Compartmentalized ideology and nation-building in non-democratic states

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Abstract
What are the mechanisms of legitimation in non-democratic and linguistically divided states? How do regimes in these states use and manipulate the ideology and nation-building for the purposes of regime legitimation? The article focuses on the concept of compartmentalized ideology in non-democratic regimes with substantial divisions in the so-called titular and minority group where socio-linguistic divide allows regimes to construct diverse audiences and even political communities with their own distinct narratives and discourses about the nation, state and the regime. The compartmentalized ideology is only sustainable under the conditions of the regime's power to control and facilitate these discourses through the system of authoritative presidential addresses to the nation and/or other forms of regime's communication with the polity. The shifting of these discourses and themes contribute to the regime stability but also may constitute its re-legitimation.

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1. Introduction

The collapse of the Soviet regime and subsequent independence of all fifteen union republics brought about complex discussions on the role of the new ideology in defining the new vision on development. In the post-communist context nationalism became the dominant paradigm and the guiding discourse for the elite competition that defined state-building. That was also the case of the second largest post-Soviet state of Kazakhstan that shared the vast border with the Russian Federation (more than 6500 km) and substantial ethno-linguistic divisions in its state borders where Russian-speaking group dropped from almost forty percent in 1989 to 25 percent in 2009 (see Table 1). Despite the fears of ethnic radicalization, the ethnic division proved to be less problematic than the language fragmentation. According to the latest (2009) census, 74 percent of the population can understand the state, Kazakh, language, and 65 percent can read it well. However, the Russian-speaking minority demonstrates the lowest comprehension levels — less than 10 percent in reading proficiency. Russian, the official language of the inter-ethnic communication in Kazakhstan, is more widely represented, where 94 percent of total population can understand, and 88 percent can read well in Russian_.

This unevenly divided ethno-linguistic situation left the country with the reality of two separate ethno-lingual groups as it is seen by the regime. The predominant language of communication constitutes the national identity and the milieu of a member of a specific audience. Those speaking mainly in Russian may or may not be always identified as “Russian” by...
ethnicity but are assumed to comply with the specific Russified and cosmopolitan values. And those speaking predominantly Kazakh are not automatically assumed to be ethnic Kazakhs but must comply with a more ethno-nationalist agenda. Most importantly, however, the difference in language proficiency of Russian-speaking audiences in Kazakh or vice versa, has allowed the first president of the country – Nursultan A. Nazarbayev, to successfully maneuver both discursive domains – of the ethnic Kazakh revival and multicultural harmony – to co-exist and equally legitimate the regime in the eyes of these audiences. National identity, “a particular form of political identification” (Suny, 1999, p. 144), in this particular case, serves as a discursive space for the political legitimation by providing different legitimating narratives of what it means to be a citizen of Kazakhstan. This coincides with the processes of non-democratic state-building where:

Managing democracy does not consist simply of crushing the opposition or persecuting dissidents (as in Soviet times). Instead, it has developed the ability to imitate the rhetoric of all kinds of ideologies — from the liberal and social-democratic to the national-patriotic and religious-fundamentalist. The regime’s eager embrace of various legitimizing narratives has given the Russian [and Kazakhstan’s] executive significant opportunities for ideological maneuver (Sproede and Zabirko, 2016, p. 196).

In Kazakhstan in doing so the regime employed techniques of discursive substitution in order to address all of these goals without overlapping one group’s interests with that of the other. In this manner two opposing identities: Kazakhstani (supposedly and ambiguously represented by the regime as civic and depoliticized state belonging identity for minorities) and Kazakh (predominantly ethnic calling for legitimation via primordialism) were used interchangeably based on the “audiences” and the contexts in which these messages and discourses are addressed by the regime. Why it was so important for the regime to address both of the audiences it has ideologically divided: the Russian-speaking and Kazakh-speaking, with distinct identities but similar state-building discourses?

Many post-Soviet elites in Kazakhstan first perceived the independence as a result of the “deep crisis” of political and ideological powers of the Soviet Union. This discourse was rarely repeated in subsequent political discussions as the regime try to cement the value of independent statehood and nation-building prior to and immediately after the independence. But in the midst of the post-Soviet establishment of the new order, when “millions” were “living without the kinds of guiding visions that they had grown used to in Soviet times, and elites and the state itself” had “little conception of a “national idea” or national identity,” discussions on the new type of ideology were formulated. There was, however, a single consensual term on which majority of elites agreed — the “state,” defined by the power of the ruling elites, had to become the sole legitimate actor of defining nation-building. The “state” here correlates to the regime, nationalizing regime that is defined as the ideational and decision-making framework and the hegemonic structure of elite-led and elite-controlled discourses of nation, nation-building, and national belonging. In the words of the former main ideologue of the regime,

As the experience of many societies transitioning from colonial to independent, totalitarian to democratic regimes, it is the state itself becomes the [main actor] defining and forming new identity and mentality. This happens because it is impossible to imagine stable and prosperous development of the new independent [state] and young democracy without goal-oriented and visionary actions that aim to neutralize the legacies of totalitarianism and colonialism in social mentality and aimed at establishment and empowerment of democratic institutions and their legitimacy.

In this article I critically evaluate the nature of post-Soviet “ideology” and its legacy on the formation of national identity in non-democratic polities. The Soviet legacy is important in discussing national identities formation because the continuous influences of the Sovietized codification of ethnicity and invention of “nationhood and nationality on the sub-state level, while at the same time doing nothing to institutionalize them on the level of the state as a whole” (Brubaker, 1994, p. 52; see


3 Interview with the author, August 2013, Almaty, Kazakhstan.
1.1. Nation-building, ideology, and legitimacy in non-democratic regimes

In the context of non-democratic states and regimes, which are usually identified with the use of coercion and force instead of consent over power sharing and open determination for elections (Adams and Rustemova, 2011; Linz and Stepan, 1996; Schatz and Maltseva 2012; Therborn, 1980; Barker, 2001; Beissinger, 2002), the legitimation techniques in an ethnically divided society are crucial for the stability of such regimes. However, the term ‘non-democratic’ suggests that there is a wider spectrum of non-coercive sanctions for such regimes, and compartmentalized ideology being only one of them. In using “non-democratic” instead of authoritarian or totalitarian I attempt to shy away from the “force-and-consent dichotomy” criticized by Goran Therborn as a limited and inadequate category of analysis as: It tells us nothing about the very different kinds of non-coercive acquiescence and obedience. It neglects the necessary ideological mediation of “force” or sanctions, and fails to see that consent is largely governed by the constellation of force in a given situation. Implicit in the dichotomy seems to be, in most cases, the totally mistaken notion that domination is ensured either by ideology (consensus, including “false consciousness”) or by non-ideology (Therborn, 1980, p. 99).

The ruling elites forming the regime in this situation must provide enough symbolic space for the competing identities of sizeable groups within the society to limit the competition and debate to the mere symbolic form only; but also to legitimate regime’s efforts in building the inter-ethnic harmony and stability which forms the backbone of regime’s own stability. Building on that the sustainable non-democratic regime must preserve the differentiated approach and simultaneously existing binary identities within the society to whom the regime provides both promises of stability, guaranteed welfare and the appropriate national identity. And in order to sustain such conditions there is a need for both a continuous ethno-linguistic divide and the created and controlled ideological ambiguity or ‘blurring’ between different socio-lingual and ethno-lingual groups in terms of national discourses that are presented to these communities. In other words, those speaking the dominant national or state language (Kazakh in Kazakhstan or French in Quebec) receive the more ‘nationalizing’ message of the national identity and the dominance of that particular political group and those monolingual in alternative language (Russian in case of Kazakhstan or any other non-state or ‘minority’ language in other case) are fed the idea of the interethic stability and harmony. Both discourses, audiences co-exist in nationalizing regime’s ideological addresses without overlapping due to the existence of compartmentalized audiences. The regime also continues to sustain these audiences and discourses because of the sustained linguistic divide that the regime perceives and analyzes.

The regime legitimacy in this case is provided via the control of the messages between two, three or numerous national discourses. Moreover, the non-democratic regime in such divided or fragmented socio-linguistic societies may also need to build an umbrella discourse covering all of the audiences. This could be, for example, the articulation of the belief in stability which the regime projects via the most powerful figure, that is, the president or the leader that becomes the guarantor of stability and prosperity. In the case of Kazakhstan, first President Nursultan A. Nazarbayev who addressed these various audiences with the substitutive discourses, was seen as the main figurehead in the provision of promised stability, prosperity and inter-ethnic harmony. First president, Father of the Nation, elbasy Nazarbayev, despite his resignation in March 2019,
remains the symbol of compartmentalized ideology he himself constructed since his first presidential elections in 1991 and through his three decades of political tenure. Discussions about this “transition” period were widely discussed in Kazakhstan and by local experts as the twilight period (Satpayev et al. 2013) but its consequences are still to be determined in the coming months and years.

In non-democratic contexts where the rule is usually personified, like in personalized neopatrimonialism (Isaacs, 2010, 2011; Schatz, 2006, 2009) or personalized nationalizing regime (Kudaibergenova, 2016b, 2017), presidential or leadership addresses are linked to the ruler, president or other most powerful political figure. In this way varying, multifaceted and overlapping discursive systems represent a very authoritative and dominant form of a political address to each specific audience that the regime tries to construct.

Compartmentalized ideology of the regime creates a system of discourses and experiences, ways of thinking and imagining oneself only within the framework provided by the non-democratic regime itself. Because the regime is fixated on the balance of inter-ethnic stability and guaranteeing powers of the president the important ethno-lingual divide is politicized to the level of national identities within the provided frameworks guided by the regime only. In this way the regime is able to legitimate itself to both audiences by providing them both projected desired discourses and representations within nation-building clearly dividing the identification and agenda of each audience. Because these discourses are aimed to provide a differentiated and not “socially shared,” “fundamental,” unifying and most importantly, stable discourses (Van Dijk, 2006, p. 116), they do not form viable and lasting effects of self-identification and a meaningful and constructive belief system in the same way as ideologies do. Compartmentalized and dividing mechanisms are crucial for the regime’s own stability in its nation-building policies and in the attempts of stabilizing the ethno-lingual situation but not in solving the problem of the growing gap between these two communities.

Nation-building in Kazakhstan is an ongoing process of national imagination through the constellation of programs, legislation, projects, and other political actions from the state side (Kudaibergenova, 2016a; Nazarbayev, 1997, 2010) and the ways in which various different audiences within and outside the state receive and interpret these programs and projects (Isaacs, 2013). The content of ideology continues to develop according to the “compartmentalized” idea following the Soviet separation into compartmentalized sections of ethnicity or natsia, as it is also widely known (Slezkine, 1994).

In order to identify and interpret different narratives and rituals of addressing compartmentalized ideology, we must use discourse analysis as the most appropriate tool of analysis. Discourse analysis is the most appropriate here because it will allow us to deal with ideological and symbolic interpretations in a more detailed and full account for “all symbolic forms are meaningful constructs” (Thompson, 1990, p. 292) which require a discursive dimension to trace changes, developments and approaches the regime uses to legitimate itself and its policies. In the following section I explain further methodology of studying compartmentalized ideology and discourses.

1.2. Methodological note

Presidential addresses are important vehicles of transmitting dominant discourses and ideas because “they provide a powerful opportunity for a leader to define and outline their geopolitical [and political] understandings and visions, speaking to both domestic and international audiences in a formal manner” (Ambrosio and Lange, 2014, p. 539). In non-democratic states presidential addresses are also the main means for the regime to communicate current trends and socio-political contexts (see Wedeen, 1999). In a methodological and conceptual vein presidential addresses in non-democratic states also provide important space for mapping of the dominant discourses and rhetoric of the power elites. In the historical perspective it also allows to map out differences and contradictions and evolution of such discourses and political imagination in non-democratic contexts.

In this analysis I used presidential speeches from 1989 to 2018 including the special presidential annual addresses that were introduced in 1997. In the analysis I have separated the following categories: the context of the speech, time and place, ritual, main focus and audience. The study of presidential speeches in defining national identities provide a space for the further conceptualization of legitimacy and power within the political regime. It also allows to expand on the social theory of power in general as

The rationale for pressing for a more practically oriented sociological approach to nationalism is simple: concepts of nation are recurrently and routinely employed by people in making sense of their social environment and to this end it is important that we understand more about the ways in which these concepts are used (Thompson and Favre, 2001, p. 311).

The mechanism of the compartmentalized ideology performs regime’s symbolic action in the constructed but very flexible way. The process of nation-building under such conditions is never finished but is constantly under construction depending on the challenges and purposes to feed the discourse to distinct audiences. This is an important task for non-democratic regimes who lack true political legitimacy which characterize democracies. The regime is able to perform nation-building in a more flexible way without providing both audiences the final ideology they might want to commit to.

1.2.1. On discourse analysis

Public speeches addressed by high officials, especially by political leaders in non-democratic states, are the heights of discursive substitution performance. Staged at parliamentary meetings or during important public events, these speeches

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become rituals in themselves. Leader’s speeches are both channels for the proposed ideology, constructed meaning as well as regime’s performances. John B. Thompson (1990, p. 292) reminds us that, “if the concern with ideology directs social-historical analysis towards the study of relations of domination, then it focuses formal or discursive analysis on the structural features of symbolic forms which facilitate the mobilization of meaning.” In order to interpret ideologies:

[...] we may begin by analyzing the structural features of symbolic forms, and may seek to establish these features as instances of particular strategies or processes of symbolic construction. We may then try to argue that, in specific circumstances of the production and reception of these symbolic forms, the strategies of processes of symbolic construction can be linked to certain modes of operation of ideology (Thompson, 1990, p. 293).

But what happens in conditions when political regimes that do not have a direct feedback from the civil society, social groups and movements through the means of open and contested elections exist in conditions of ideological manipulation? In democratic contexts open and contested elections are in place for the replacement of political decision makers, the political elites, political parties and coalitions but also for the evaluation of the ruling party’s policies and projects. In Kazakhstan the personalized nationalizing regime of the first President Nursultan A. Nazarbayev was able to survive a number of oppositional movements particularly due to the cementing idea of stability and economic development that only this particular regime could bring. Up until the voluntarily resignation of President Nazarbayev himself in March 2019, oppositional institutions and channels of communication between the regime and the “society” were either weak or non-existent.

Only after mass protests that started off with late April “You cannot run away from the truth” political action at the Almaty marathon and further jailing of the activist, did these protests become regular and diverse.4 Prior to the April–June protests 2019, there were also protest movements sporadically organized by the mothers with many children (mnogodetnie materi in Russian or kop balaly analar in Kazakh) demanding for better provision of welfare including subsidized housing and relief on banking debts and mortgages (Stronski, 2019). Until these waves of protests, local political commentators struggled to identify the level and extend of social responses to the regime’s policies and discursive addresses. After the resignation of the first president and subsequent presidential elections and the creation of oppositional social movements, there are now discussions about “inadequate” and unbalanced dialogue between the vlast5 — power, regime and the people, narod.

In the absence of the adequate wholesome country-wide evaluation of the responses to compartmentalized ideology, it is important to turn to the ways in which ideology is interpreted since it “has the role of synthesis in the sense that it seeks to draw together the results of socio-historical and formal or discursive analysis, showing how the meaning of symbolic forms serves to establish and sustain relations of domination” (Thompson, 1990, p. 293). In seeking to identify specific socio-historical contexts in which a given ideological narrative was addressed, such type of analysis (in-depth hermeneutics) shows how different ideological “devices or structures facilitate the construction of meaning” (1990, p. 293). This meaning under specific circumstances “serves (…) to support relations of domination” (1990, p. 293).

So, for example, the necessity of discursive shift of the ideological narratives depending on the socio-political contexts of the ideological address and the audiences may suggest its interdependence on both audience and context. As I will show below (See Table 2), the first Kazakh President Nazarbayev’s speeches given in the Southern Kazakhstan, a traditionally Kazakh-populated region, were highlighted by more nationalistic texts, whereas speeches addressed to the wider audiences had a more multiethnic approach:

[...] the territory of Kazakhstan (zemlya Kazakhstana) — is the main treasury, common Motherland (Rodina) of all citizens of the republic regardless of their nationality and religious views. We shall not have “second class” people (u nas ne dolzhno bit’ ludei vtorogo sorta), who feel inferior, who are worried about the future of their children and security of their home. Kazakh language was declared the state language in Kazakhstan. And it’s a fact. However, we cannot grant any language a state status just by decree. (…) I want to stress thoughtless (bezdumpie), hastened decisions to switch to Kazakh language in official documentation that were “given away” (otdany na otkup) to bureaucrats; [this] played a negative role, created certain social tension. Together we need to find a rational solution in which the Kazakh language as a state language will not marginalize substantial part of the population from active work and socio-political life.

What we can see from the example of another program speech, addressed by Nazarbayev on the fifth anniversary of Kazakhstan’s independence in December 1996 is a similar mechanism of combining the nationalistic and multiethnic

4 The artistic protest with the banner that appeared at the Almaty city marathon on 21 April 2019 had slogans “You cannot run away from the truth” and hashtag #Haveachoice spurred further protests when two of the banner holders were jailed for 15 days for “unsanctioned” protest. The activists’ performance precluded the presidential elections of 9 June 2019 and demanded free and open elections. Their detention and fears of falsifications at the first presidential elections without long-term leader Nursultan A. Nazarbayev prompted a number of diverse movements to protest against electoral falsifications. After the elections hundreds of protestors were arrested (Lillis, 2019).

5 A tragedy in Astana in February 2019 where five children from one family died in a fire, while their parents were working overnight, caused series of so-called “mothers' protests” in Kazakhstan calling against social insecurity and better provision of welfare for impoverished families and families with many children.

6 In Kazakhstan’s non-democratic conditions the main decision-making capacity is associated with the most powerful elites that are often referred to as the “regime”. Nazarbayev himself or ambiguously as a sort of institution and a sort of amorphous personified source of power that translates into Russian as vlast and in Kazakh as bilik and both terms simply mean “power.”
Table 2
Discourse analysis of selected presidential speeches from 1989 to 1994 (as an example). Based on the President Nazarbayev selected speeches (Nazarbayev, 2009).

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>The speech</th>
<th>Date</th>
<th>Place</th>
<th>Main focus</th>
<th>Audience</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Speech at the 15th Central Committee Plenum, Nursultan Nazarbayev's first speech as a First Secretary of the Kazakh SSR</td>
<td>22 June 1989</td>
<td>Alma-Ata, Kazakh SSR</td>
<td>Inter-ethnic relations in Kazakhstan, perestroika, new hopes for the future</td>
<td>Communist Party elite in Kazakhstan, wider population of the Kazakh SSR, partially Moscow elites</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Speech during the meeting with creative intelligentsia, scientists and writers</td>
<td>27 June 1989</td>
<td>Alma-Ata, Kazakh SSR</td>
<td>Kazakh language which was discriminated and which needs to be brought back [into the public sphere]</td>
<td>Intellectuals and Scientific Intelligentsia</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Speech at the Republican meeting of first secretaries of regional and city-wide centres of Communist Party of Kazakhstan</td>
<td>18 August 1989</td>
<td>Alma-Ata, Kazakh SSR</td>
<td>Possible political destabilisation, Zhana Uzen inter-ethnic disputes.</td>
<td>Regional party elite, Kazakh SSR</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Speech at the Central Committee of CPSU Plenum</td>
<td>19 September 1989</td>
<td>Moscow</td>
<td>The speech is constructed against the common enemy — chauvinistic nationalism which represents danger for the society.</td>
<td>Gorbachev, Central Communist Party elite, party elite from other Soviet republics Youth of Kazakh SSR</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Speech at the meeting with youth in capital Alma-Ata</td>
<td>17 January 1990</td>
<td>Alma-Ata, Kazakh SSR</td>
<td>December 1986 (riots in Almaty). “Searches for the organisers and underground groups were fruitless”, there was no real organisation leading these riots</td>
<td>Party elite of Kazakhstan, population</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>First speech at the 1st Supreme Council meeting, Nazarbayev makes his first speech after being elected President of Kazakh SSR</td>
<td>24 April 1990</td>
<td>Alma-Ata, Kazakh SSR</td>
<td>Kazakh language revival without harming Russian</td>
<td>Party elite, Kazakhstani population</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Speech at the 17th meeting of Communist Party of Kazakhstan</td>
<td>8 June 1990</td>
<td>Alma-Ata, Kazakh SSR</td>
<td>Inter-ethnic stability in the society is more important than anything else because stability will lead to better economic conditions and opportunities in Western cooperation</td>
<td>People of Kazakhstan</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Address to the People of Kazakhstan, Kazakh Central Television</td>
<td>10 September 1990</td>
<td>Alma-Ata, Kazakh SSR</td>
<td>Historical and Tragic Soviet heritage in Kazakhstan is mentioned for the first time - forced collectivisation, Stalinist repressions. Simultaneously Peoples’ Friendship was mentioned</td>
<td>Party elite and people of Kazakhstan</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Speech at the Supreme Council of Kazakh SSR, and the Cabinet meeting dedicated to 70th anniversary of Kazakh SSR</td>
<td>12 October 1990</td>
<td>Alma-Ata, Kazakh SSR</td>
<td>Talk about overall equality but special remedial role for Kazakh people</td>
<td>Soviet Party elite, Gorbachev, Kazakh nationalists, people of Kazakhstan Ideological blueprint for presidential administration and regional elites</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Speech at the republican meeting of party activists with General Secretary, Mikhail Gorbachev</td>
<td>30 May 1991</td>
<td>Alma-Ata, Kazakh SSR</td>
<td>Preparations of the first Constitution, attention is drawn to the national stability</td>
<td>Political Elite of Kazakhsta</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sovereign Kazakhstan development strategy</td>
<td>16 May 1992</td>
<td>Alma-Ata, Kazakh SSR</td>
<td>The speech is full of references to the importance of Kazakh culture and Kazakh population in country’s development of new national symbols</td>
<td>People of Kazakhstan</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Speech at the New York Council for International Relations</td>
<td>23 May 1992</td>
<td>New York, USA</td>
<td>Preparations of the first Constitution, attention is drawn to the national stability</td>
<td>International Community</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Speech at the Kazakhstan’s Supreme Council 8th Meeting</td>
<td>1 June 1992</td>
<td>Alma-Ata, Kazakh SSR</td>
<td>The speech is full of references to the importance of Kazakh culture and Kazakh population in country’s development of new national symbols</td>
<td>Political Elite of Kazakhstan</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Speech at the Kazakhstan’s Supreme Council regarding the adaptation of national symbols (flag, coat-of-arms, anthem)</td>
<td>6 June 1992</td>
<td>Alma-Ata, Kazakh SSR</td>
<td>Very postcolonial speech, referring to the past sufferings and the need to unite ethnic Kazakhs</td>
<td>Predominantly ethnic Kazakhs, Kazakh-speaking audience</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Speech at the first international qurultay (meeting) of ethnic Kazakhs from all over the world</td>
<td>30 September 1992</td>
<td>Alma-Ata, Kazakh SSR</td>
<td>History and heritage of the Kazakh people Harmony and Unity of Kazakhs people</td>
<td>Kazakh-speaking audience, Kazakh intellectuals and nationalists</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Speech at the Memorial Days dedicated to the 18th century leaders of Kazakhstan — Tole bi, Qazybek bi, Ayteke bi</td>
<td>28 May 1993</td>
<td>Ordabasy, Kzyl-Orda Southern Kazakhstan</td>
<td>Hope for the CIS economic consolidation.</td>
<td>Muslim intellectuals of Central Asia.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Speech at the 40th anniversary of Tselina (Virgin Lands) projects in Northern Kazakhstan</td>
<td>25 February 1994</td>
<td>Aqmol (Astana)</td>
<td>People of Kazakhstan; People of Kazakhstan (no specific ethnic identification)</td>
<td>Russian-speaking population</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>


a The Virgin Lands campaign which was initiated in 1953 saw the greatest agricultural development in Northern Kazakhstan. This also led to the growing Russian-speaking migration to this region when since 1939 to 1970 the share of Russian ethnic population in Kazakhstan grew from 39 per cent to 42 per cent and the overall population of Kazakhstan doubled.
approaches. In 1996 Nursultan A. Nazarbayev devoted significant portion of the speech to the discussion of Kazakh history from the time immemorial to the Russian “colonial conquest of Kazakhstan” and Kazakh people's “resistance” to such colonization where “a national movement for independence emerged in the Kazakh steppe” in the nineteenth century. The president also mentioned the “origins” of the multiethnic makeup of Kazakhstan's population and connects it with the colonization:

Active migration of waves of migrants from the European part of the Russian empire to the territory of Kazakhstan starts in the end of the nineteenth century. In the mid-60s of the nineteenth century tsarist government transited to the brutal military-Cossack colonization of Kazakhstan to the peasantry [colonization]. Colonization was combined with mass land seizures from the local population [korennoe naselenie], (...) Kazakh people and Kazakh land were a colonial appendage of the Russian and then Soviet empire since the second part of the nineteenth and until the 90s of the twentieth centuries.8

The problem of regionalism and decentralization, along with heightened competition among regional elites, placed President Nazarbayev into the position of a watchdog that required a degree of ideological maneuvering dependent on emerging problems. Elite competition and contestation (open and hidden) contributed to the insecurity that the regime experienced and expressed in the ideological course and in nation-building. Thus, the context and various audiences to whom the speeches and messages were addressed (on very different elites' levels, on socio-linguistic societal levels, to the international audiences) have all structured the discursive shifts in numerous selected presidential narratives. Table 2 demonstrates the clear-cut distinctions in rituals of addressing the speech to specific audiences in varying contexts. Presidential speech would depend on the circumstances in which it was addressed — it would become more or less nationalistic or more leaning towards the predominant Kazakhified values and discourses — Kazakhstan being the “sacred land of ancestors” or the welcoming land of the “oralmans” — the Kazakh diaspora returnees. While speeches were addressed in Russian or to wider non-Kazakh audiences the content would vary but mainly represent the discourses of people's friendship (druzhba narodov) and interethnic harmony. The “cosmopolitan” parts of speeches also included notes on Kazakhstan's overall economic development and the importance of “prosperous Kazakhstan” narrative which was directly tied to the strong presidency and interethnic stability and thus were transmitted in Russian language. The nationalizing ideology in Kazakhstan is divided according to the different discourses and narratives as well as the audiences to whom it is transmitted. I discuss the logic of dividing compartmentalized ideology into different political audiences in the next section.

1.3. Audiences

The division into distinct political audiences is the main feature of compartmentalized ideology of non-democratic and divided regimes. The existence of two or more separate ethno-linguistic communities require the regime to legitimate its rule in two or more distinct discursive fields. The power of the non-democratic regime is centered around its ability to yield its control over these varying discourses, beliefs and narratives of nation-building and ideology in general that different audiences associate themselves with.

The two audiences in Kazakhstan are separated by the value system and approaches to what nation constitutes but are also separated by the language of address — Russian or Kazakh. Both languages below to distinct linguistic groups and until there is a limit to the intersection of two languages the regime is able to separate these audiences. This also allows the regime to convey very divergent and sometimes conflicting messages and narratives to these audiences.

The existence of language barriers during the early independence in the 1990s constituted the initial divide in the audience selection. However, with the growing nationalism of indigenous population who demanded cultural revival and decolonization and growing Russian nationalist movements, such as Lad, that demanded the secession of northern regions of Kazakhstan to Russia, the regime was challenged to divide the polity into at least two discourses and two audiences. The regime also had to marginalize the growing popularity of the Russian and Cossack movements and the Kazakh nationalism-patriots to legitimate the sole role of the president.

According to the regime's dominant ideological narrative it was President Nursultan Nazarbayev who guaranteed the accomplishment of both goals — the solidified Kazakh national idea and multi-ethnic peace and harmony. The role of the president as the sole guarantor of the stability and prosperity in Kazakhstan became an important and very powerful narrative of the development paradigm in Kazakhstan (Kudaibergenova, 2015). Kazakh-led Alash, Zheltoksan and Russian-led Lad nationalist movements were used by the regime as examples of radical nationalism, which President Nursultan Nazarbayev presented as ideological enemies and threats to stability, endangering further the development of the country and, above all, stalling potential foreign investment because of its demands for political stability (see also Marat, 2009; Matveeva, 2009). These “enemies” of stability were portrayed as narrow-minded populists preaching national closeness, who organized

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8 Ibid.
“a hundred and thirty unsanctioned meetings and anti-social events” which was noted by President Nazarbayev in June 1992 to the eighth session of the Supreme Council of Republic of Kazakhstan.

In the same speech, President Nazarbayev referred to “Alash, Zheltoksan, Siberian Cossacks Union and zemlyachestva [local territorial communities]” movements, whose lack of official registration with relative ministries proved the “unconstitutional basis of their activities.” He concluded that “in places, where [they] want to substitute democracy with ochlocracy — with the power of the square (ploshadi) and crowd, we cannot deal without special measures.” Proposed special measures against these “activities of political parties that preach national, class and religious intolerance that endangers constitutional and territorial integrity” of the country were “a further consolidation of the executive power with refining president’s functions as the head of the state and head of the government”. In the same speech, addressed to political elites and followers, President Nursultan Nazarbayev managed attacked another obstacle to stability — the strong Parliament, which he called “a myth.” The more important distinction and achievement of the compartmentalized ideology was, however, the division into Russian-speaking and Kazakh-speaking audiences which provided ideological spheres regardless of ethnicity but dependent on the socio-linguistic identification. As one of my respondents noted,

There is no political vacuum and no marginality as such in Kazakhstan, there are two socio-political spheres. In Kazakh [language] they [Nazarbayev and political elite] say “we will do everything as you [Kazakhs] wish.” And then in Russian [they — political elite] say “don’t worry, we won’t do anything against you [Russians].” So, there is no ideological vacuum, Kazakhs live by their own ideology. (...) It’s natural; Russians [in Kazakhstan] live in their own world and don’t accept ours [pure Kazakh].

The traces of such an account are easily found in different addresses in the two languages. Examples include an address on the acceptance of national symbols in June 1992 in Almaty, a speech to the OSCE in Helsinki in July 1992, and President Nazarbayev’s address at the first world Qurultai [meeting] of ethnic Kazakhs in Almaty in September 1992. The selection of these three speeches, though random, helps distinguishing a range of tones, narratives and substitutions that spanned within just four months of President Nazarbayev’s political addresses. These were held in both Kazakh and Russian (the acceptance of national symbols speech), in Russian (OSCE) and Kazakh language (Qurultai).

The first speech had to be nationalistic per se since it laid the foundations for the political and symbolic legitimation of independence, through the acceptance of new national symbols. Moreover, national symbols of coat-of-arms and flag mostly reflected Kazakh culture and history as when he claimed the “history of our national attributes reflects great and tragic past of the Kazakh people.” This speech covered traditions of ethnosymbolism, in which various myths of ancestry, glorious past, defeat and final revival in an independent era were linked to the legitimation of the nation, whose new symbols had to reflect “a young independent state with self-determining Kazakh nation” (Nazarbayev, 2009, p. 130).

In the second speech, addressed to the OSCE’s international community, Nazarbayev was less nationalistic and more cautious about the “regional conflicts.” The speech was full of symbolic references to peace, friendship of peoples, democratic rights and civic equality without further conceptualization of these key ideas, especially without the clear provision of what civic identity meant within nationalizing regime’s vision towards nation-building. Yet towards the end of the speech, Nazarbayev acknowledged that “democracy was achieved by Kazakh people through suffering as substantial part of the population was physically destroyed (physicheski unichtozhenas) in the course of anomalous communist experiment” (Nazarbayev, 2009, p. 149).

The third speech, delivered at the Qurultai, was an apogee of Kazakh postcolonial cultural and ethnic revival since it was addressed to the indigenous ethnic Kazakhs diaspora abroad and to local Kazakhs in Kazakh language:

The people of Kazakhstan, who broke the chains of centuries long colonialism and who only recently acquired the long-waited independence that is already accepted by the whole world, now with pride and dignity, with wide open embrace welcomes you, dearest brothers on your own native land (Nazarbayev, 2009, p. 152).

This speech was full of ethnically-tinted representations that construct a core of territorial legitimacy, for example, “for centuries Kazakhs lived in these boundless steppes.” President Nazarbayev was dividing Kazakhstan into two nations — Kazakh and Kazakhstani. The former was seen as the core nation around which most symbolic legitimation was built, while the latter comprised not only Russians, but all the others who had been forced to migrate to Kazakhstan. The latter term was vaguely defined and used for its ambiguity without further implications or significant policies and programs to dwell on it. While there are studies on civic identity in Kazakhstan, it still requires further critical analysis and rigorous methodological study.

This tension and division prevailed within society at that time. However, in the 1995 Constitution a key definition of the nation in the preamble was changed from ‘Kazakh nation’ to the ‘people of Kazakhstan,’ as the rhetoric of Nazarbayev’s

9 Author’s interview with political elite, August 2013, Almaty, Kazakhstan.
10 I discuss the specific type of Nazarbayev regime postcolonialism in “The Use and Abuse of Postcolonial Discourses in Post-independent Kazakhstan,” Europe-Asia Studies, 68:5, pp. 917–935.
speeches and ideology reduced distinctions between the two groups. The notion of Kazakhstan smoothly entered his ideological discourse, as if substituting an old rivalry; nationalisms and nationalistic movements slowly were marginalized and left the main political stage.

By the 2000s speeches it was clear that the term “Kazakhstan” entered more a realm of the whole population of Kazakhstan for the President Nazarbayev where he used the term interchangeably to address both Kazakh and Russian speaking audiences. In 2003 program speech he, for example, declared the success of the “fastest economic and political reforms” achieved by the regime and the country in “the shortest historical period.” The new time promised new bright future where “only personal labor would become the source of wealth and the state only ought to create legal conditions for that.” He continued by specifying his role in the country’s development process moving from the collective “we” in the speech to the personified “I”:

Today I can responsibly say that I am delivering the promised. The development of Kazakhstan's economy serves our common goal – to the development of well-being of the people. I spoke about this time and here it is. I have an honor to declare about the greatest increase in social spending that we are soon to launch, and which will touch upon every single Kazakhstani [citizen] and every single family.12

The division in audience address and compartmentalized discourses in the president’s speeches remained past the first wave of post-independent nationalism. Throughout the late 1990s and 2000s as well as in the president’s early 2010s addresses to the nation (for example, 2011, 2012), the Kazakh speeches were more nationalist, whereas in the Russian language the president mostly employed and highlighted the themes of economic prosperity, democracy and unity, which substituted ethnic revival and nationalism (Adams and Rustemova, 2011) for the Russian-speaking sphere. For example, in his address to the nation in 2009 in Kazakh, President Nazarbayev referred to the discourse of independence as a long-lived and aspirational dream of “our ancestors” while in the Russian text of the same address the message was slightly changed into “for twenty years we have been building open and prosperous country” in which “every year the well-being of Kazakhstanis is enhancing” (Nazarbayev, 2009 Address to the Nation). In the 2011 presidential address, the Kazakh part of the speech read as “more than 800 thousands of our “compatriots” oralmans [ethnic Kazakhs who migrated abroad during the Soviet times] returned from abroad and enlarged our population.” The Russian version of the same speech did not include this reference but instead focused on strategies of socio-economic development (Nazarbayev, 2011 Address to the Nation).

The Kazakh language parts of the presidential speeches traditionally employ more nationalist symbolism since they are directed to groups of the indigenous population who “do not feel that decolonization and revival was done fully by the current elite.” In this sense, addresses to the nation are more or less balanced and delicate although, until the 2000s, the historical and cultural references to a core Kazakh ethnicity remained within the discourse. In these addresses, Russian and Kazakh versions were rarely translated or repeated each other, since it was assumed that many citizens of Kazakhstan are fluent in both languages. However, a substantial proportion of the population are either apathetic to the messages (Cummins, 2005, 2006) or, due to limited proficiency in either Kazakh or Russian, choose elements of the texts they can readily comprehend. This distinction in socio-linguistic approaches to the audiences has helped President Nazarbayev create parallel spheres of domination, in which he is more or less supported by the Kazakh-speaking population yet still wins the Russian-speaking one, including the so-called Kazakh cosmopolitans: urban Russian speaking educated Kazakhs.

2. Conclusion

Nation-building in a divided society may prove to be the most challenging context for the viability of any regime. Two distinct socio-linguial groups may be oriented towards different goals in the national politics, especially in the multiple post-contexts, for example, in the post-colonial or post-Soviet socio-political contexts where the indigenous, so-called titular, ethnic group may rely and demand more strict policy in citizenship and/or political rights and symbolic domains of the national identification for minorities and all members of the nation (like in Latvia). There could be also a context of politically divided societies where ethnic identities are divided artificially to keep the ‘titular’ and ‘minority’ group in some sort of balance which requires their separation especially along the lines of national identification and nationalist agenda. Kazakhstan’s case belongs to the latter scenario where the non-democratic regime chose the available strategy of both artificial division into ethno-lingual groups of Kazakh- and Russian-speaking parts of population based on the traditional and regional distinctions in language proficiency. The level of Kazakh language proficiency and acquisition among the ethnic Russians and Slavs also traditionally remained the lowest in the former Soviet space. This factor allowed the regime to use the substitution mechanisms in addressing Russian-speaking, and thus, non-Kazakh audiences and Kazakh-speaking audiences who may not be interested in the Russian content of the presidential speeches and discourses.

The compartmentalized ideology can exist and sustain itself only in the closed, non-democratic systems with limited pluralism and almost absent open political competition via open and fair elections or free media. It is a closed and controlled discursive system centered around the most powerful figure in the regime who is able to construct a strong discourse leading to his or her own legitimation under such conditions. In this short investigation of post-independent Kazakhstani case, the

12 Annual presidential address of the President N.A. Nazarbayev to the people of Kazakhstan, Astana, 4 April 2003 “The main directions in domestic and foreign policies for 2004.”
article demonstrated how President Nazarbayev was able to create the panic discourse about bloody ethnic conflicts and, most recently, instability and ethnic conflict in the post-Nazarbayev era (Satpaev et al., 2013) linking his own strong presidential powers to the inter-related concepts of political stability, economic growth and inter-ethnic harmony. I term this the Nazarbayev Triangle.

This triple discourse of stability which led to economic growth and inter-ethnic harmony became the only umbrella discourse uniting both audiences and it became the main legitimation discourse. It propagated the need for strong presidential power and the political stability which would follow with it. Stability-Prosperity-Power was the triangle of the discursive substitution, which originated in 1989 and constituted the stability and legitimation of the regime in the absence of any national ideology. It also allowed the regime to construct the strategic ambiguity in nation-building project by not committing to either one audience (Kazakh or Russian) or other. Instead both messages were kept separate, united by the triangle discourse and President Nazarbayev’s role as the guarantee for the economic growth and ethnic stability in the country. The unexpected resignation of Nursultan A. Nazarbayev in March 2019 but his continuous influence on Kazakhstan’s politics as the Chairman of the country’s Security Council and its Father of the Nation, elbası, still keeps Nazarbayev at the cornerstone position of both the nationalizing regime and compartmentalized ideology in the country, where he remains the creator and main consolidating figure in both. And while the fate of the real political transition in Kazakhstan is still unclear, the growing protests and demands for substantial welfare and economic growth that compartmentalized ideology promised the Kazakh- and Russian-speaking audiences for decades might provide a different scenario for power transition on the elite level.

Recent protests demonstrated the fragility of the top-down semi-institutional approaches of compartmentalized ideology and significantly shook the positionality of elbası as the most powerful and the “most supported” political figure despite the attempts of the previous election committees to convince both domestic and foreign audiences in 99 percent approval rate. And while many protestors still addressed Nazarbayev in their own personified perception of real power, vlast, in the country, by protesting in front of presidential palace or calling his name in demand for answers, the inability of the regime to find a reliable and working mechanism for dialogue, threatens further legitimation of the entire regime.

In conclusion, the case of Kazakhstan’s compartmentalized ideology example can contribute towards more complex and comprehensive understanding of similar processes in other non-democratic contexts with popular, unpopular and seemingly domestically legitimate regimes. On the one hand, the power of such ideology depends on the ability of the regime to convincingly convey varying messages, discourses and narratives to the audiences which regime creates within the society. But on the other, the true power of such mechanism of ideological reshuffling of discourses heavily depends on the regime’s ability to deliver on state capacity-building promises in real wages, pensions, welfare provisions and affordable housing. And if there are stages to post-Sovietness in the region, then Kazakhstan’s case in post-2018 scenario might as well demonstrate that not all nation-building processes require a complex network of discursive addresses, divisions into different socio-linguistic audiences but a clear agenda of addressing the challenges of neoliberal crises of inequality and demands for material state support from its population.

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