this in mind, the question of failure is moot, especially when considering the various discursive iterations authorities employ that rely upon factors ranging from audience to geopolitical relations. Far from serving as exemplars of failure, civic nation building discourses in Russia and Kazakhstan represent recyclable tools, which their authors may employ whenever they are useful.

The more important question for my purposes is the fate of the local-level institutions, their programs, and the impact they have on their communities. This concern evokes questions about the integrity and sustainability of German autonomous territories in Siberia and the constituent organizations of the Assembly of the Peoples of Kazakhstan. Certainly a strong shift to ethnic nationalism from state-level authorities or the dispersal of ethnic minorities (as we have seen with Germans and Russians departing from Kazakhstan) could leave these institutions bereft of a public to serve. In their place, perhaps more robust and suitable institutions will arise designed to meet the needs and capture the allegiances of whatever sort of culturally diverse public remains or ascends. As Nazarbayev’s discursive leanings have adjusted themselves in response to nationalist Kazakhs, and Putin has strategically replaced the term “rossiskii” with
“russki” to vie for public support of his aggressions against Ukraine, so will future iterations of nationalities’ discourses, policies, and institutions transform themselves in response to the political moment. In this context of shifting political maneuverings and the discursive flexibility they engender, it is ever important to attune our attention to how state level decisions and subsequent actions impact communities, which have been the primary focus of my research, analysis, and search for Germanness in the former Soviet Union. With that focus in mind, I add one final anecdote to illustrate the conclusion of my search.

**The end of my search for Germanness and the voyage home**

Returning to New York from Kazakhstan was not an easy undertaking. Given the indeterminate nature of my research stay, The Social Science Research Council, which had funded my initial stint in Podosnovo, had only provided one-way flight arrangements for me and my family. Having lost my job with the language school, my cash flow was barely a trickle, and I could not afford plane tickets to travel across the globe for four people. After days of groveling before the director of the failed English school, I eventually cajoled her into purchasing four, one-way tickets from Astana to New York against my back pay using the profits from a restaurant she recently purchased. The last couple of days in Astana awaiting our flight were bittersweet. I had grown to absolutely love this country, where I had spent the last two years, and its people. However, escaping the chaos and unpredictability of life in Central Asia was an appealing prospect for me, and especially for my wife and kids, who desperately missed being able to consistently converse with people in English, experience intimacy with close friends and family, and enjoy the comforts of a more familiar culture.
As I sat in the airport waiting to board our flight to Abu Dhabi and watching my 6 year-old son read a Spider Man comic book in Russian, I reflected upon how this trip from Astana represented an end to a journey starting in Rostock, Germany nearly fifteen years in the past. I had chased the traces of Germans in the former Soviet Union from Kaliningrad to Samarkand (where I had attempted to track down a German family while waiting to renew my Kazakhstani work visa). What emerged in my memory was the thought of a kindly Babushka living in the Kaliningrad Oblast, who had likely suffered excruciating aches and pains to serve me hot soup on a cold day. The presence of the state in relation to cultural identity, relevance of citizenship, and personal behaviors and choices had connected us on that winter’s day by driving the Babushka and her family from their homes in Kazakhstan and inspiring me to seek out people with experiences like hers. They were the same forces that had carried me through this journey and were ultimately sending me home to complete it. Thinking of the Russian-German scholar Elvira Babaschina whom I met in Novosibirsk, or Liubov Kondratev, my kindly host in Podosnovo, and their indulging my enthusiasm for the traces of Germans after which I so ardently sought, I realized their guidance had ushered me into a community much more complex and interesting than anything I had anticipated.
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