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# MULTICULTURALISM AND NATIONAL-BUILDING PROCESSES IN KAZAKHSTAN: THEORETICAL PERSPECTIVE

The complexity of multiculturalism has been central to European countries' political concerns since the 19th century. The era of globalisation creates another complex dimension of multiculturalism based on continuity and discontinuity. Multiculturalism also deals with the growing numbers of the geopolitical situation in the context of Eurasian integration. Most recently, in the wake of religious extremism in the world and the ensuing contention of superpowers like the U.S.A., China and Russia created another debate on multiculturalism. Most often, multiculturalism is addressed by questions of ethnicity, religion and nationality. However, it is also essential to consider cultural differences such as gender, age, disability, and other aspects of identity and social equality. The concept of multiculturalism comes into a complex and ambiguous relationship with the ideology of the national-building process. The issue of nationalism is associated with aspects of ethnic and national identity, particularly in the era of social transformation. This paper aims to elaborate on a theoretical conceptualisation of multiculturalism and the national building process in Kazakhstan and its prospects and challenges.

**Key words:** Multiculturalism, National-Building processes, Central Asia, Kazakhstan, Ethnicity.

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## Қазақстандағы мультимәдениеттілік және ұлттық құрылу процестері: теориялық перспектива

Көпмәдениеттілік мәселесінің күрделене түсуі ХІХ ғасырдан басталып, Еуропа елдеріндегі саяси мәселелерде басты орынға шықты. Жаһандану дәуірі үздіксіздік пен үзіліске негізделген мультикультурализмнің тағы бір күрделі өлшемін туғызады. Мультикультурализм еуразиялық интеграция контекстіндегі өсіп келе жатқан геосаяси жағдайды да қарастырады. Соңғы кездерде дүниежүзіндегі орын алып жатқан діни экстремизм мен АҚШ, Қытай және Ресей сияқты алпауыт державалар арасындағы туындап жатқан дауға байланысты мультимәдениеттілікке қатысты тағы бір тың пікірталас туындап отыр. Көп жағдайда мультикультурализм мәселесі этникалық, діни және ұлттық сипаттағы мәселелермен қозғалады. Дегенмен жынысы, жасы, еңбекке қабілеттілігі сияқты мәдени айырмашылықтарды және сәйкестік пен әлеуметтік теңдіктің басқа аспектілерін де ескеру қажет. Мультикультурализм тұжырымдамасы ұлттық құрылыс процесінің идеологиясымен күрделі және даулы қатынастарға түседі. Ал ұлтшылдық мәселесіне келер болсақ, әсіресе қазіргі әлеуметтік трансформация процесі орын алып жатқан дәуірде этникалық және ұлттық бірегейлік аспектілерімен тығыз байланыста болады. Бұл мақаланың мақсаты – Қазақстандағы көпмәдениеттілік пен ұлттық құрылу процесінің теориялық тұжырымдамасын айқындау, сондай-ақ оның даму перспективалары мен проблемаларын әзірлеу.

**Түйін сөздер:** көпмәдениеттілік, ұлттық құрылу процесі, Орталық Азия, Қазақстан, этникалық.

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## Мультикультурализм и национально-строительные процессы в Казахстане: теоретическая перспектива

Сложность проблемы мультикультурализма началась в XIX веке и заняла особое место в политических вопросах европейских стран. Эпоха глобализации создает еще одно сложное измерение мультикультурализма, основанное на преемственности и прерывности. Мультикультурализм также имеет дело с растущим числом геополитических ситуаций в контексте евразийской

интеграции. В последнее время из-за религиозного экстремизма, происходящего во всем мире, и конфликта между такими сверхдержавами, как США, Китай и Россия, возникла очередная свежая дискуссия о мультикультурализме. В большинстве случаев проблема мультикультурализма связана с вопросами этнического, религиозного и национального характера. Однако следует также учитывать культурные различия, такие, как пол, возраст, трудоспособность и другие аспекты идентичности и социального равенства. Концепция мультикультурализма имеет сложные и противоречивые отношения с идеологией процесса национального строительства. Что же касается вопроса национализма, то он тесно связан с аспектами этнической и национальной идентичности, особенно в эпоху, когда происходит процесс социальных преобразований. Целью данной статьи является уточнение теоретической концепции мультикультурализма и процесса национального становления в Казахстане, а также разработка перспектив и проблем его развития.

**Ключевые слова:** мультикультурализм, национально-строительные процессы, Центральная Азия, Казахстан, этнос.

## Introduction

Multiculturalism, a social phenomenon, is based on intercultural communication as its ideological platform. Multiculturalism explains how a given society deals with cultural diversity. Multiculturalism also reflects how the members of different cultures can coexist peacefully. It also expresses that society is augmented by protective, respecting, and inspiring cultural diversity. In the contemporary era, multiculturalism discusses how societies must formulate and implement policies dealing with the impartial action of different cultures.

The concept of "multiculturalism" generally has three perspectives. One is political, in which the arguments are "for" or "against" the policy of multiculturalism and the corresponding control method; both supporters and opponents use the term. It was in this context in Canada in 1960 that the concept originated. The second context is empirical, descriptive or analytical. It occurs in scientific works and the public debate, involving the various manifestations of cultural heterogeneity of society, and is most closely associated with the emergence of "multicultural society." The third relates to the context of social and political philosophy, social and political order and human rights in the heterogeneity of the culture of a society (Therborn, 2001: 50-67).

Regarding the origin and social dynamics, scholars distinguish four types of multicultural societies: The pre-modern empire, multinational societies in Europe, post-national polyethnicity and colonial zone (Grishaeva, 2012). There are two different narratives associated with the concept of multiculturalism – amalgamation, assimilation, inclusion, or incorporation are some words illustrating the converging narratives; inequality, segregation, exclusion, or religious extremism emphasise the diverging narratives counter to the ethos of multiculturalism (Tawat, 2018).

## Justification of the choice of articles and goals and objectives

Most modern states today are, at least to some degree, culturally diverse primarily due to globalisation. Cultural diversity gains further significance in societies and states with established variability in terms of cultural traditions, language, migration patterns, citizenship and religion, with multiple ethnic groups residing there. These multiple identity-defining notions become significant for personal and group identity formation and further extend to the nation-building processes (Karas, 2019).

In this context, one of Central Asia's most pregnant lineaments is its ethnic and cultural diversity. Complex historical processes have created ethnically diverse states, which have enormously influenced the region's current shape. Human beings invent their identity through the culture, which socializes them. The term 'civilization' refers to a universal, plural and non-hierarchical phenomenon since contacts and exchanges have enriched every civilization. History is a shared experience. The historical relationship exists between nomadic and sedentary peoples, living in quite different environments-steppes and oases- played a crucial part in shaping the cultural diversity of Central Asia and made an essential contribution to its originality. On the territory of Central Asia for thousands of years thrived various civilizations that have left unique masterpieces of material and spiritual culture (Spengler, 2021).

Thirty years have passed since the Central Asian republics received their independence. In these last thirty years, the dynamics and mechanisms of ethno political processes in Central Asia have raised many questions about the ideology and politics of social stability in multi-ethnic societies such as Central Asian republics.

**Scientific research methodology**

The research methodology is based the scientific methodology such as induction, deduction and comparative analysis. Theoretical and historical methods were also considered for the access of the paper purpose.

**The main part**

*Multiculturalism in Kazakhstan*

Kazakhstan is celebrating its 30th anniversary of state independence and sovereignty. However, the regaining of Kazakhstan's statehood coincided with the disintegration of the Soviet Union, which resulted in the formation of fifteen newly independent states. However, historically, present-day Kazakhstan is the result of the centuries-long emerging and fading of tribes in the vast steppe between the Altai and Volga. In this context, the development of separate statehood has pro- longed due to the nomadic lifestyle of the tribes living on the territory and to numerous penetrations from outside, ethnic migration movements and, last but not least, due to everlasting inner struggles for power among various Kazakh tribal groups (Akbota & Gaur, 2016).

Multiculturalism in Kazakhstan also evolved from the same laws for other world peoples. The general scheme of the ethnogenesis process is determined as follows: individual genera, tribes, tribal unions, ethnicity, nation and multicultural state. This process is not straightforward and occurs inconsistently through fragmentation, assimilation, and crossing; it could stop for a while and then resume under new historical conditions (Laurea, 2012).

The history of the ethnogenesis of the Kazakh people should be considered in the complex historical, archaeological, ethnographic, linguistic, and anthropological sciences. It is known that the Kazakh ethnic group evolved mainly from autochthonous tribes and tribal unions that anciently inhabited the vast territory of Kazakhstan. The formation of the nation has been associated with significant events of ethnopolitical antiquity and in the early middle ages, with the evolution of economic systems and the progressive changes in social relations, the establishment and the strengthening of feudalism (Laurea, 2012).

After gaining its independence as a result of the collapse of the Soviet Union, Kazakhstan started its pursuit of a new national identity in 1991. It was natural that the starting point was not a fresh start onto which a new national identity could be written. Instead, historical, pre-Soviet identities that per-

sisted in different forms during the Soviet era were the first ones that the Kazakh policymakers used as resources for building the Kazakh nation. However, building a viable national identity that includes all the citizens living in the territory of Kazakhstan is not easy because of the high proportion of the non-Kazakh population, especially Russians. Therefore, the nation-building process in Kazakhstan is critical due to ethnic and civic elements clashing (Shirin, 1995: 47).

The demographic structure affects the policy choices of the policymakers in contemporary Kazakhstan (dual citizenship issue, a north-south difference in ethnic structure etc.). It is one of the planks used by the nation-builders in Kazakhstan for the implementation of ethnic policies concerning Kazakh values that ethnic policies are necessary for the formation of unitary Kazakh identity as the sub-national/tribal identities, which could not have been eradicated by the Soviet policies, obstruct the nation-building process. In a similar vein, Kazakh policymakers have also been trying to shift the loyalties of the Kazakhs from sub-national/tribal identities toward a collective Kazakh identity. In contrast, pre-existing traditions and cultural resources of the Kazakhs have been selected while implementing the policies for building a viable Kazakh identity (i.e. state symbols, cultural policies, and celebrations) (Shirin, 1995: 56).

The presence of the high proportion of non-Kazakhs and Russified ethnic Kazakhs forced the nation-builders to adopt more civic policies (i.e. elevation of the Russian to the official status, cancellation of the language law making the knowledge of the Kazakh language mandatory, the prevalence of the Russian in significantly higher education) in the short-run, nation builders will push for more ethnic policies (i.e. further emphasis on the Kazakh language, culture and values) in the long-run. Therefore, even if the nation-building process in Kazakhstan has civic components in the short run, the process is more ethnic in the long run (Amrekulov, 2000: 98).

Moreover, the experience of interaction between different cultures in the Republic of Kazakhstan has its characteristics. The first is connected with the presence of a republic within the Soviet Union, which Western analysts refer to as a monocultural multi-ethnic state. In the Soviet period, the multi-ethnic composition of the republic was finally formed. However, the main development line was aimed at forming the Soviet monoculture. There was another line of development, which, acting on

the "informal" domestic level, has been directed on interaction and mutual enrichment of cultures. Examples of this can be found in the cultural life of modern Kazakhstan (Schatz, 2000: 70-92).

In recent years, inter-ethnic cooperation has undergone significant changes in the country. Through freethinking and tolerance new social groups originated in society in the context of economic and political reforms. The democratisation of society in Kazakhstan has created conditions for the revival of the culture. Cultural revival, further, would be based on the different ethnic groups of Kazakhstan, which contributes to the harmonization of interethnic relations in Kazakhstan. However, it raises following pertinent challenges: the degree to which cultural diversity could be 'accepted or tolerated' and how well it could be accommodated (Cummings, 2005: 156).

*Challenges and Prospects of Multiculturalism in Kazakhstan*

The critical challenge of multicultural states such as Kazakhstan is how these states can achieve peaceful coexistence and harmony. It has become more significant when every ethnic group and religion has its interests, and it has become a challenge for the nations to ensure the coexistence of all these groups integrated with the processes of nation-building, particularly after the January 2022 event in Kazakhstan.

However, in the last thirty years of independence, Kazakhstan has formed a particular way of interethnic relations. Kazakhstan's model of ethnic and religious tolerance provides a ground to understand multi-ethnic groups and what challenges a state can face, especially in maintaining social harmony, tolerance and territorial integrity. It also shows inter-ethnic and inter-religious peace with economic and political stability along with these challenges (Lee, 2002).

In addition, it is impossible to ignore the fact that in thirty years of independence, the ethnic structure of Kazakhstan's society has changed significantly. In 2022, the share of Kazakhs in the population reached 69.6 percent (10.09 mln. people); the share of Russian was 17.9 percent (3.7 mln. People), and the other ethnic groups accounted for 15.5 percent (World Population Review 2022). Over these years, the number of representatives of European ethnic groups almost doubly reduced; simultaneously, the number of representatives of Asian ethnic groups increased by almost doubling. All these changes, continuing to this day, inevitably impact interethnic relations in the country and require continuous

monitoring of various challenges of multiculturalism like language, migration, citizenship, education, and religion in Kazakhstan.

Integration of the intra-Kazakh population was a decisive factor in the young nation's survival in its transition period. The importance of ethnic policy allowed Kazakhstan to form the foundations of national statehood, especially to mobilize the spiritual and other resources of the Kazakh population. The Declaration of State Sovereignty of the Kazakh SSR, dated October 25, 1990, recognized the state sovereignty of Kazakh SSR. Constitutional Law "On State Independence of the Republic of Kazakhstan," dated December 16, 1991, highlights "the right of the Kazakh nation to self-determination." The Constitution of the Republic of Kazakhstan, dated January 28, 1993, also focuses on the national character of Kazakh statehood, presenting it as a form of self-determined state of the Kazakh nation (Rogov, 2019: 220-222).

The initial phase of the ethnic multiculturalism of Kazakh State follows the logic of the nation's spiritual rejuvenation rather naturally. However, due to a number of variables, this procedure during this time has not been revealed thoroughly and completely. The Following stage commence with the Constitution adoption (1995), which preserved the civic concepts of broad statehood with the territorial model of the nation. As a result of the document's lack of a division between Kazakhstan's delegates from titular and non-titular countries, social integration processes were sped up. This action was necessary because a significant segment of the populace did not embrace the state's ethnonationalism, which accorded the Kazakh people special status.

Due to the possessions of oil reserves, minerals and metals, Kazakhstan's economy is the largest in Central Asia and can potentially consolidate the Kazakh society (Collins, 2006). The economic potential depends on the ability of society and the national elites, designed to overcome ethnic tensions and resolve the priority problems of the society. Independent political organizations would promote the integration of population policy into a single nation and the different regions of the country – into a single economic space (Kadyrzhanov, 1999). In this context, the relatively common cultural values and philosophical orientation of the vast majority of the population are the central resource of Kazakh society in achieving these strategic goals and promoting the integration of society at the supra-ethnic level and reducing conflicts.

The ethnic divide of Kazakh society was a product of ethnopolitical developments in Kazakhstan,

particularly after independence. The mobilization of Kazakhs sparked the mobilization of other ethnic groups, creating racial tension in society. The inter-ethnic rivalry between Kazakhs and Russians, the two major ethnic groups in society that helped to fuel the rise of racial tensions in Kazakhstan, is where this dynamic is most clearly visible. Despite this, there was no significant ethnic violence in Kazakhstan between 1991 and 2021, and there are some following factors:

Firstly, ethnic conflict is usually driven by the interest and values of different ethnic groups—the contradictions in the interests of the most concern the elites of society. Fundamental human values are at stake in this battle, which also has an impact on the pillars of national identity. Therefore, the position of ethnic group elites determines whether there appears to be a conflict of interests. In Kazakhstan, the elites of the various ethnic groups reached a settlement that helped to resolve the war. There is no value conflict in Kazakhstan because the vast majority of the people has the same cultural value orientations.

Second, the absence of extreme religious traditions in Kazakhstan's Orthodox milieu and the lack of historical forms and traditions of orthodox Islam in Kazakhs' thinking.

Conflicts are more manageable, organized, and predictable when they are between ethnic groups, yet they can still be dangerous. Because there are fewer policy domains at stake, ethno-social disputes are less hazardous to the state while not being structured. They sought a firm response (Kurganskaya, 2001: 256-278). They recommended using political strategies rather than violent ones in their resolution. Complex issues related to the transition era led to ethnic clashes. None of the ethnic conflicts had been settled, according to a review of them. Kazakhs participated heavily in these interethnic clashes. Twelve of them have kept the essential capacity for interethnic violence and have taken on a latent form.

The fact that ethnic communities were not segregated in Kazakhstan's interior regions proved advantageously. In ethnic media, where it was portrayed as the biggest challenge to the state and a danger to the nation's territorial integrity, it gave rise to separatist tendencies. Consequently, political mobilization of ethnic groups in the ethnically concerned area was a key factor in evaluating the possibility for ethnic violence. The country's Russian community emerged as the greatest politically organized force in this situation because of the power of their historic homeland.

Several hundred thousand Russians lived in the nation, and their presence was linked to issues with the politicization of ethnicity (Schatz, 1999).

The most problematic is the existence of shared values to unite all peoples living in Kazakhstan into a single nation. Long-term co-residence and economic activity can lead to addiction of ethnicities to each other but are unlikely to give rise to shared values. The creation and sharing of cultural heritage, mainly as the symbiosis of Russian and Kazakh cultures in Kazakhstan, has not yet been observed. However, there is talk about the significant influence of the Great Russian culture on Kazakh, merging of the two into one is not happening nor is likely to happen. In future, if Kazakhstan retains a sufficiently sizeable Russian population, there is a possibility of the formation of a Russian subculture.

The Assembly of Peoples of Kazakhstan could be the answer to the questions related to social harmony and tolerance in Kazakhstan, which harmoniously fits into the system of life of the young sovereign state. For the years of its activity, the Assembly of Peoples of Kazakhstan has developed practical recommendations to ensure inter-ethnic harmony and political stability in the Republic of Kazakhstan. This structure positively impacts the Republic of Kazakhstan's policy of unity and equality for members of different nationalities and faiths. Furthermore, the Assembly of the People reflects the entire spectrum of ideals and interests of all the peoples of Kazakhstan and each ethnic group separately. It is an essential direction of the State policies aimed at preserving and strengthening inter-ethnic peace and accord in the country and ensuring that all citizens of Kazakhstan have equal access to social and economic rights and freedoms.

The Assembly, an institution of civil society, was established in 1992 at the First Forum of the Peoples of Kazakhstan. In March 1995, it found its practical expression and became a unique advisory corpse under the President of the Republic of Kazakhstan. Going along with the country, the Assembly has proved its relevance and urgency. Currently, the Assembly brings together and represents almost all 130 ethnic groups living in the republic's regions. Currently, the integration potential of the Assembly, its ability to consolidate the interests of ethnic groups, dialogue with the authorities, and interethnic communication contributed to the establishment of the socio-political institution as one of the main instruments of national policy in Kazakhstan.

## Results and discussion

However, so far, inter-ethnic conflicts in Kazakhstan are sporadic. In many cases, there are latent ethnic tensions not expressed in physical acts of violence, such as poorly diagnosed phenomena such as ethno cultural isolation, ethnic and social exclusion, economic competition and a high level of mutual distrust between ethnic groups. For example, when closed ethnic groups do not have the strength and power to deviate from the explicit expression of their discontent and avoid overt conflict, the conflict persists, but the open acknowledgement of the conflict is not there. Dominant groups frequently interact with other dominant groups and have fewer interactions with minority groups. Thus, the analysis of multiculturalism and inter-ethnic relations in dominant and minority groups reveals a significant correlation between ethnic disparity and inter-ethnic relations in Kazakhstan.

## Conclusion

In other words, ethnic disparities influenced and determined inter-ethnic group relations in society. Thus, ethnic identity and multiculturalism are interrelated and mutually reinforcing in a society like Kazakhstan. The dominant group of Kazakhs has the highest degrees of ethnic enclosure, and minority groups have the lowest. In turn, ethnic stratification is an important principle to organise the relationships of dominant and minority groups in a plural society. Ethnic disparities and capricious measures of ethnic inclusion among ethnic groups give augments to plural society as in Kazakhstan. The public policy of ethnic nationalism has become a decisive factor in consolidating the foundations of Kazakhstan's statehood.

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