

Introduction

My first encounter with Kazakhstan's Germans took place, rather by chance, in a small village in the south-eastern corner of Kazakhstan in 1999, where I had been living for about two months. While I was researching the significance of Kazakh kinship categories, my Kazakh host father happened to mention the 'village's German family'. By the time I had finally arranged to meet them, it was the last day before their emigration, and they were extremely excited about their new life in Germany. For me it was quite unsettling to realize, after talking with them, that they had little clue about the country in which they had longed to live for so many years and to which they were now heading. Not to mention my disorientation as I sat eating the same apple pie my mother bakes, while in a garden full of flowers, the likes of which I had never seen before in a Kazakh village.

Those Kazakhstani Germans, as many others before them, desired to live among Germans, and had therefore sold everything to leave for an unknown land, often precluding any possibility of coming back. Three years later, I decided to write my MA thesis about homeland conceptions of Russian Germans living in Cologne. I understood that the vision of 'returning to the historic homeland' had been for many a strong motivator, fuelling high expectations, but at the same time those feelings worked against them because this vision of an 'historic homeland' was not accepted by local Germans. The fact that people born thousands of kilometres from Germany claim 'Germanness' on the grounds of common blood simply reminds most people in Germany of times they hoped had long passed.

In 2006, I returned to Kazakhstan, this time to learn what being German meant to Kazakhstani Germans and how it affected their behaviour. I met Germans who, above all, considered themselves more punctual, organized and hard-working than those around them, which they proudly attributed to their ethnic belonging. For me, this was hard to accept since the attribution of 'mentality' to ethnic groups contradicts my very personal viewpoint and experience. The fact that I am a German researcher has impacted this work. My presence

often disturbed the well-established mechanisms of inclusion and exclusion since I was perceived as a different kind of German. Furthermore, some Kazakhstani Germans were aware that many Germans dislike the category 'German', and this was particularly troubling to so-called ethno-activists who held positions in one of the German minority's institutions and whose reservations towards me were sometimes difficult to dispel. But also encounters with non-officials were often affected by the contradictory expectations of each other's concept of a German identity. This either resulted in people trying their best to prove that they were 'real, pure' Germans by, for instance, showing me how well they kept their house, or – not solely but sometimes depending on their knowledge of Germany's Germans – by doing their best to make it clear that they were not 'nationalists'. Fortunately most people realized I was not an official representative of the German state, and only a few times was I approached under the mistaken notion that I could provide assistance in pursuing immigration to Germany.

My research has profited greatly from the fact that I spent an extended period of time with my subjects. I was able to experience many encounters and conversations in which my presence became increasingly insignificant over the months, and divergent findings between interview statements and everyday conversation contributed to my insights into the significance of a German identity in present-day Kazakhstan. But above all people allowed me to be part of their community and to attain intimate knowledge of who they were and how they viewed their paths in life.

This book explores the lives, perceptions and actions of those who chose to stay in Kazakhstan and those who did not necessarily choose to stay but who stayed nevertheless. Why did they stay? Was it not important for them to live 'among their own kind'? Or did they fear that they would be regarded as Russian in their 'historic homeland' Germany? What, then, does a German identity mean to people? When is it important? For whom is it important? What constitutes a German identity in Kazakhstan, and has it been changing?

Kazakhstan is often characterized as the most prosperous and 'international' of all Central Asian states. According to official statistics, present-day Kazakhstan is home to more than one hundred different ethnic groups; however, the two major groups – Kazakhs and Russians – comprise more than eighty per cent of the country's population. After the Soviet Union's dissolution, many of its long-term observers predicted ethnic turmoil, but in Kazakhstan this largely failed to materialize. Nor was there any intense aspiration to independence in 1991, which is why the country's existence has been referred to as 'accidental' (Olcott 2002). Kazakhstan's first and – as of this writing – only president, Nursultan Nazarbayev, is said to have successfully unified a Kazakh 'national and cultural regeneration' with a policy of 'ethnic harmony' and economic reforms (Dave 2007: 3). However, despite economic growth and ethnic stability, a vast number of people have opted to leave the country since 1991.

By 1997 alone, approximately 1.5 million people had left Kazakhstan, or roughly ten per cent of the country's population. This huge migratory outflow had the largest impact on Kazakhstan's Germans, of whom more than eighty per cent have emigrated. Between 1989 and 1999, the German population in Kazakhstan dropped from about one million to about 350,000 (or from 5.8 to 2.4 per cent of the total population) and was, according to official statistics, estimated at about 180,000 in 2012. Germany's constitutional guarantee of citizenship and generous benefits for immigrants from the former USSR during the late 1980s and early 1990s, in support of the *Ruf der Heimat* ('call of the homeland'), had laid the groundwork for this massive immigration (Römhild 1998: 130f).

Kazakhstani-German history is marked by several turning points, and ethnic belonging has had varying impacts on the lives of Kazakhstani Germans and their ancestors. At the time when most German settlers came to Russia – towards the end of the eighteenth century – they were considered more 'developed' simply because they had come from a Western country. For about a century they enjoyed more freedom and greater rights than their Russian neighbours, who were mostly bound to serfdom during that time. But as the twentieth century unfolded, the situation gradually reversed. Russia's Germans had always been affected by the mutual relations of the two states, which, for obvious reasons, worsened during the First World War, and which, after the attack of the German Wehrmacht on the Soviet Union in 1941, brought about the catastrophe of deportation. All Soviet Germans were forced to leave their settlements in the Volga region and in Ukraine, and to begin a new life in Siberia or Central Asia. Many lost most or all of their relatives after the Second World War and faced discrimination because of their link to a Soviet 'enemy nation'. However, once more, in the 1980s and 1990s, the situation reversed. Being German turned into an asset, for it permitted immigration to Germany.

Kazakhstani Germans are usually referred to as a diaspora (Akiner 2005; Brown 2005; Diener 2004), which presumes an ethnically distinct group that is characterized by its attachment to an 'historic homeland'. More recent studies operate additionally within the framework of transnationalism (Sienkiewicz 2015; Stoll 2007); thus they account for the numerous ties between those Kazakhstani Germans who left and those who stayed, which are assumed to build a social field that transgresses national borders. This book critically reflects on the concepts of diaspora and transnationalism by elaborating on social (transnational) networks, the flows of support, the meanings transmitted by such networks and support, and how both impact the lives of Kazakhstani Germans and the role that ethnicity plays in them. I will explore how transnationally transmitted meanings are reinterpreted by people in Kazakhstan to meet their predominantly locally defined needs. Along these lines, it will be investigated how views about Germany interact with Kazakhstani Germans' memories of 'their past' and their views of a German identity. Further, I will elaborate on the role of the two

states' policies – the effect of Germany's immigration and minority policies on Kazakhstani Germans' perception of a German identity, and how Kazakhstan's nationality policies are viewed and used. Thus I will explore the interplay of memories, networks and state policies and how they constrain and enable people in the 'construction' of a (Kazakhstani) German identity. In doing so, my study adds to research on migratory processes and transnationalism that have so far focused on labour migrants and refugees after immigration. Firstly, only by equally investigating those who did not leave a place that is deeply affected by emigration are the effects of transnational ties to be fully understood. Secondly, a predominantly ethnically triggered out-migration raises the question of how a significant reduction in numbers affects the process of ethnic identification in the place that has been abandoned. To this end, I will discuss when, how and why people identify themselves as Germans in present-day Kazakhstan, and those aspects that influence this process of identification.

I will argue that German identity in Kazakhstan has been transformed during the last decades. Memories of the past, which had been built upon unjust treatment received during Soviet times, have been partially replaced with 'German success stories', due both to the diminishing Soviet notion of the 'German enemy nation' and to increasing contact with Germany, which has also resulted in the influx of 'good German products' into the Kazakhstani market, which is particularly appreciated by Kazakhs. However, a growing knowledge of Germany's Germans, personally transmitted by relatives who sometimes face a range of difficulties in Germany, is reflected in negative attitudes towards Germany and its Germans, and has ultimately contributed to a reformation of the German category, namely by excluding Germany's Germans and by partly dismissing the idea of an 'historic German homeland'. More locally defined identities appear to be 'under construction', and may increasingly become bound up in the newly established Kazakh nation state and find expression in a Kazakhstani German or Kazakhstani identity.

My research contributes to the anthropological study of ethnicity in present-day Kazakhstan. At the same time, it deals with a largely ethnically triggered migratory process by focusing on those who did not migrate. Neither of these issues has been extensively investigated thus far, and to do so this research project will need to engage with a diverse field of studies and research both within and outside of anthropology.

Kazakhstani Germans and the Study of Nationalities in Central Asia

The process of ethnic identification with regard to Kazakhstani Germans has not been extensively investigated. What few studies exist (Brown 2005; Diener 2004, 2009a; Moore 2000) primarily deal with the impact of Kazakh state policies on Kazakhstani Germans as a minority nationality 'inherited' from the Soviet

Union.¹ Though some of them are based in part on fieldwork in Kazakhstan, their findings are largely a contribution to the body of literature on the ‘nationality question’ in the former Soviet Union and its successor states (Abashin 2007; Bremmer and Taras 1993; Brubaker 1999; Chinn and Kaiser 1996; Hirsch 2005; Kolstø 1999; Martin 2001; Slezkine 1994; G. Smith 1996; Tishkov 1997; Weitz 2002; for Kazakhstan see Akiner 2005; Dave 2007; Gumpfenberg 2004; Olcott 2002). Most of the authors are political scientists who are concerned with the ‘transition process’ within societies in the context of a post-Soviet framework. In doing so, most studies touch on the notion of identity, but identity formation is conceptualized – at least implicitly – only as a ‘top-down’ process and conceived of as identity politics. Thus, very often, people are placed into categories and ethnic belonging is assumed rather than analysed. This is one of the reasons why most studies, until the end of the 1990s, tended to predict ethnic turmoil and large-scale ethnic uprisings in the Soviet Union successor states. Furthermore, many of those analyses were mistaken in that they conceived of ethnicity itself as a source of potential conflicts, thus arguing that once the Soviet Union as an oppressive force had faded away, ethnic differences would trigger various kinds of (ethnic) conflicts (cf. Finke, Sanders and Zanca 2013: 133). Since most countries of the former Soviet Union followed a different course from what was predicted by the nationality experts, the study of nationalities in Central Asia almost ground to a halt.

The formation of new Central Asian nation states and its effects on ethnic boundary drawing have not attracted much attention in anthropology circles (Finke 2014 and Schoeberlein 1994 among the exceptions). Since fieldwork in Central Asia has only recently become possible, there are few anthropological research studies on Central Asia, and they are scattered between such diverse fields as household economy and economic strategies in an ‘economy in transition’ (Finke 2004; Werner 1997; Yessenova and Dobson 2000; Zanca 1999), the role of religious belonging, conversion and everyday Islam (Kehl-Bodrogi 2008; McBrien 2006; Pelkmans 2007; Roberts 2007), gender relations (Finke and Sancak 2007; Reeves 2010), state borders (Reeves 2007, 2014) and local-level state administration (Alexander 2007; Jones Luong 2004a, 2004b; cf. also Wolfe 2000 for anthropological research on Eastern Europe and the former Soviet Union). However, features and effects of migratory processes, from an anthropological point of view, remain understudied. Exceptions are several projects on labour migration from Kyrgyzstan and Uzbekistan to Russia and the United States (Ilkhamov 2013; Isabaeva 2011; Reeves 2011a; Schröder 2013), which also capture the concerns of those who stayed behind.² Their work is insightful insofar as they shift attention to the unfinished outcomes of place making by multiple movements and (power) relations in a field of analysis that appears to be determined by fixed ethnic and spatial categories. Furthermore, several studies investigate the politics and effects of the repatriation of the Kazakh diaspora

(Bonnenfant 2012; Diener 2009b; Dubuisson and Genina 2011; Finke 2004, 2013; Finke and Sancak 2005; Sancak 2007).

The history of Russian Germans has attracted more academic attention. Historians and *Volkskundler* have presented a Russian-German history largely in terms of ‘sovietology’, and thus Germans are primarily perceived as victims of the Soviet regime (Brandes 1996, 1997; Eisfeld 1999; Krieger 2006; but cf. also Oltmer 2006). In this regard, Eisfeld (1999: 7) states that ‘their [Russian Germans’] fate is among the worst that was done to the Germans before, during and after the Second World War’.³ This victimizing stance, as well as the search for a German essence by investigating *Wolgadeutschtum* or *Sibiriendeutschtum*, which is described by Brake (1998: 42) as a search for a *Reliktkultur*, has been rightly critiqued as a continuation of Nazi ideology (e.g., by Bausinger 1987).

Furthermore, the fact that the field of *Vertriebenenvolkskunde* has been for the most part non-academic and pursued by several independent institutes implies that insights of social theory have been largely ignored (cf. Brake 1998: 42).⁴ This has gradually changed due to a shift in focus to the present-day situation of Russian/Kazakhstani Germans in Germany, and several studies explicitly draw on a biographical approach (Brake 1998; Pfister-Heckmann 1998; Römhild 1998). These studies, like several others (Boll 1996; Dietz 1996, 2006; Eder, Rauer and Schmidtke 2004; Graudenz and Römhild 1996; Ingenhorst 1997; Kühnel and Strobl 2000; Radenbach and Rosenthal 2015), elaborate on Russian-German history, in order to understand why it is often so complicated to integrate Russian Germans into German society. As of late, research on Russian/Kazakhstani Germans takes into account questions of transnational social networks and identity, but research remains mostly focused on the migrants’ situation in Germany (Savoskul 2015; Schönhuth and Kaiser 2015; Sienkiewicz 2015; among the few exceptions are Stoll 2007 who has investigated the migration decisions of Germans in Kazakhstan and Tauschwitz 2015 who has analysed why some Russian Germans have stayed in Russia).

Concepts of Ethnicity

Ethnicity refers to one particular type of social or collective identity, and thus shares features with the broader concept of identity, so it is helpful to begin here with a general discussion on identity. The notion of identity is contested; for instance, Stuart Hall (1998: 1) asks, ‘Who needs it?’ In the same vein, Rogers Brubaker (2004: 41–48) suggests abandoning the notion of identity as an analytical concept and instead looking separately at identification and categorization, at self-understanding and at commonality, connectedness and groupness. I find all aspects – and their separate consideration – useful, but because the notion of identity brings them together, I will employ it as an analytical tool.

The critique of identity as an analytical category is argued largely on the same grounds as the critique of structuralism and structural functionalism in general. Thus the notion of identification, which implies investigating processes instead of representations and structures, is seen as superior (Schlee et al. 2009: 7). I, however, follow Schlee (ibid.: 7f) in that both identity/structure and identification/process have to be explored since ‘the latter cannot be understood without the former. Just as there can be no identities without identification, so can there be no identification without identities’. Thus, existing identities establish the frameworks for people’s identifications, but though they imply ‘normative appeals to potentially interconnected actors’ (ibid.: 2), they certainly do not determine how actors respond to such appeals. In order to explain processes of identification it is, therefore, not enough to study prevalent identities; rather, both the wider context (socially, economically, politically and historically) and individual motivations and choices have to be taken into consideration. The next sections will outline the theoretical aspects that are most relevant for a discussion of Kazakhstani-German identity.

Based on Cultural Grounds

Almost every statement on ethnicity or ethnic group starts with a reference to Barth’s seminal ‘introduction’ to *Ethnic Groups and Boundaries: The Social Organization of Culture Difference*, originally written in 1969. Barth (1996 [1969]: 78) states: ‘To the extent that actors use ethnic identities to categorize themselves and others for purposes of interaction, they form ethnic groups in this organizational sense’. Thus, according to Barth, people build groups in order to interact with others; only for this purpose do they differentiate themselves from others on the basis of cultural differences. But those differences in culture are not the reason for building groups, and, therefore, ‘the critical focus of investigation from this point of view becomes the ethnic boundary that defines the group, not the cultural stuff that it encloses’ (ibid.: 79). Logically then, ethnic groups only persist as long as the boundary is maintained and interaction with others takes place (ibid.: 78f).

Barth’s ideas challenged essentialist notions of ethnicity, asserting that ethnicity is an ongoing construction process, in which cultural attributes are secondary. However, there is no similar controversy in terms of boundary making, which is always based on making distinctions with regard to language, religion, customs, shared norms and the like. Barth took his basic idea from Weber (1996 [1922]: 35), who states that ‘the political community inspires the belief in common ethnicity’ and not the other way round, but Weber (and also Barth in his later writings) also made clear that such a presumed identity may last, once the *Gemeinschaft*, the political community, has dissolved. Furthermore, particular cultural attributes – such as language, religion, a conception of what is correct and proper or a sense of honour – can play a decisive role in the continuity of a group (cf. ibid.: 37).

Ethnicity, therefore, has a cultural basis and, precisely for that reason, differs from class, gender or age (Brass 1996: 85; May 2001: 41). But any common cultural trait can provide a basis for ethnic group formation. Hence a description and analysis limited to differences in language and religion, customs and habits does not reveal how, when and why ethnic belonging matters and when and why it does not because ethnicity ‘is produced and reproduced in social interaction’ (Jenkins 1997: 40). Moreover, ethnic identification depends on the particular situation and the particular interlocutor, i.e., people might situationally switch between different identities (cf. Elwert 2002; Schlee 1989, 2006).

In present-day social science, it is widely accepted that every facet of an ethnic identity is constructed,⁵ but how the often observed significance and persistence of ethnicity is to be explained is a controversial matter. Explanations draw on the power of categorization, emotion and memories as well as the aspiration of individuals to achieve their aims. These explanations will be discussed in the following sections.

Ethnicity as a Resource

According to Abner Cohen, who takes up Weber’s ideas, ethnicity is largely a political phenomenon. Cohen (1996 [1969]: 84) states: ‘people do not kill each other because their customs are different’, but because ‘these cultural differences are associated with serious political cleavages’. In particular the context of colonialism catalysed people to organize themselves against the colonial rulers, often by emphasizing parts of their ‘traditional culture’ and, on that basis, building ‘ethnic groups’ (ibid.: 83). Seen this way, ethnically captured cultural traits are instrumental in instigating action to pursue political objectives and, therefore, are used as a resource.

The view of ethnicity as an instrument and resource is taken furthest by rational choice theorists. According to Hechter (1996: 90), ‘rational choice considers individual behaviour to be a function of the interaction of structural constraints and the sovereign preferences of individuals’ and, thus, intends to bridge the micro and macro levels of analysis. Acknowledging that individual preferences vary and are difficult to assess, rational choice theorists hold that the aggregate of many individuals’ reactions to structural constraints is predictable. This is feasible because individuals’ behaviour is assumed ultimately to seek to optimize cost-benefit calculations (Hechter 1996).

Any kind of group activity, therefore, only occurs when people expect a net benefit for themselves. However, how people make such calculations depends on their knowledge and their experience. In order to be able to predict someone else’s behaviour (which is of course decisive) people are geared to share norms or institutions. In general, the more norms or institutions people share, the better they are able to predict each other’s behaviour, which in turn engenders trust, and is why some rational choice theorists argue – in particular against the background

of weak states and legal uncertainty – that trade or business activities are most likely to occur in ethnically homogeneous networks (Landa 1998).

Schlee (2008: 26) underlines the relevance of the size of a particular group. For any kind of group activity, the ideal number of members is desired in order to perform collective action as efficiently as possible. There should be a sufficient number of members to perform the action or to fulfil certain criteria, but any additional member also means another person with whom benefits must be shared. Striving for the ideal number of group members, then, has its effects on the process of identification itself, since the group would be motivated to opt for a wider or narrower interpretation of certain identities in order to constitute the ideal number of potential members (cf. also Hechter 1988).

The ideal size of a particular group is, however, only one explanatory component in Schlee's decision theory of identification (2008). The two other components are the identities' cognitive representations and the politics of inclusion and exclusion. That is, identities must match up with a shared category system since they must be plausible to others, and only certain actors have the power to actively engage and/or manipulate identity discourses. Both aspects will be detailed in the next section.

Generally speaking, all 'instrumentalists', not only rational choice advocates, interpret ethnicity as something principally positive that people use (and 'construct' in the first place) to organize their common activities and to predict the behaviour of others. However, many social anthropologists observe that the individual's agency is much more constrained than is generally assumed by instrumentalists.

Categorization and Power

Anthony P. Cohen argues against viewing ethnicity as merely a matter of tactics and strategy. Cohen (2000a: 5) criticizes 'Goffman's legacy to identity studies':

[It] overstated the gamelike character of social interaction, and the extent to which individuals and groups can control their own destinies. It understates culture. It ignores self-consciousness, and the commitment made by individuals and, perhaps, groups to views of themselves which, contrary to another horrendously overused term in identity studies, they do not regard as 'negotiable'.

Thus, people often do not have a choice in deciding who they are or who they wish to pretend they are, for they are classified by powerful others (cf. Cohen 2000a: 10; cf. Verdery 2000: 36).

Jenkins (1996) views social identities as the result of a dialectical process of self-identification and categorization, and he (1997: 54–56) criticizes social anthropologists, in particular the postmodern ones, for having overly focused

on group identification. Such one-sided observance advanced the perception of ethnicity as a social resource at the expense of neglecting the possible negative aspects of social categorizations.⁶ Negative consequences of social categorizing are often attributed to racism and nationalism instead of ethnicism (cf. May 2001: 33–35).⁷ One might view both nationalism and racism as ‘historically specific manifestations of ethnicity’, but both are ideologies and, therefore, ‘bodies of knowledge which make claims about the way the social world is and crucially about the way it ought to be’ (Jenkins 1997: 84).

According to Jenkins (1997: 56–59), categorizations take place at three different layers: the individual, the interactional and the institutional. Thus, even the ‘sense of self’, the individual layer, is the result of social interaction.⁸ Furthermore, Jenkins (*ibid.*: 63–69) sees a gradual distinction between formal and informal ways of classifying others, ranging from state classifications to employment to public interaction.

The state holds a prominent position with respect to the categorizing of people (e.g., Brass 1985). Verdery (2000: 37) asserts that state-makers tend to fix social identities by classifying their subjects according to clear-cut categories, with an aim to maintain better control over them. Therefore, ‘identity categories become mandatory elements of people’s existence within the state’ (*ibid.*: 39), though, according to Verdery, there is still some room for the manipulation of identities in ‘micro-interaction’. But different states, at different times, vary in their efforts to keep track of and classify people, thus the ‘imperativeness of identities has its own historicity’, which is why ‘the conditions that make identities more or less imperative, according to the organization and histories of the states that contain them’ (*ibid.*) shall be the focus of investigation.

The modernist assumption, above all associated with the writings of Anderson (1983), Hobsbawm and Ranger (1983), Hobsbawm (1990) and Gellner (1983), is that the state came first, and it was the state that ‘constructed’ the ethnicity of its subjects. Modernists view the rise of the nation state, as well as of nationalism – i.e., viewing nations (each with its own distinct identity) as the crucial source of political power (A.D. Smith 1994) – in connection with modernity. The building of nations, which eventually entails a process of cultural homogenization, also brought about the category of ‘ethnic minority’ for those who, for various reasons, could not become part of the nation (cf. Sökefeld 2007: 46; cf. Verdery 2000: 45–47). May (2001: 25f) hints at the paradox that modernists, although they rejected the ‘pre-modern’ notion of ethnicity and saw it replaced by the nation, ultimately provoked the postmodern celebration of ethnic minorities in a plural society (cf. also Herzfeld 2005: 114f).

One potent way in which states can shape their subjects’ actions is through the forming of stereotypes, which are seen by Herzfeld (2005: 202) as a ‘discursive weapon of power’. Local actors are affected by state actors since ‘the categorical systems of local communities absorb (or are forced to swallow) increasingly

regimented typifications of “others” emanating from above and authorized as the weapons of a locally reproduced form of power’ (ibid.). At the same time, stereotypes entail the ‘possibility of subversion’ (ibid.). Herzfeld (ibid.: 26, 203, 209) raises the question of how stereotypes fit into his advocacy to look at actions, since stereotypes are generally associated with the static analysis of classificatory systems; he still stresses their importance, however, by placing the emphasis on investigating how, by whom and under what circumstances they are used. Herzfeld (ibid.: 207) points out that an actor refers to ‘stereotypes of a dominant discourse and deploys them in the pursuit of personal interests’; thus he stresses people’s agency and does not primarily view people as the victims of powerful states.

My study takes up Herzfeld’s idea that states are able to exert power by means of coining stereotypes which, however, might be used otherwise by local actors. With regard to Kazakhstani Germans, the power of several states – the Russian Empire, the Soviet Union, Kazakhstan and Germany – in the shaping of people’s identities and the influencing of their behaviour will be explored. State actors affect their subjects’ lives and behaviour, but this is not a one-way process, and even when state policies aim to fully control people, they certainly never determine behaviour. Therefore, Brubaker (2004: 53) is right when he states with respect to the USSR: ‘Categorical group denominations – however authoritative, however pervasively institutionalized – cannot serve as indicators of real “groups” or robust “identities”’.

Beyond the role of states in categorizing people, this study explores other processes of categorization. The starting point of this investigation will be the individual person and her or his life experience. Thus it will be necessary to consider how someone has been categorized throughout his/her life in order to understand how present-day identities are perceived, lived and used.

A Product of Individual Life Experience

Ethnic identities, like any other identities, are not grasped comprehensively solely by viewing them as products of categorizing others, and/or by seeing in them potential resources for action. On the contrary, ethnicity may under certain circumstances appear as an obstacle, and may cause one to question why in such circumstances people continue to hold to their ethnic belonging. T.H. Eriksen (1993), for instance, indicates that ethnicity might even be reproduced, though this rather limits the prosperity and power of those who ‘belong’ to the group.

Ethnicity can only be fully understood by looking at how people identify themselves, which implies looking at individual persons because ‘any social identity ... must mean something to individuals before it can be said to “exist” in the social world’ (Jenkins 1997: 166). In this vein, Anthony P. Cohen (2000b: 61) highlights that by paying attention to people’s consciousness, to the question of ‘the person I believe myself to be’, social anthropologists are also better equipped

to avoid any kind of ‘groupism’. Cohen (ibid.: 76) states: ‘The ethnic group is an aggregate of selves each of whom produces ethnicity for itself. What these various productions have in common may well be more a matter of formal appearance than of meaningful reality’. Thus, people might have very different things in mind when they, for instance, refer to a German identity.

If one takes into account what social identities mean to people, such identities may not be as flexible, shifting and negotiable as often assumed because social identities are an aspect of each individual’s emotional and psychological constitution. In early socialization human beings develop a sense of self that may prove extremely resistant to change (Jenkins 1997: 47, 58; cf. E.H. Erikson 1959). Emotional attachments to social identities might, therefore, be seen as constraining forces to the ‘free usage’ of ethnic belonging. Emotions might also help to explain why ‘ethnic attachments do not have the same salience and force everywhere’ (Jenkins 1997: 77). But the salience of ethnic belonging, can, logically, only be identified for individual persons, and not attached to any given group.

How such an emotional bond is constituted and what people precisely attach to certain identities is, therefore, fundamental and brings us back to the ‘cultural grounds’, to the ‘ethnic memories, values, symbols, myths and tradition’ (A.D. Smith 1996: 189) that are seen as crucial for ‘ethnic survival’. Likewise, how ethnic belonging is constructed by people – e.g., whether or not in primordial terms – is part of culture, too (cf. Barth 2000). This knowledge of ‘who someone is’, and how the categories to which people belong are defined, is transmitted from generation to generation. To be sure, this is not to say that the knowledge of ethnicity is unlikely to be highly contradictory. Exactly for this reason, it offers a great range of alternative belongings, at certain times and under certain circumstances. But what people ‘have in their minds’ while acting has to be considered. Thus, in order to systematically investigate people’s minds, this research study also draws on insights from cognitive anthropology.

Ethnic Boundaries as Cultural Schemas

Cognitive approaches investigate the relation between human society and human thought by seeking to understand how people organize and use knowledge (D’Andrade 1996: xiv, 1). Cognitive anthropology stems from a long-standing anthropological interest in classification and categorization (Durkheim and Mauss 1970; Lévi-Strauss 1969). From the beginning it has additionally been concerned with developing appropriate methods through which to study the structures and forms of idea systems. This is also why the writings of Lounsbury (1968) and Goodenough (1968) were so authoritative since they – using the example of kinship terminology – presented a method for identifying ‘idea units’ and comprehending the structure of these units which, then, became known as componential (or feature) analysis (D’Andrade 1996: 17, 21). During the 1960s, feature analysis expanded to other areas – e.g., colour terms or classification of

animals – and turned away from ‘structuralist thinking’; its emphasis shifted from dichotomous features to more continuous dimensional types of representation (cf. *ibid.*: 58–91).

A decade later, in the mid-1970s, with a further shift in research interest to ‘on the ground discourses’, it became apparent that human cognition relies on more complex structures than previously analysed through feature analysis. The new concept that was developed in order to better grasp complex human thinking became popularly known as ‘schema’ (D’Andrade 1996: 122). A schema can be defined as ‘an organized framework of objects and relations which has yet to be filled with concrete detail’ (*ibid.*: 124). Thus a schema is not a ‘picture’ or representation that is stored in one’s mind but rather a processor or ‘a kind of mental recognition “device” which *creates* a complex interpretation from minimal inputs’ (*ibid.*: 136). The concept of schema was further developed by connectionists (e.g., Strauss and Quinn 1997) who use a neural (rather than a lingual) metaphor for knowledge in order to better illustrate that ‘a schema is not a set of sentences but rather a pattern of interaction among strongly interconnected units’ (*ibid.*: 52). An event, for instance, activates all units that respond to features of similar events. In this daily process, mental networks are constantly modified (*ibid.*: 51–53). But ‘networks can range from very easy to very hard to change with experience and from very biased towards one interpretation to very balanced in choice’ (D’Andrade 1996: 142). Generally, mental networks develop through encounters with a structured environment and, hence, they are shaped by someone’s life experience, or they can be described as ‘an abstract organization of experience’ (*ibid.*: 150).⁹

A further step, then, is to ask when and how schemas and networks affect perception or memory, and how they influence behaviour. D’Andrade (1996: 239) states that ‘schemas do not by themselves have any force or power’. It is only through linkage with the emotional or motivational system of individuals that cultural schemas affect human action (*ibid.*: 218).¹⁰ Feelings and motivations are incorporated into schemas; for example, someone might associate Christmas with pleasant feelings. Thus, motivations are mediated by the inner experience of feeling, which stems, in part, from the approval and disapproval of those who are important to us. But experiences also produce conflicting goals and, therefore, never stimulate behaviour unambiguously (Strauss and Quinn 1997: 101–10). Generally, ‘not all cultural schemas acquire affective and motivational force for people; to understand which do and which do not, we need to learn the particularities of a person’s experience’ (*ibid.*: 110). For instance, to the extent that evaluations (like ‘good girl’) become aspects of someone’s self-identity, they can act as stable goals towards which people strive throughout their lives in order to remain true to their self-images.

Few studies on ethnicity have explicitly drawn on insights from the field of cognitive science (an exception is Finke 2014), even though many studies elaborate on the power of categorization in general (cf. Brubaker 2004: 69). Brubaker

(2004), who advocates for the integration of cognitive approaches into the study of ethnicity, points to the ‘clash with the positivist, experimentalist, individualist and reductionist commitment of cognitive science’ (ibid.: 69) and the epistemological assumptions of those who investigate ethnicity in a usually ‘humanistic, interpretive, holistic and antireductionist’ manner (ibid.).¹¹

With regard to research on the former USSR and the nation states that gained independence after its dissolution, Brubaker (2004: 66) suggests that most related studies on ethnicity are almost exclusively concerned with ‘official, codified, formalized categorization practices employed by powerful and authoritative institutions, above all the state’, whereas ‘unofficial informal “everyday” classification and categorization of ordinary people’ are rather understudied. This is all the more problematic since ‘the connection between official categories and popular self-understanding is seldom demonstrated in detail’ (ibid.: 68). Those ‘everyday classifications’ might, however, significantly deviate from official ones, because the former leave ‘considerable room for maneuver’ and people are ‘often able to deploy such categories strategically’ (ibid.). Since, as mentioned above, schemas are built up in relation to engagement with the ‘real world’, Brubaker (ibid.: 79) is correct when he asserts that cognitive approaches connect ‘what goes on in people’s heads with our analysis of what goes on in public’.

Furthermore, the concept of schema allows for the consideration of more complex knowledge structures than the notion of category does (Brubaker 2004: 76). For instance, it is not only about how people are classified but ‘about how gestures, utterances, situations, events, states of affairs, actions, and sequences of actions get classified (and thereby interpreted and experienced)’ (ibid.: 77). Hence, it is about the daily reproduction of ethnicity. One key aspect of processes of ethnicization is, then, to investigate the degree to which ethnic schemas are accessible; in some contexts they might become hyperaccessible and in effect outdo other interpretive schemas.

It is not my intention to advocate for a single concept of ethnicity; instead, I wish to combine the above-presented ideas and theoretical thoughts. Ethnicity is based on cultural grounds. Self-identification and categorization are carried out on the basis of language, religion, a shared memory of the past, common customs, norms, habits and/or other features. Through interaction people build groups and categories, and thus they create identities that are linked to those dimensions. Those identities are at a given time already available, which is why their features and how they relate to one another has to be investigated: they set the framework for future action. People in principle strive to pursue their goals or life projects, and since they have agency they both use and alter those given identities. However, differences in power among people have to be kept in mind, along with state identity policy and its history. Finally, emotional attachments to language, religion and other identity dimensions, as well as to identity categories, have an impact on how people identify themselves and classify others.

This book addresses the core questions of when, how and why people identify themselves as Germans and when and why not. To discuss when people stress their ethnic belonging, it is necessary to elaborate upon the situational linking of ethnicity. To discuss how people identify themselves as Germans, one must refer to the elements that comprise the cultural basis. Why people identify themselves as Germans is, on one level, dependent upon an individual's situation; but in a larger sense the answer also lies in instrumental uses, emotional bonds and performative expressions.

In particular, this book seeks to combine the ideas and concepts of Schlee, D'Andrade and Herzfeld and to investigate structure and process in equal measure to account for how it is that identities exert power. In this endeavour, I treat ethnic belonging both as a mental representation and as a discursive expression, as a motor for deliberate action and as performance, as an instrument of the state to control its people and as a weapon of power of its citizens. In order to investigate such diverse aspects of identity my research study applies various methods from the social sciences and combines them in a novel manner. Next to methods stemming from cognitive approaches, this research is inspired by network analysis and by life story interviews. However, my main insights derive from the intimate knowledge that people were willing to share with me during informal interviews and participant observation (Spradley 2005). In the city of Taldykorgan, I conducted twelve months of fieldwork in 2006 and 2007. In the following section, I will briefly introduce my research site.

Fieldwork in Taldykorgan

Taldykorgan is a medium-sized city of about 135,000 inhabitants, situated approximately 300 kilometres north-east of Almaty. According to official statistics, about sixty per cent of the city's inhabitants are Kazakh and thirty per cent are Russian; the German population was estimated at 1,500 in 2007. Taldykorgan became the centre of the Almaty oblast in 2001,¹² which resulted in a rapid increase in population that 'brought money to the city', created large-scale building activities and gave many people hope for a prosperous future. This contrasts sharply with the disastrous living circumstances prevalent during the second half of the 1990s, when the city's infrastructure, as in many other areas of Kazakhstan, was on the verge of collapse, not to mention the widespread failure of former state enterprises. In present-day Taldykorgan, there is only one large factory (which produces batteries), and thus most people are engaged in small business ventures. Jobs in administration, however, have rapidly increased since 2001, as well as in other parts of the public sector such as for teachers and hospital employees. The soil of the surrounding area is comparatively good, and the amount of water available for farming exceptional by Kazakhstani standards. During the Soviet era, the region was famous for growing sugar beet. However,



Map I.1 Field site in Kazakhstan. Reproduced with kind permission of the Max Planck Institute for Social Anthropology, Halle.

at present most of the previous agricultural crop land lies fallow because farming is not considered to be particularly profitable.

Taldykorgan is situated in the *Zhetisu* (seven rivers) region; its Karatal River is one of the seven rivers flowing into Lake Balkhash. Before Russian colonization, the area was used as a winter camp by nomadic Kazakhs. Russians and Ukrainians came to the region mainly after the 1860s, and by 1880 there were more than three thousand primarily Russian families who settled in the region and built thirty-six settlements. One such settlement was Gavrilovka, with about twenty-five farmyards, which was renamed Taldykorgan in 1920. Most Germans were deported to the city, or to nearby villages, in 1941. Other Germans moved from various places in Siberia to Taldykorgan after the abolition of *komandatura* in the second half of the 1950s,¹³ basically because of the better climatic conditions in southern Kazakhstan. Shortly after the Second World War, the city had about twenty thousand inhabitants. In the following decades the population rapidly increased, and from the 1950s onwards, five suburbs spread out from the city centre which – aside from the bigger shopping areas in the very centre of the town – is still composed of single-family dwellings.

The city of Taldykorgan was chosen as a field site because it has a sizable German population but is itself relatively small, which allowed me to contact people more easily and to become more integrated into the city's social life. In terms of the Russian-Kazakh dynamics the city of Taldykorgan sits between the 'Kazakh cities' of the south and west and the 'Russian cities' of the north.



Figure I.1 Surrounding landscape of Taldykorgan (photo: R. Sanders, 2007)

This book is divided into four parts. Part I reflects on history and memory, detailing people's memories of 'their past' and contrasting these with official histories. In this vein, it points to the role ethnicity has played within the changing political frameworks of Russia, the Soviet Union and Kazakhstan. Furthermore, this part's second chapter explores the interplay of individual life experience and history by presenting four personal stories reflecting on the past and present situations of Kazakhstani Germans. Using these stories as a springboard, I elaborate on diverse interpretations of a German identity, and different attitudes as to how significant an ethnic identity is for individuals.

Part II deals with the interconnectedness of identities and identifications. Chapter 3 examines the dominant discourse on nationality and analyses stereotypes as a social practice. Additionally, schema theory allows me to investigate categories and to understand when and why people use them and to what effect. Chapter 4 explores how people relate nationality to their lives in the Kazakh nation state. It is shown how concepts such as the 'friendship of the peoples' (*druzhiba narodov*) and a 'Kazakhstani identity' are perceived, transformed and lived.

Part III explores the interplay of social relations and identity. It refers back to the different identity types presented in Chapter 2 and proceeds to explore



Figure I.2 The main *bazar* in Taldykorgan (photo: R. Sanders, 2007)

the interconnectedness of mental schemas of the nationality category and actual interethnic relationships. This focus on social ties also leads beyond the city of Taldykorgan and Kazakhstan. Thus in Chapter 6 I show how transnational and local networks are interwoven, and I identify central persons and their role in transmitting information about Germany and how such information impacts on the construction of identities in Kazakhstan. In this context, the motives for people's self-identification as Germans in the city of Taldykorgan are seen as decisive with regard to how the flow of information and support from Germany are evaluated and how they contribute to establishing a Kazakhstani-German identity.

Part IV elaborates on the minority nationality policies of the German and the Kazakh states by focusing on the work of the German minority centre in Taldykorgan and its effects. It is shown how people deal with the often conflicting intentions of the policies of the two states, how those policies impact on the conceptualization and on performative expressions of a German identity, and how they stimulate the process of ethnic identification. I point out that people also transgress the prescribed role of the minority centre in order to use the institution and its economic, symbolic and social potential to their own advantage.

Notes

1. Furthermore, there are Kazakhstani-German studies that focus mainly on 'German culture', namely literature, theatre and music (Kalshev 1998; Sakenova 1998; Seifert 2006; Wensel 1998, 2006; see also Dorlin 2005). These studies often aim to show the value of particular cultural traits for which the German language is generally seen as a prerequisite.

2. The articles by Ilkhamov and Schröder are part of a special issue of *Zeitschrift für Ethnologie* that brings together various types of socio-spatial mobility in and beyond Central Asia. The articles by Isabaeva and Reeves are part of a special issue of *Central Asian Survey* that focuses on movement, place and power by advocating a dynamic approach to place that explores its habitual production (Beyer 2011; Bunn 2011; Féaux de la Croix 2011; Reeves 2011b).
3. This translation is provided by the author; the original text in German is as follows: *‘Ihr Schicksal [das der Russlanddeutschen] aber gehört zu dem Schlimmsten, was Deutschen vor, in und nach dem Zweiten Weltkrieg angetan wurde’*.
4. Among others: Institut für Deutschland- und Osteuropaforschung des Göttinger Arbeitskreises e.V., Volkskundliche Forschungsstelle Berlin, Institut für Kultur- und Sozialforschung München e.V., Ostdeutsches Volkskundearchiv NRW.
5. The distinction between ‘primordial’ and ‘instrumental’ and/or ‘constructivist’ approaches to ethnicity has been comprehensively depicted and, as far as possible, resolved (among many others, Jenkins 1997; Finke 2014; May 2004). The fundamental agreement among social scientists, including Geertz (who is misleadingly considered the grandfather of primordialism) – and apart from sociobiological accounts, above all associated with the writings of van den Berghe (1981) – is that the ties of blood and culture themselves are not natural but that they might be viewed as such by actors. On the other hand, the constructivist Barth did not deny that ethnic identity might have meaning for an individual person which, then, aids in understanding why ethnic belonging becomes so crucial under certain circumstances (cf. Jenkins 1997: 44–48). However, this does not hold true for all Soviet, Russian and German historians and ethnographers who have dealt with Russian Germans. Their search for the peoples’ *Volksgeist* will be explored in Chapter 1.
6. In contrast to Anthony P. Cohen, Jenkins (1997: 58f), however, holds that Goffman’s view of social selfhood as performative and processual perfectly supplements Barth’s model of ethnicity as transactional.
7. The absence of an ideological model of ethnicity supports the contention that ethnicity is mostly perceived as a ‘good thing’, while, as mentioned above, negative aspects are encompassed within the terms ‘racism’ and ‘nationalism’ (cf. Jenkins 1997: 86).
8. Jenkins (1997: 57) refers to G.H. Mead’s concept of embodied selfhood and his distinction between the ‘I’, ‘the active aspect of the self which responds to others’, and the ‘me’ that ‘comprises the attitudes and responses of significant others, as they are incorporated into the self’.
9. This challenges the assumption that one might study a culture by learning its rules or other types of ‘verbal declarative knowledge’ (D’Andrade 1996: 145). Hence, ‘there may be regularity in behaviour but no direct representation of the rules in symbols’ (ibid.) (cf. also Bloch 1998).
10. D’Andrade (1996: 182) generally advocates for an interactionist approach which asserts that culture and psyche mutually affect each other; thus, only by the integration of psychological insights can anthropological thinking advance: ‘This seesaw between culture as completely and unproblematically internalized and culture as entirely negotiable and contested results from an attempt to have a cultural theory without any psychology – a cultural theory with empty people’ (ibid.: 234).
11. Interpretative and postmodern approaches tend to stress the publicness of meanings and their performative aspects, and argue for a de-essentializing turn by stating that discourses do not represent realities but that they create them (cf. Strauss and Quinn 1997: 27f). Strauss and Quinn (ibid.: 28–33) advocate for maintaining the difference between the inner world of subjects and the outer world of objects because discourses about desire,

for instance, are not the same as desire since social discourses do not directly construct psychological realities.

12. An oblast is an administrative unit that had its origins in the Soviet era and most resembles what would be referred to in English as a 'province'.
13. The *komandatura* demanded registration (first weekly, then monthly) at the local administration and thus ensured that Germans did not remigrate to their former homelands in Ukraine or the previous Volga Republic, which was forbidden after the Second World War. The *komandatura* was not abolished until 1956 (Brake 1998: 66–68; Röhmschild 1998: 118f).