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Universidad del Zulia
Facultad Experimental de Ciencias
Departamento de Ciencias Humanas
Maracaibo - Venezuela

Sociocultural mechanisms of Oralmans' adaptation in the contemporary Kazakhstani society

Kalysh A.¹

¹Al-Farabi Kazakh National University
kalysh@mail.ru

Kassymova D.²

²KIMEP University
kassymova@kimep.kz

Isayeva A.³

³Kazakh National Woman Pedagogical University
isayeva@mail.ru

Meirmanova G.⁴

⁴Al-Farabi Kazakh National University
mairmanova@gmail.com

Baudiyarova k.⁵

⁵Al-Farabi Kazakh National University
baudiyarova@mail.ru

Sapatayev S.⁶

⁶Al-Farabi Kazakh National University
sapatayev@mail.ru

Abstract

The objective of the article is to make preliminary generalizations for further research on repatriates' adaptation models via comparative qualitative research methods. As a result, the case of Kazakhs coming from Uzbekistan is interesting as it provides an opportunity to look at how Kazakh practices survived in Uzbek environment and now serve the purpose to breed true Kazakhness on Kazakh soil. In conclusion, the employment of Mahalla model by the Ak Ordasy Corporation was necessitated by the limited time and space specifics and the nature of the population under their responsibility.

Keywords: Adaptation, Asar, Kazakh, Oralman, Traditional.

Mecanismos socioculturales de la adaptación oral en la sociedad contemporánea de Kazajstán

Resumen

El objetivo del artículo es hacer generalizaciones preliminares para futuras investigaciones sobre los modelos de adaptación de repatriados a través de métodos de investigación cualitativa comparativa. Como resultado, el caso de los kazajos procedentes de Uzbekistán es interesante, ya que brinda la oportunidad de observar cómo sobrevivieron las prácticas kazajas en el medio ambiente uzbeko y ahora tienen el propósito de criar un verdadero kazajo en el territorio kazajo. En conclusión, el empleo del modelo Mahalla por parte de Ak Ordasy Corporation fue necesario debido a las limitaciones de tiempo y espacio específicas y la naturaleza de la población bajo su responsabilidad.

Palabras clave: Adaptación, Asar, Kazajo, Oralman, Tradicional.

1. INTRODUCTION

Repatriation waves since the 1990s from different countries (of former USSR, China and Mongolia) created new socio-cultural groups of population with pragmatic interest to gain access to living space and resources, that is interpreted as return to ancestral homeland, reconciliation with the torn past, revival of lost ethnic traditions, or to provide feedback or new impetus to forgotten Kazakh culture and language under the Soviet regime. Kazakh people are torn apart by times and regimes currently live in many countries, and the degree of

their adaptation to the recipient societies vary from almost full acculturation (Turkey) to selective marginalization (chosen by the Kazakh Diaspora or the host regimes). For the political leadership of independent Kazakhstan, the Diaspora became an essential asset to be deliberately employed in the process of the nation/state building through repatriation and inhabiting the depopulated living zones in some areas of the country.

The term selected by the authorities to designate their social-cultural status since the early 1990s –oralman - does not encompass all the aspects of their adaptation problems, and has been rejected by most of the repatriates. The process of oralmans adaptation proved to be painful for all interested parties: repatriates, authorities, and the Kazakh community. The building of houses by the authorities is not paralleled by lives and identity building in the oralman community in state-designated territorialities.

The territorial distribution of repatriates (oralmans in official state designation) in the country is uneven; most of them reside in the densely populated but economically active zones (southern, western, creating serious pressure on state structures and local communities. Kazakhs living abroad as ethnic minorities in the recipient societies developed their subcultures that remained mainly archaic at the core, modified cultural forms to meet the canons of the dominant political and cultural mainstream and incorporated some aspects of other cultural practices. But how do the recipient community and new accommodate each other? What are grass root, bottom level models of

ethnic repatriates' adaptation for further integration into the new country?

2. MAIN PART

The integration into Kazakhstani society includes not only measures from the administrative structures but from the repatriates – methods of life framing – economic basis, social networks creation and maintaining, education opportunities, linguistic adaptation. The adaptation and integration models differ due to mostly the areas of settlement and specifics of the social-economic factors there. But the repatriates bring also centuries-long practices of social life organization that on one side, are helpful in their life organization to overcome the challenges they face in a collective way, but on the other side, might conflict with the Kazakhstani realities at several levels: local, regional and country- as the state-administrative system of Kazakhstan does not recognize some traditional models of territorial units' activities (Mahallas in Uzbekistan).

Internal principles of social organization differ- Mahalla principle governs the lifestyle of oralmans from Uzbekistan, clan-tribe principle and party membership hierarchy is maintained by Kazakhs from China. The processes of oralmans' integration into the recipient society have a complex nature and depend not only on the state institutes and regional administrations' policy and repatriates' social

capital but also to great extent on the specifics of local frameworks to provide conditions for newcomers' life arrangement.

The methodology of information collection. The findings of the report are based on the field research data obtained during the field trips in spring, summer and fall of 1012 and summer 2013 to South Kazakhstan. The authors interviewed administrators (akims, akimat administration officers, heads of aqsaqal councils, heads of the oralmen's communities, and activists of the female organizations in Asar micro-district, head of the business corporation - Ak Ordasy, common folk – both old and young generations. Data was collected through semi-structured interviews, by snowball technique, discussions were held in focus groups and occasional mini-surveys. We conducted videotaped interviews of aqsaqals in places of their residence and interpreted them using discourse analysis technique. The discussions were focused on the everyday life of the informants. The interviews and discussions were held in the Kazakh language and then were translated into Russian and English for feedback and interpretation.

2.1. Asar case

The positive model of adaptation and integration is Asar settlement (micro-district in Shymkent city, South Kazakhstan). Asar is a type of a new settlement, therefore the leadership had a chance to realize the plans they could have had in their heads, part of them was modified the meet the realities- both opportunities and limitations, but

centered around a social-economic model of mahalla. Ethnic repatriates from Uzbekistan (living in Asar) with the hopes for the best future brought rich expertise of life cycles' social-cultural organization framed in traditional Central Asian mahalla system in Ak Ordasy corporation interpretation. All stages of repatriation and integration of the Asar inhabitants are controlled via the embedded hierarchically structured traditional and invented institutions and established norms of proper conduct.

The deviations from the fundamentals for the centrally managed community-based life are differently interpreted by the common folk and the administration as freedom of choice, common good or betrayal of the ancestors' dream. Conflicts of interests, individual and corporate managed collective modes of social conduct through the intrusion of the bigger Kazakhstani community are interpreted in the paper as a social-cultural transit into new identity generally shaped by the external environment but filled with the individual content. Comparison of accepted norms and deviations at four levels (repatriates and their communities, corporation management and the recipient Kazakhstani community) would help to develop an integration minimizing risks model.

Assessment of the traditional social structures' employment can contribute to civic society and identity building in modern-day Kazakhstan. The social-economic and cultural realities of South Kazakhstan posit a great challenge to the smooth realization of the corporation's plan to integrate Asar people into Kazakhstani society.

The case of Asar administration is interesting as it interlinks three structures – grass root traditional Mahalla and its top management body -council of elders and central authority – Ak-Ordasy Corporation.

The adaptation and integration model of ethnic repatriates from Uzbekistan settled in Asar micro-district under Shymkent city in South Kazakhstan under the patronage of the Ak-Ordasy Corporation is assessed in the article as a model of adaptation and integration into the Kazakhstani society. The first part of the paper provides a brief introduction into the history of Asar settlement formation in Shymkent suburbs, structural hierarchy in Asar and the role of Ak-Ordasy Corporation. The second part shows life organization in the – discursive and symbolic imaginary. The third part summarizes the pros and cons of the Mahalla model for the integration and adaptation for ethnic repatriates in Kazakhstan.

Asar inhabitants are from three oblasts of Uzbekistan – Tashkent, Jizak and Sur-Dariya, whose ancestors from the times immemorial used to live on those lands and became part of the Uzbekistan society as a result of the Soviet administrative reforms of the 1920s and international legal agreements between two states – Kazakhstan and Uzbekistan - reached after 1991 (Koblandin & Mendikulova, 2011). Asar can be viewed as a poly-functional cluster composed of the forms of social-economic units to handle various aspects of its inhabitants live (Mahalla committees and informal associations of neighborhoods and friends – gaps) in Kazakh version, promotion of business and political interests of Ak-Ordasy corporation,

and accomplishment of the historical mission of the leaders of Kazakh diaspora in Uzbekistan to settle repatriates in the ancestral homeland delegated to the Kalybekov family, and realization of the Kazakhstan's leadership ethnic repatriation policy.

Kazakh repatriation from Uzbekistan is a lengthy complex multifaceted phenomena covering several key actors within that process: 1) states – recipient Republic of Kazakhstan and country of origin – Republic of Uzbekistan; 2) Kazakh diaspora in Uzbekistan and its leadership at different levels (central, regional and local); 3) ethnic repatriates and the patronizing organizations (if any) (Sievers, 2002).

The repatriation under Kalybekovs included several stages: 1) planning to fulfill the assigned the mandate to arrange the migration and settlement; 2) legal arrangements – residence permits obtaining for 65 pioneers/volunteers to legalize land purchase (300 hectares under Shymkent city) from the Kazakhstani authorities; 3) search of the financial resources to construct a cottage village and the construction process itself; 4) arrangements for the arriving people – social and economic conditions; 5) administrative and social-economic networks and infrastructure in the village; 6) institutionalization of the repatriation – internal and external frameworks.

All the stages went hand in hand with the creation of the social control mechanisms to bind people with the real and imagined ties of new identity building – Kazakhs on the ancestral homeland. The financial crisis of 2008 affected the construction process, but the Ak –

Ordasy Corporation managed to get the financial resources through the state program for repatriations and integration–Nurly Kosh and were backed by the President of Kazakhstan – N. Nazarbayev, who visited the Asar village in April 2008 and blessed the process. The Asar people now view the 30th of April and 1st of May as their new holidays (Schatz, 2004).

2.2. Ak Ordasy corporation role

The corporation is the embodiment of quazi state authority; and acts through the El Amanaty administration, and real instruments are materialized in the constellation of mini councils – from the council of elders/aqsaqaldar *kenesi* through *ulichkoms* (committees for the streets' control) - to the *apalar kenesi*. Legitimization of the rights of the Ak Ordasy Corporation to chair the people and hold the key top administrative positions gives the corporation leadership solid grounds to claim the right to run for the political management at regional and national levels (Tajfel & Turner, 1986). The corporation created a hierarchically structured system composed of:

1) Corporation leadership that administer external affairs - creation of favorable political and legal foundations to facilitate its business and political interests at local, regional, national and international levels (cooperation with the Chinese companies); 2) Asar village administration operating by the traditional Mahalla scheme – El Amanaty; 3) structural units and subdivisions within Asar – districts'

and streets' administrations and traditional social institutes – elders councils, neighborhood communities, gaps; 4) system of formal (parents and families, schools and kindergartens) and informal control over the socialization and education processes (neighbors, seniors).

The competition between authorities is eliminated through the operational division of powers and duties. The Asar settlement infrastructure development, its administration, business activities for the Asar people and corporation, security are financed and supervised by the corporation. Part of the Asar inhabitants is working within the network of corporation units. The system of basic unwritten rules aggregated within the centuries of community life administration serves the interests of the corporation (Merton, 1938).

2.3. El Amanaty within the Asar structure

Council of elders is instrumental in establishing general frameworks for the activities of the corporation and Asar authority - El Amanaty administration. It is a hybrid construction linking modern and traditional forms of governance, politically and judicially incorrect but justified by the needs of the transit times. For administrative purposes, Asar is divided into six districts headed by the elected respected people - biis. The biis are under the supervision of tobe bii (the senior), under termless authority. They act to partisan the interests of the corporation, maintain social stability, raise issues of common concern and interests, and mobilize resources for the common good.

The mission of the traditional authorities, in the words of the El Amanaty chairman Munaibek Sailibayev, is to reconstruct forgotten or deformed Kazakh practices of social and cultural existence and form conditions for breeding new citizens of the Republic of Kazakhstan out of repatriates. The Asar inhabitants transit from one reality to another through the direct and indirect participation in self-administration due to paternalistic politics. The Asar people correlate independent decision-making and selection of survival strategies for their families with their potential and expected support from the corporation and Asar as a social construct. The corporation controls economic resources, and distributes the resources among the populace is based on real, imagined and prescribed qualities (Bourdieu, 1984).

2.4. Mahalla within the Asar system

Traditionally Mahalla in the Central Asian societies with predominant sedentary population activities engaged in agriculture and cotton production that demand orchestrated collective efforts for maintaining irrigation system played a great role in social-cultural and religious life. Depending on the regime that controlled the territory and population, Mahalla responded to the political-ideological order. The choice of Mahalla model by the Ak Ordasy Corporation for collective life management of repatriates can be explained not only by the attachment to tradition but by the deliberate strategy. Supporting each other to overcome hardships and sharing valuable recipes to arrange better life, communicating on various occasions, the repatriates do not

lose links with the past. Many repatriates are challenged by the cultural and psychological differences in Kazakhstan despite the likeliness of their cultural and language practices with the Kazakhs of the South (Blumer, 1969).

The past is present not only in family memories but in community life organization. Mahalla in neighboring Uzbekistan outlived the Soviet period and is recognized by the modern Uzbekistani regime as a cradle of ethnic identity, fount and generator of most precious genuine traditions, rites, customs and social-cultural practices. By Uzbek folk saying for every Uzbek Mahalla is like father and mother. The Uzbekistani authorities employ Mahalla institute as one of the instruments of civil society building in the state/nation-building process, the primary element in breeding social and civic responsibility and management training for the populace (Berger & Luckmann, 1966).

Hierarchical subordination within Asar structures provides the corporation to control all aspects of life in the settlement through multiplex and multifunctional practices and relationships – old and new ones, like corporate solidarity and loyalty, and ascribed right to interpret demands and establishments of the Kazakhstani authorities, form a new type of identity. Life strategies of Asar people are directly connected with the realization of business strategies of Ak Ordasy Corporation irrespective their position in the Asar hierarchy. Competition for statuses is possible inside the Asar and in the form of achievements from the external world. The positive sides of life

systemic organization by Mahalla principle are summed up as follows: 1) lower economic costs of social-economic infrastructure maintenance by free collective labor; 2) minimization of expenditures for internal control and security;

3) lesser efforts of individual family on family stability keeping, breeding children, organization of life cycles events and social gatherings and celebrations (weddings, funerals, religious and national holidays); 4) accumulation (directly or indirectly) of social capital forms as moral compensation – mutual aid, respect, prestige, reputation to serve future generations; 5) creation of new identity through common vision of the present - individual experience becomes collective, and provides feedback, foundation and framework for the development of shared patterns and schemata. Relations within the Asar community are hierarchically structured to meet the traditional society specifics and state requirements interpreted by the corporation. Resources people save and accrue through living in the Asar – parents are confident in the education, socialization and mobility of their children (Mazana et al., 2019; Rasooli & Abedini, 2017).

3. CONCLUSION

The Ak Ordasy leadership established stratified layers of supervisory units; remodeled customary authority based on the rule of central authorities, and applied traditional (with regional specifics) patron-client schemes to the system of administration and appeals to

the law of tradition. The employment of Mahalla model by the Ak Ordasy Corporation was necessitated by the limited time and space specifics and the nature of the population under their responsibility. Elements of Mahalla work as the form of social-political control over time and space in the transit period through social cultural and economic mechanisms.

The corporation has to employ the traditional institutes of authority condensed in Mahalla - council of elders (for males and females) and biis (elected representatives of the folk), neighborhood communities – gaps (age/gender specified), business and security units, educational centers (schools and kindergartens) and cultural establishments in various forms (new holidays and calendar, social time interpretation, new identity building mechanisms) to fulfill its mission - design an Asar man model, values and norms of common life, lenses to see and interpret new reality, topicality of problems selection and their orderly arrangement, etc.

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