

**WHEN CAPITAL CITIES MOVE: THE POLITICAL
GEOGRAPHY OF NATION AND STATE BUILDING**

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ABSTRACT

Capital relocation (i.e., the physical move of the central state apparatus from one location to another) is an unusual tool for nation and state building. Yet, it is used more frequently than we might expect. Thus, when Kazakhstan shifted its capital city in 1997 from Almaty to Astana the move was unique in that post-Soviet region, but not as uncommon in other post-colonial cases. This paper examines the move of the capital in Kazakhstan suggests that this move was designed to address particularly acute nation-and state-building challenges. If the Kazakhstan experience seems strange in de-Sovietization, this tells us much about the different nature of post-Soviet space versus other post-colonial contexts. The relative in frequency of capital moves implies that the challenges of nation and state building in the ex-USSR—as daunting as they have proved to be—are generally not as acute as in those of other post-colonial contexts.

RESUMEN

La reubicación de las capitales (es decir, el desplazamiento físico del aparato del estado central desde un lugar a otro) es una inusual herramienta para la construcción de naciones y estados. Sin embargo, se la usa más frecuentemente que lo que podría esperarse. Así, el desplazamiento de la capital de Kazakstán de Almaty a Astana fue único en esa región post-soviética, pero desplazamientos similares fueron más comunes en otros casos post-coloniales. Este artículo examina este desplazamiento y sugiere que fue diseñado para responder a desafíos de la construcción nacional y estatal particularmente agudos. Que la experiencia de Kazakstán parezca extraña en el contexto de la de-sovietización nos dice mucho respecto de la diferencia de naturaleza entre el espacio post-soviético y otros contextos post-coloniales. La relativa infrecuencia de los desplazamientos de ciudades capitales implica que los desafíos de la construcción de estados y naciones en la ex Unión Soviética—tan intimidatorios como revelaron ser—en general no son tan agudos como en otros contextos post-coloniales.

INTRODUCTION

In December 1997 Kazakhstan moved its capital city from scenic Almaty in the southeast region to Akmola (later renamed Astana) in the north-central steppe.¹ On the ground, the popular consensus was that this move was bizarre, extravagant, and misguided.² Western observers harbored similar sentiments, calling the decision “mystifying”³ and the new capital’s location a “bleak outpost in the middle of the great Eurasian steppe.”⁴ Cost estimates began with \$400 million but began to climb higher, even as Nursultan Nazarbaev, president of Kazakhstan, claimed that no funds would be used for the expense of the move from the state’s budget.⁵ The more westerners observed Nazarbaev’s authoritarian tendencies and personalized ruling style, the more the decision to move the capital seemed rooted in nothing more than the whim of its leader. In addition, given conditions in the country—the move seemed profoundly ill-timed⁶ with plummeting industrial and agricultural output, rising unemployment, and collapsing education and healthcare systems.

As bizarre as the relocation to Astana⁷ seemed, it was not totally unique. From 1950 to 1990, thirteen countries including ones in Latin America, Africa, and the former USSR moved their capitals. This occurrence across space and time raises the following questions: Is there a common logic that propels capital moves? What motivates élite members of these countries to undertake such an expensive and risky strategy?

In this paper, I will suggest a connection between capital relocation, and state- and nation-building efforts. I will argue that capital relocation is much more likely to seem an attractive strategy to élites when effective state bureaucracies and broad national loyalties are wanting,⁸ particularly in post-colonial situations.

There is no simple formula for addressing the challenges of state and nation building. Typically, élites effect the changes piecemeal, using a range of strategies from the uninhibited use of force to eliminate opposing power bases, compelling compliance, and rewarding loyalty to more humane forms of persuasion such as politicking and institution building to create incentives to accept the new political system. Élites who genuinely want to improve institutional performance and create allegiance to a new national community use both these types of carrots and sticks in some combination to bring about their goals.⁹

Capital relocation is one of the more innovative tools for building states and national identification. It is a very large undertaking and most leaders are afraid of taking on the financial, logistical, and political costs. With profound sunk costs established capital cities rarely move. Indeed, many attempts to move capital cities stalled and remain like partially completed monuments to grandiose ideas. But there is something curious about the fact that capital cities are moved at all. What circumstances convince élites to undertake this radical step and how are they different from the majority of cases in which capital cities stay put?

I use the Kazakhstan case to make two comparative arguments. First, compared to other post-Soviet states (none of which moved their capital cities), Kazakhstan faced particularly acute state-and nation-building challenges in the early 1990s that were potentially profoundly destabilizing¹⁰—the relocation to Astana was designed to meet these challenges. Second, these challenges were in many critical respects similar to ones facing many states in post-colonial Africa. By comparing the infrequency of capital relocation in the ex-USSR to its relative frequency in post-colonial Africa, we are reminded of the critical differences in political geography in these two continents.

I have divided this paper into four sections. In the first two sections I make the case that a capital move tells us something about nation and state building. The first section compares relocation of capital cities in the Westphalian state system in Europe with similar moves outside Europe, and especially in post-colonial contexts. In the second section, I address the comparative literature on capital moves. This literature is diffuse and most studies are idiographic—a point to which I return below—but three general perspectives are nonetheless implicit. In the third section, I directly address the Kazakhstan case, suggesting ways in which the capital move was designed to meet the élite's most daunting challenges. In the fourth section, I situate the Kazakhstan case in a broader comparative perspective and offer conclusions and implications.

POST-COLONIAL CAPITAL MOVES IN HISTORICAL PERSPECTIVE

Relocation of capital cities seem to defy reason. Indeed, if one considers instances as diverse as the moves in Russia from Moscow to St. Petersburg in 1703, in India from Calcutta to New Delhi in 1911, and in Kazakhstan, from Almaty to Astana in 1997, one runs the risk of operating at too high a level of abstraction to be meaningful.¹¹ On the other hand, when a similar phenomenon results in most different cases, this can be a powerful comparative framework for

analysis.¹² In this section, I try to identify a set of cases that captures diverse contexts without stretching concepts too far.

The rise of the modern Westphalian state system institutionalized a qualitative shift in the nature of authority claims. The personal ties that linked rulers to subjects were dealt a profound blow; parties in Westphalia agreed that territory-based authority claims assumed legal priority. Its extent limited, the exercise of authority became more intensive as administrative and coercive apparatuses began to control dense populations. Commanding the loyalty of spatially bounded populations became the central order of the day.

The system of sovereign states enshrined at Westphalia was initially a European phenomenon. It was in Europe that demographic pressures intensified regional and continent-wide conflicts that eventually gave rise to territorial states.¹³ In much of Europe, the processes of state and nation building began before the modern state emerged. Westphalia simply made an international law of what was becoming reality on the ground—élites had already created states through taxation, enlistment of soldiers, and infrastructure development and had begun the drive to homogenize and purchase the loyalty of diverse populations. Clearly, much remained to be done after 1648; state and nation building processes continued afterwards. But, for our purposes, it is significant that these processes had already begun.

Outside Europe, the sequence was often the reverse: the establishment of statehood was followed by the drive to create viable state structures and secure the loyalty of diverse populations.¹⁴ As it diffused to areas outside Europe, the institution of state sovereignty offered resources to non-European élites. Statehood allowed their authority to be recognized in an emerging international arena before they had achieved significant domestic legitimacy. States—in an international, legal sense—were built before viable governing apparatuses were created or substantial popular loyalty forged.

Given this different sequence of events, capital cities played different roles in the core Westphalian states than they did in non-European ones. In Europe, (Herbst 2000: 14), élites used capital cities to exercise power over potentially disloyal peripheral areas. The capital city controlled these territories and concentrated wealth to pay for the effort. These cities served the purpose for which the state itself had been created. In contrast, non-European states established statehoods without having to develop a government to administer control over the territory or inspire the loyalty of the populations that inhabited a particular area. To simplify this concept

dramatically—in Europe capitals emerged as part and parcel of state and nation building, outside Europe capitals emerged after territoriality had been established. In the latter cases, the capital cities suited the functions of the state quite imperfectly. With decolonization, post-colonial élites had to create and locate real capital cities—cities that controlled territory and promoted loyalty in the inhabitants just as their European counterparts had done.

Given these differences in the nature of statehood and the functions of capital cities, not all attempts at moving a capital city are qualitatively similar. Let me sketch some key differences. Before authority claims became more territorially bounded at Westphalia, city moves had little to do with claims over a bounded territory. Capital moves under empires were about court intrigues (Nanjing to Beijing in 1420) or about the shifting identification of the ruling élite (Moscow to Petersburg in 1703). City moves under colonial rule (Calcutta to New Delhi in 1911) emerged from understandings of the purposes of colonial administration. Much later, when advanced industrial states considered such moves (Japan in the 1960s and 1990s, Germany in the early 1990s), security and control were less important considerations than economic prospects and technical rationality. Finally, when colonial states (the United States, Canada, and Australia) established capital cities, they expanded gradually over space, largely without security threats from militarily weaker and numerically smaller indigenous populations.

Thus, capital relocation in post-colonial contexts is distinctive in that it turns on nation- and state-building imperatives. These imperatives are the defining feature of these contexts even if in other contexts they may not be entirely absent. Restricting the domain of comparison to post-colonial contexts, makes a more plausible comparative framework. Table 1 lists the cases I have in mind.

Table 1**Latter Twentieth-Century Capital Relocations¹⁵**

Case	Year	New Capital	Former Capital
Brazil	1956	Brasilia	Rio de Janeiro
Mauritania	1957	Nouakchott	Saint Louis (Senegal)
Pakistan	1959	Islamabad	Karachi
Botswana	1961	Gaberone	Mafeking
Libya	1963	Tripoli	Benghazi
Malawi	1965	Liliongwe	Zomba
Belize	1970	Belmopan	Belize City
Tanzania	1973	Dodoma	Dar es Salaam
Nigeria	1975	Abuja	Lagos
Ivory Coast	1983	Yamoussoukro	Abidjan
Germany	1990	Berlin	Bonn
Kazakhstan	1997	Astana	Almaty
Malaysia	2000	Putrajaya	Kuala Lumpur

WHY MOVE A CAPITAL CITY?

Like all political outcomes, capital relocation cannot be explained simply—it results from the confluence of multiple factors. Yet, different perspectives highlight different variables as causal. I first discuss the usual explanations and then offer a political geographic explanation. I evaluate these alternative explanations through reference to various examples from Africa, with some initial discussion of Kazakhstan.

Authoritarianism and Authoritarian Preferences

Capital relocation, more common than we might initially expect, is still a relatively rare outcome; a first-order question is whether seeking a general explanation is either possible or desirable. Indeed, the diverse literature on the issue eschews generalities, focusing instead on particular examples in which many factors are understood to be at play. Central place among them is usually reserved for the personality quirks or preferences of the authoritarian ruler who is understood to make the decision to move a capital against common sense, popular opposition, and the advice of wiser policy-makers.

Indeed, since many moves fail to achieve the stated objectives, analysts often question their usefulness in the first place. About capital relocation in Malawi, Potts (1985: 188) argues that the authoritarian president made the decision primarily for

personal prestige, rather than as a rational element of an attempt to restructure Malawi's...economy more equitably.

Similar arguments might be offered for Babangida's decision to create a new Nigerian capital at Abuja below.

Glittering buildings and grandiose projects were testament more to the will of the president than to the needs of an impoverished population. Clearly, the personality quirks of an authoritarian ruler—often his megalomaniac tendencies—play a role. Yet, to focus on the idiosyncrasies of character may obscure common themes; outcomes should not be reduced to rulers' preferences.¹⁶

Projects of such an enormous scale are easier to pursue in the absence of democratic procedures.¹⁷ In authoritarian political systems, the élite might accept the enormous financial costs of such a move because they anticipate future symbolic, political, and economic gain. The opposition to such an undertaking that inevitably develops is ultimately more pliable than it would be in non-authoritarian settings. Repressive regimes can more easily move their capitals—authoritarianism may be a permissive cause—yet, such regimes usually do not move their capital cities (and those that do choose a particular time for the move—which itself begs an explanation). If authoritarianism is a necessary condition, it cannot be sufficient.¹⁸

Rational-Technical Reasons

If, as I have suggested, capital relocation occurs in authoritarian contexts, this raises an additional issue of methodology. Accurate reconstruction of an élite's decision-making calculus is difficult even in democratic contexts.¹⁹ For non-democratic contexts, the difficulty is enhanced. An élite that seek to justify radical policy decisions will promulgate any number of explanations that are superficially plausible but that hide deeper agendas. If we accept at face value the official explanation, we should do so only after critical evaluation.

The rationale from official circles for moving a capital is to bolster economic performance and enhance administrative functions. A city, their reasoning goes, designed to serve the commercial and geo-strategic interests of a colonizing power, is ill-equipped for the

economic and administrative challenges of independent statehood. A new city could be located and designed to be the hub of economic exchange, the central node for infrastructure, and the model of effective administration. Starting from scratch would allow the new city to quickly bypass the limitations of old economic, transportation, and administrative structures. If achieved, this would certainly be a desirable result, officials say.

There is more than some truth to this perspective—the littoral states of decolonizing Africa and Asia, for example, had capitals along the coast and betrayed a distinct orientation toward the commercial needs of the former imperial center.²⁰ Such an orientation was ill-suited to post-colonial imperatives—it could not provide services to populations that were geographically dispersed across a vast territory.²¹ In theory, a well-designed and well-executed capital move could bring economic opportunities and government services to the hinterland. Indeed, in the heyday of modernization theory (with which the aftermath of decolonization coincided) such rational-technical solutions to problems of development seemed quite sensible.

If the rational-technical theory reasons that leaders help analysts evaluate alternative explanations, these perspectives are not sufficient alone to move a capital. Indeed, the pronouncements of an authoritarian élite may be particularly misleading. Rational-technical reasons are designed to appeal to international audiences, especially donors who find such language appealing. Reasons that seem to make capital moves legitimate internationally may do nothing to make them legitimate to a domestic audience. If rational-technical reasons are part of a decision calculus to move a capital, they are incomplete.

Even if we are not skeptical of official reasons for moving a capital, there are other reasons to doubt rational-technical reasoning. First, while imperial commercial interests may have located capitals along waterways, there is no *a priori* reason to assume that, absent colonialism, indigenous commercial forces would themselves have become concentrated in the hinterland, rather than along the coast. After all, the steamship was critical for commerce, especially in those contexts where coordination and financing for national railroads was lacking. It is ultimately an empirical question to be directed to each individual case whether or not indigenous commercial forces exerted pressures for the concentration of wealth and power along the coast or in the hinterland. Simply put, it may not be economically rational to relocate a capital in the hinterland.

Second, suggesting that the colonial location was economically irrational while the post-colonial new location would be economically rational makes for particular nonsense for Kazakhstan. The location of Almaty does not betray an economic orientation toward Moscow. Had the Kazakh capital been selected for its commercial prospects, it would have been closer to the Russian border. Even if economic rationality holds for certain cases, it is not a promising factor for the Kazakhstan case.

Third, as Potts has shown, the claim that capitals are moved to generate economic growth and improve administrative efficiency is plausible, but such capital moves have had extremely limited success in these areas. About Malawi, she argues that

despite the rhetorical importance of Lilongwe's growth center role, regional planning arguments have been used more to justify the relocation than to guide its development.²²

I am not aware of any capital relocation to which economic growth or added administrative efficiency are commonly attributed.

Finally, even if an existing capital is poorly located from the standpoint of economic and administrative rationality, this only tells us that the capital city should be moved. It says nothing about where it should be moved *to*.

A Political Geography of Nation- and State-Building

Another aspect of capital moves is the political geography of state and nation building. By state building, I mean the effort to undermine alternative, rival power bases and develop viable institutions. By nation building, I mean the effort to secure the loyalty of broad populations inhabiting the territory represented by the state. In practice, these processes invariably are closely intertwined. For analytic purposes, we may separate them.

Building the State via Patronage

States are those organizations that succeed in marginalizing rival organizations. When they succeed they institute a normative regime²³ which they propagate across a spatially bounded territory. The relocation of a capital city creates an opportunity to reward supporters and undermine rivals in the context of constructing effective institutions.²⁴

State building can take a variety of forms. If the colonial era apparatus remains significantly intact, the new élite faces the institutions, practices, and personnel that had served fundamentally different purposes. An élite that does not confront colonial legacies will face particular difficulties in meeting new economic and political realities. An élite that, on the other hand, seeks to move against colonial inertia will face resistance and generate opposition. Those who choose the former option—to confront the colonial era legacies—must build alternative bases for support.

Moving the capital city is part of a patronage strategy. President Banda of Malawi moved the capital to consolidate his rule. He made little distinction between the consolidation of his own rule and the effectiveness of the state, and moved the capital to a region close to his birthplace and where his ethnic group, the Chewa, was concentrated.²⁵ A similar pattern took place on the Ivory Coast—President Houphouët-Boigny moved the capital from Abidjan to Yamoussoukro, the president's birthplace. In each case, the move shored up the president's power base.

In Botswana (as in Kazakhstan, as we shall see), moving the capital was executed differently. In Botswana the move from Gafehing to Bagerone brought the locus of power closer to rival groups that threatened the emerging state. Gaberone brought the prospect of closer control over six of the eight main tribal groups because it had been the “meeting place of the tribal chiefs.”²⁶ Whether the capital was selected to shore up the ruler's networks or to exert tighter control over alternative power bases, key calculations about using patronage to weaken rivals were at play.

Symbolic State-Building

State building involves not only creating a physical infrastructure but also constructing a symbolic apparatus to propagate ideas of a leader's political legitimacy, cultural rectitude, and effectiveness in governance. In short, state building involves setting the terms of a normative regime. This may be especially important in contexts where the state struggles to deliver services to its public but is more effective in using (often monopolizing) media resources to get its message to domestic and international audiences.

Relocation of a capital is an act rife with symbolic import. New capitals (or existing towns radically refashioned into capital cities) are designed to highlight the place of the state in the modern economic and political world. Through their construction, a state is vaulted

symbolically to parity with other modern states. This is most striking in Brasilia, where high modernism was embodied in architectural design and where the function of the capital was to be expressly political and administrative—aspects that were understood to be the hallmark of membership in the modern system of states.²⁷ As Rapoport puts it

In Brasilia, the central function would be government, other functions being secondary. As a ceremonial and symbolic city, it could express the grandeur of the nation rather than, say, that of royalty.²⁸

In this sense, Brasilia—like Gaborone, Lilongwe, and other capitals—was the way the élite expressed to ordinary people the meaning (however defined, according to the period and context) of modern statehood.

Controlling Cultural Diversity

I have suggested that state building through capital relocation involves patronage politics—creating alternative power bases or weakening rivals. This tells us a great deal about élite politics, but it says relatively little about ordinary people.

Capital moves also serve as nation-building strategies, since they may help to promote broad identification with a larger cultural community. In other words, capital relocation is used to generate the loyalty of a broad citizenry.²⁹ For examples: Nigeria—ever experimenting with various forms of institutional reform to placate its multi-ethnic and multi-confessional population—moved its capital from Lagos to Abuja in part because Abuja was located between the largely Muslim North and the Christian South so it was aligned geographically with both and was not partial to either one. As discussed above, Botswana faced similar challenges and therefore selected Gaborone over the alternatives.

Nation building involves creating a minimal popular allegiance to a broad cultural community. While it does not necessarily preclude various subnational identifications—whether along confessional, ethnic, or interest-group grounds—it does suggest some subordination of those subnational identities to a superordinate one. In postcolonial contexts, nations are often built through the self-conscious efforts of élites to minimize or balance the alternative allegiances of a cultural plural population.

Élites who build nations use both carrots and sticks to effect successful relocations of capital cities. Some of the benefits or carrots of state building include new economic and political opportunities, increased investment and access to political power, increased employment levels, and greater regional prominence for politicians. The economic, political, and physical security of the region can also increase not only for élites but for the general population as well, who become the recipients of better services and, therefore, identify more strongly with the new national identity that the élite pretends to represent.

Capital relocation can also employ sticks to bring about a successful move. A restive region, particularly one dominated by minority ethnic populations, can be difficult to manage and lead to the possibility of separatism. In this event, a new capital location brings with it the state's coercive power and greater ability to exercise control over unruly populations that live near the new capital. In addition, the move can bring demographic changes, particularly if there is migration of people from the region of the old capital to the region of the new one. If the élite's cultural group is underrepresented in the region targeted to be the new capital, migration of this group to the new capital can powerfully change that region's cultural geography.

THE ASTANA MOVE

While geography, economy, and political factors come into play in any decision to move a capital, I believe that the move in Kazakhstan from Almaty to Astana was designed to address pressing nation-and state building challenges that were particularly acute in Kazakhstan. While élites across the former USSR faced similar issues, in Kazakhstan they were especially formidable. In fact, in this sense Kazakhstan more closely resembles cases from postcolonial Africa than it does the other post-Soviet cases.³⁰

Official Reasons

Kazakhstan moved its capital for a number of reasons,³¹ many of which were geographic according to official sources. One of these reasons included problems of urban geography specific to Almaty, the old capital. Almaty was located in a zone of strong seismic activity and scientists predicted that devastating earthquakes would occur within decades. Another problem with Almaty's location was that the Zailiiskii Alatau mountains prevented urban expansion to the

south and east, cramping the city's economic prospects. These same mountains also trapped airborne contaminants creating moderate to severe air pollution in the city.

Officials said Almaty's geography limited its political influence as well, because it is located on the periphery of a vast, underpopulated³² steppe that borders China. China's relationship with the former Soviet states in Central Asia was unstable until the late 1990s, making Almaty an insecure place from which to govern Kazakhstan. As a communications, transport and commercial hub, Almaty's location was better for connecting the Central Asian states to each other than to connect the regions of Kazakhstan itself.³³ Astana seemed to offer remedies for this syndrome of ills that emerged from the implacable facts of geography.

Though the geographic reasons for changing the location of the capital city were strong, I believe they were not the only reasons, as officials indicated. If geographic factors were the only reasons for change, it is not clear what separates instances of capital moves in other instances where geographic consideration prompted moves that are not carried out. Why did Argentina abandon the scheduled move from Buenos Aires to Carmen de Patagones? Why has Japan not followed through on plans to move its capital from Tokyo to either Sendai or Nagoya? Why did Russia not move its capital east during the post-Soviet period to improve connections to the far-flung regions of this vast state? These questions defy answers; I merely wish to suggest that official reasons give an incomplete picture of the decision calculus.

Building the State by Consolidating Power

State building is not the correct phrase to use to discuss post-Soviet politics. After all, post-Soviet Russia already had states; in fact it was the successor of the government that was once so powerful as to be called "totalitarian." Accordingly, the usual paradigm for analyzing the region has been "transition," because the word implies teleology of progress, directionality and well-defined end points.

The power of the state-building concepts lies in its focus on the state as critical to the provision of public goods, including those associated with economic and political reform.³⁴ Yet, like many concepts, it is imperfect. It downplays the legacies of Soviet rule—the fact that efforts to construct governing apparatuses occur not on *tabula rasa* but on terrain littered with the partially viable edifices from previous state-building experiences. How élites deal with existing state structures is central to all state building efforts. I will address four aspects of state building

in Kazakhstan and suggest that the capital shift was designed, in part, to help build a state in the face of the institutional legacies from the Soviet period.

One of the first steps in state building briefly involved Nursultan Nazarbaev, president of Kazakhstan, who eliminated the old sources of patronage that persisted from the Soviet period. Like Boris Yeltsin, who chose armed confrontation against his Soviet-era Duma in 1993, Nazarbaev faced the challenge of transforming a Soviet-era state apparatus. His task was especially difficult because Central Asia had witnessed few core changes during the *perestroika* period. Unlike the Baltic republics and Ukraine (and to a lesser extent Moldova and Russia), in which republican élites transformed embryonic state apparatuses by rallying them to the cause of ethnic nationalism in the late 1980s, in Central Asia independence movements were much weaker and republican leaders were Soviet-era appointees.³⁵ Consequently, Central Asia lacked many of the institutional ruptures at the republican level that the other new states experienced.

The principal political *modus operandi* of the post-Soviet period remained largely unchanged from the late Soviet period, when Brezhnev's trust-in-cadres policies had entrenched the republican élites. Dinmukhammed Kunaev, the long-standing first party secretary, was influential in a republic-wide structure of patronage. Access to goods—whether consumer wares or industrial products—and access to political power was structured largely through patron-client relationships. From the perspective of bureaucratic efficiency, state agencies were redundant and overstaffed. The World Bank estimated that at the time of independence over one million Kazakhstanis were on the Civil Service payroll.³⁶ It is not surprising, then, that since the state's function was less Weberian than it was to ensure employment and equity through pervasive patronage structures.

International financial institutions (IFI's) indicated to the new government that cutting the size of the state was a prerequisite to receiving international loans and was necessary to attract direct foreign investment.³⁷ By 1994 Nazarbaev had accepted the IFI's prescriptions for macro-economic and institutional reform. Kazakhstani currency, the *tenge*, was introduced in November 1993, and after a year of inflationary monetary policies, a policy of fiscal austerity was adopted. Revenue came in massive quantities largely through a multi-tiered privatization program which included relatively few restrictions on foreign ownership and joint-venture contracts to develop Kazakhstan's vast oil and mineral deposits proliferated.

The Astana move was a chance for Nazarbaev to marginalize members of the bureaucracy who resisted reforms or who resided outside of his patronage networks. Massive institutional reorganization occurred within virtually every aspect of the governing bureaucracy from the national Academy of Sciences to the National Security Agency. As state agencies physically moved north to Astana, Nazarbaev's opponents faced pressure to adapt or become marginalized. (Ultimately, most chose to adapt and the state continued to be vastly overstaffed.) Moreover, the move was a chance for Nazarbaev to push economic reform, which he ultimately benefited from personally.

A second related aspect of the state-building effort in Kazakhstan was to replace existing patronage networks with new ones. Institutional reform created a broad new system of patron-client ties. Most significantly, in Kazakhstan's emerging oil, gas, and mineral extraction industries.

Nazarbaev did not make a strong effort to disassociate himself as president from the institution of the presidency. He identified himself strongly with the state and its functions and did not distinguish between state control over the country's assets and his own personal control. Patrimonialism helped propel members of the Greater Horde political party to which Nazarbaev belongs into the ruling elite. Some of the most prominent Greater Horde Kazakhs included:³⁸ Nurtai Abykaev, Nazarbaev's closest advisor; Akmetzhan Esimov, deputy prime minister from 1996-8 and chair of the president's administration from mid-1998; A. Musaev, director of the Committee on National Security and successor to the KGB; Kasymzhomart Tokaev, Minister of Foreign Affairs; M. Abliazov, Minister of Energy, Industry, and Trade; Omirbek Baigel'di, chairman of the Senate; and Altynbek Sarsenbaev, director of the National Agency on Press Affairs and Mass Information.

The dominance of the Greater Horde helped consolidate the power of Nazarbaev and his kin. From the mid 1990s, with the introduction of mass privatization and the opening of Kazakhstan to large-scale direct foreign investment, the political reach of members of Nazarbaev's family was dramatically enhanced. The most significant were the increasingly close ties between Rakhat Aliev and Nazarbaev. Aliev, who was married to Nazarbaev's daughter, served as the director of the Tax Police who also had an interest in oil development in the Caspian area. Aliev later became prominent in the CNS. Nazarbaev's other brother-in-law, Timur Kulibaev, owned Kaztransoil the strategically critical pipeline company. Nazarbaev's rule

was compared to the powerful Suharto family in Indonesia though the Suharto government was overthrown in 1998.

The move to Astana rewarded loyalty to the president and the extractive industries contributed generously to it. Extra budgetary funds helped build Astana and not only maintained a public fiction (widely recognized as such) that it cost the state nothing to move the capital, but also enabled loyalty to be rewarded more broadly.

The move to Astana was part of Nazarbaev's attempt to address the concerns of IFI's zealous resistance to reforms and bloated state bureaucracies and replace Soviet-era patronage networks with his own. Reducing the size of the apparatus involved a process of selection and the capital move weeded out less loyal cadres and rewarded the more loyal. Only those who showed loyalty to the president survived institutional reorganization. While it was ironic to think of living in Astana as a reward, the alternative was losing one's position entirely. Young professionals who were educated abroad were often among the first recruited into the newly reorganized structures in Astana. While these young workers often claimed technical expertise and a generally technocratic outlook, as a practical matter they owed their usually low-level positions to Nazarbaev and his followers.

The politics of alternative sources of patron-client ties do not exhaust state building. These issues are often remote for ordinary people who feel less and less impact from the state, because it ceased to provide meaningful social welfare. For these people, the symbolic aspect of state building has more impact. As Rapoport puts it,

Capitals provide stages and props for ceremonies and rituals—what have been called shrines or theatres of power...By using appropriate repertoires, political authority is communicated and relevant institutions appear mighty, impressing large audiences. Appropriate elements dramatically communicate culture-specific schemata of political authority, act as mnemonics, legitimate acts, secure compliance and reinforce the official definition of the state.³⁹

The central imagery etched into Astana's design highlighted Kazakhstan's place as a legitimate actor in the international community. That is, the symbolic face of Astana was created to underscore the outward, international aspect of the city. New government buildings were modern and rich in amenities but not grandiose monuments honoring the self-indulgence of its leadership. Designs for new parks, museums, plazas, and other public areas recalled the neo-classical designs of European capitals. Just as the state took out full-page advertisements in the

New York Times to proclaim its membership in the international community, the emerging architecture of Astana was intended to broadcast the same message.⁴⁰

Not everyone accepted the legitimacy of the new capital. Many merely viewed it as a modern day Potemkin village, rapidly constructed to appeal to international investors and foreign audiences. Rumors circulated about the shoddy workmanship and even dangerous conditions of the new buildings. One observer suggested that the new structures could not compare to their Soviet-era counterparts: One can find distinct [*sil'nye*] cracks in all new buildings—in contrast to those buildings constructed in Soviet times.⁴¹

The construction of a new state was critical to the legitimacy of the new government. After all, modern statehood was a twentieth-century Soviet creation in Central Asia, so the Kazakhs, former nomadic people, did not experience state institutions until then. They had historical myths of independence from which to draw in the post-Soviet period, but those myths did not include twenty first century state making forms of governance. The move to Astana was a way to address concerns about Kazakhstan's readiness for independent statehood.

A new state also meant that its borders needed to be secured. Initially, this was important only in a minimal sense. After all, much of post-Soviet space remained an economically unified zone linked, until 1993, by the continued use of the Russian *ruble* so it was initially not necessary to create serious customs checkpoints or patrol borders. Russia was preoccupied with its own domestic concerns. With Chinese interests in Central Asia unclear, the proximity of Almaty to the border raised the question of the city's vulnerability to China.⁴²

The move to Astana brought the 7000-kilometer long border with Russia closer to the seat of state and put the capital a safe distance from the Chinese frontier.

Imagining a Legitimate Community—Nation Building⁴³

The logic of the international system that recommends the fusion of the nation, as a cultural community, and the state, as a political entity, means that nation and state building are closely connected. Here, I consider nation-building efforts separately. There are three factors that leaders can use to promote at least minimum loyalty to the abstract “nation”—ethnic diversity, addressing subethnic groups, and creating national symbols that are accepted by the population.

The first aspect is ethnic diversity. Kazakhstan was only post-Soviet state whose titular group Kazakhs, was not a numerical majority in 1991, making that region one of striking cultural

pluralism. The concentration of ethnic Russians in the northern and northeastern regions created the possibility for separatism,⁴⁴ a threat that was not without justification. Irredentists from Russia called for the incorporation of northern Kazakhstan into the Russian Federation,⁴⁵ creating tensions along the vast Russian border, Cossacks on the Kazakhstani side, whose political identification leaned toward Russia, began agitating for cultural and political autonomy. These developments offended many in the Kazakh ethnonationalist movement who came to expect that confrontations would materialize.⁴⁶ Even after a large-scale emigration of ethnic Russians from Kazakhstan to Russia, thus shrinking their numbers, these northern and northeastern regions were on average 63 percent non-Kazakh—predominantly ethnic Russian.⁴⁷

During the 1990s, analysts believed Kazakhstan's cultural mix was explosive. Bremmer predicted that along the Russo-Kazakhstani border

an outlook for ethnic relation...although not without hope, is none-the-less pessimistic.⁴⁸

Khazanov described how

[ethnically connected social differences] have become a source of explosive polarization and social disunity.⁴⁹

It was not clear whether the new leadership had the expertise, desire, or resources to manage this cultural complexity.

Securing the loyalty of ethnic Russians was a complicated task that involved a combination of coercion, persuasion, and forms of symbolic accommodation.⁵⁰ The move to Astana was a part of that strategy. By bringing the physical institutions of state closer to the locus of the perceived unrest, Nazarbaev showed his readiness to confront threats at a moment's notice. The disproportionate economic opportunities available in the capital city also represented an incentive for the people of these regions. While the example of Washington DC reminds us that capital cities do not need to stand out as economically vital, in this generally poverty-stricken context, money from benefactors and investments flowed disproportionately into the capital city.

A second aspect of positive nation building addressing subethnic divisions among titular Kazakhs generated an unusual, but still potentially destabilizing dynamic.⁵¹ Like other former nomads, Kazakhs divided into subunits called "hordes," *zhuz* and subdivided into smaller

divisions called “clans,” *ru*. Subethnic identities were roughly associated with specific territories. Nazarbaev and his mentor and predecessor Kunaev were members of the Greater Horde, a group that was concentrated in the south. The Lesser Horde was concentrated in the west, the Middle Horde was concentrated in the north, and winning a modicum of loyalty from all ethnic Kazakhs continued to bedevil the élite of this vast territory well into 2002.

The move to Astana created at least two solutions to the sub-ethnic rivalries. First, the move generated a tacit alliance between the Greater Horde of Nazarbaev and the Middle Horde, the territory that Astana contains. In the context of concern over Russian separatism and Cossack agitation, this alliance was a bulwark against separatists’ aspirations. The economic and political opportunities that the capital relocation brought to the Middle Horde were a boon to these Kazakhs, who otherwise might have sympathized with movements among ethnic Russians and Cossacks.⁵² Second, the tacit alliance kept the aspirations in check of the Lesser Horde élite whose territory contained large deposits of oil, natural gas, and minerals. The Lesser Horde had a history of resistance to authority, especially on the Mangyshlak peninsula,⁵³ and memories of past resistance could be invoked in struggles for regional autonomy. As the extractive industries in the western regions developed, leaders in the capital tried to quell any rebellions Lesser Horde Kazakhs.

The third aspect to nation-building strategies in Kazakhstan was the creation of symbols that would broadly resonate across the Kazakhstan multi-cultural landscape. This was a distinct challenge that the Kazakhstan leaders tried to meet by using varied and sometimes contradictory images to appeal to the diverse populations of Kazakh ethnonationalists, Kazakhs with Russian influence, ethnic Russians, and other Turkic, Caucasian, and Slavic groups that inhabited the regime. This symbolic strategy illustrated the regime’s use of “Eurasianism.”⁵⁴

Eurasianism was a set of symbols that presented an appealing discourse to the non-Kazakh population and a diffuse set of privileges to Kazakhs. Just as Russians in the Soviet period had received disproportionate privileges in the Soviet period, ethnic Kazakhs received the same in the post-Soviet period. The Kazakhstani leaders established ambiguous cultural categories designed for universal appeal and broad resonance with the population: *homo sovieticus* was a fiction spread widely in the Soviet period. *Homo eurasiaticus* remained likewise under Nazarbaev. Nazarbaev suggested that all Kazakhstanis—whether of Kazakh, Russian, or other cultural background—were Eurasian, a similar and phantasmic amalgam of peoples located

at the heart of a super-continent. While few Kazakhstani accepted Eurasianist images at face value since Eurasianism showed profound ethnic attachments, many understood them as evidence of a state with an interest in promoting interethnic peace.

The move to Astana called on Eurasian symbols. Eurasianism placed Kazakhstan and its multiethnic population at the geographic center of a vast continent. Mooring his ideas loosely to those of Soviet scholar Lev Gumiliev,⁵⁵ Nazarbaev sought to celebrate the continent's multicultural heritage and offer a vision that reserved a formative historical role for the Turkic groups, which the Kazakhs are a part. Eurasianism was supposed to be an organic outgrowth of the territory, according to a speech by President Nazarbaev:

...Our geographic position at the cross-roads in the Eurasian region. The process of globalization of world economic and political processes [*sic*] elevates this factor as a key one. Our ancestors as a part of a united family of Turkic peoples [*narody*] used this important strategic factor to their advantage: along the legendary Silk Route a wide trading corridor between European and Asiatic countries was organized. Today, we are beginning to restore it in cooperation with other countries of our region and with the support of the world community. Of course, in the future the trading system, financial currents and migrations of people between Europe and Asia will grow. For this very reason, to say nothing about the many politically stabilizing factors, I issued forth and will develop the idea of Eurasianism [*evraziistvo*], which has, I am convinced, a strategic future.⁵⁶

Astana was a critical part of this vision: just as Kazakhstan was uniquely situated at the crossroads of cultures, Astana enjoyed a singular location at the heart of Kazakhstan and could ensure stable and effective transportation, communication, and defense. The official presentation of Astana in June 1998 was a classic reiteration of Soviet-era "internationalist" ideology. The ceremonies included "traditional" dance by troupes dressed in the "national" costumes of the diaspora groups who dined in Kazakhstan, and profusely displayed symbols of harmonious multiethnicity, antinuclearism, and international peace.⁵⁷ In this sense, relocation of the capital was a symbolic resource for reconciling alternative visions of nationhood.

CONCLUSIONS: SITUATING THE KAZAKHSTAN EXPERIENCE

Why was the Astana move the only relocation of a capital in post-Soviet republics? If élites in Kazakhstan believed the relocation was a useful tool for nation and state building, why is it not used more broadly? I will argue that Kazakhstan faced structural conditions that were closer to postcolonial African contexts than to much of the ex-USSR, and that these structural conditions made capital relocation appear attractive. The two conditions that stand out are low population density and great cultural diversity.

State building was generally a less daunting task in the ex-USSR than in Africa. Post-Soviet successor élites inherited bureaucratic institutions that were bloated and inefficient, yet performed important social functions. They were not ideally suited to serve the economic and political problems of independent statehood, but they nonetheless demonstrated a greater capacity to perform functions than many of their African counterparts.⁵⁸ As a result, the challenges of state building were considerable but less acute than those in other postcolonial contexts.

The five states of the former Soviet Central Asia were unusual, because republican élites had been in a more clearly colonial relationship with Moscow than the other Soviet republics. These states depended on Moscow for virtually everything from technical expertise to financial transfers to cadres. The state structures that emerged in Central Asia were less suited for independent statehood than their counterparts in other former republics.

Kazakhstan faced additional challenges to state building because its territory was vast and underpopulated, presenting essentially the same challenges to establishing power that Herbst witnessed across the African continent.⁵⁹ If in 1998 Africa's mean population density was 25.9 people per square km, Kazakhstan's population density was 6.3 per square km.⁶⁰

Nation building is a critical issue across former Soviet territory, as shown by conflicts between Azerbaijan and Armenia, Chechnya and the Russian Federation, Abkhazia and Georgia, and the civil conflict within Tajikistan. Nonetheless, on the whole the cultural diversity of Eurasian contexts is less dramatic than that in many African settings. Indeed, the problems of nation building were impressive, but they were generally more tractable than those in other post-colonial areas.

Compared with the other post-Soviet successor states, Kazakhstan was again unusual in that its cultural diversity more closely resembled the typical African case than the former Soviet average. One indication of this cultural diversity—though an imperfect one⁶¹—is the ethnolinguistic fractionalization (ELF) index, an estimator of the degree of cultural pluralism in a given context. The most culturally heterogeneous area is rated 1.0; the most culturally homogenous is a 0.0.

Table 2

Ethno-linguistic Fractionalization Index, 1985⁶²			
Country	Estimate 1	Estimate 2	Estimate 3
mean: Africa	0.633	0.633	0.588
mean: ex-USSR	0.456	0.456	0.456
Kazakhstan	0.692	0.692	0.692

*Note: The differences between African and ex-USSR means are all statistically significant at the 0.05 level. The difference between Kazakhstan and the African mean is not significant ($p < 0.75$).

Table 2 illustrates that Kazakhstan’s cultural heterogeneity—no matter how it is estimated—more closely resembles the African mean than it does the Eurasian mean. But the picture could be stated even more starkly: I have included North African countries in Table 2, with their striking cultural homogeneity—Egypt has a score of 0.025, for example. If I restricted the comparison to Sub-Saharan Africa, the difference between it and the ex-USSR mean would have been higher. Furthermore, the ELF index does not take into account sub-ethnic divisions—hordes and clans in Kazakhstan. If the ELF index did take these division into account, Kazakhstan’s score would be higher, as would Somalia’s (ELF = 0.032), and the comparability of Kazakhstan’s ethnic landscape to that of many African contexts would have been even clearer.

The role of international norms is another factor that separates the Eurasian countries from many African ones. The construction of states and nations involves international recognition and positive sanction. After post-war decolonization the international community was uncertain whether to adopt colonial-era boundaries as borders of the new states or alter the post-colonial map significantly. They chose colonial-era boundries. By the period of de-Sovietization international norms concerning inviolability of borders—understood to be the

administrative borders formerly internal to the Soviet state-empire—had become well established. Nations were to be the communities defined by the borders in which populations found themselves. States were to be those institutional structures and assets that resided on the territory defined as independent. Across former Soviet territory the definition of nation and state were relatively less ambiguous.

Again Kazakhstan, was unusual in the post-Soviet context. Its cultural diversity raised questions about the suitability of Soviet-era administrative divisions to be a post-Soviet nation-state. After all, if the principle of ethnic self determination was coming into greater play internationally (witness the former Yugoslavia, Eritrea, and East Timor), there was little *a priori* reason to prevent it from being applied to Kazakhstan. Thus, while the international community generally supported adopting Soviet-era borders as independent ones, with regard to Kazakhstan there was still a possibility that ethnic self-determination could have been applied. In this sense, it again more closely resembled African areas during decolonization than it did the other states of the ex-USSR.

The general point is simple: many of the conditions that made state and nation building challenges more acute *generally* in Africa than in Eurasia were present in Kazakhstan. If the move to Astana seems strange in the context of de-Sovietization, this tells us a great deal about the different nature of post-Soviet territory versus other post-colonial areas. The Astana move is both ordinary and extraordinary. It is extraordinary in the post-Soviet context. It is closer to ordinary in the larger set of post-colonial cases, where capital relocation is a more common occurrence.⁶³ The relative (in)frequency of capital moves implies that the challenges of nation and state building in post-Soviet areas—as daunting as they have proved to be—are not as acute as those of other post-colonial contexts.

This is a conclusion with important implications. Analysts are correct to look for a suitable replacement for the “transition” concept often used to describe politics after state socialism. The “transition” implied identifiable end-points and a clear sense of direction. This is ironic, considering the contingent nature of the processes the concept was meant to describe. But just as analogies from Latin American contexts are imperfect in their application across geographic regions, so are comparisons to African ones. The political geography of state and nation building is much more starkly felt in most of Sub-Saharan Africa than in most of the ex-USSR. By focusing on the capital move in Kazakhstan, we are reminded that only the Central

Asian republics are broadly comparable to their African counterparts in this regard. Our comparisons should cross-cut continents, not take them as organic wholes.

Let me offer three points of clarification. First, these observations about capital relocation may be applicable beyond post-colonial countries. I have restricted the domain of comparison because my conceptualization recommends it. It is possible that what I have described has broader comparative applicability. For example, Joffe describes how in ancient West Asia and Egypt, élites created what he calls

disembedded capitals,” i.e., “urban sites founded *de novo* and designed to supplant existing patterns of authority and administration.

He contends that they

were typically founded by new élites, either usurpers or reformers, as part of innovations designed to simultaneously undercut competing factions and create new patterns of allegiance and authority.⁶⁴

Likewise, the location of Washington DC owed much to a North-South compromise that parallels other nation-building efforts.⁶⁵ I am open to the possibility that the patterns I have observed occur more broadly.

Second, I am not arguing that the challenges of nation and state building are absent in post-Soviet Eurasia. Ongoing conflicts in Nagorno-Karabakh, Chechnya, Abkhazia, Tajikistan, and other regions speak loudly to the contrary. The claim is a general one about the region as a whole and a relative one about how it compares to other regions.

Third, I do not mean to offer a functionalist argument. A functionalist might argue that capital relocation serves the needs of nation and state building. I am not convinced that such city moves have much utility in this regard. I am convinced, however, that they can be useful for the élites involved. If there is a functionalist argument to be made, it is not about utility vis-à-vis nation and state building imperatives, but utility vis-à-vis political agendas.

Finally, I have compared an eleven-year period in the former Soviet history with a twenty-six year period in African. Perhaps more capital moves are on the horizon in the successor states of Eurasia. For the reasons I have offered, I do not believe that such moves are likely. If they do occur, they will cast some doubt on my characterization of the differences between colonial and post-colonial contexts from the two continents.

ENDNOTES

- ¹ Thanks to Lucan Way and John Schoeberlein for their comments on earlier drafts of this paper.
- ² Kalamov offers a set of criticisms that represents a softer version of what ordinary people often suggested in harsher tones. See Kuanysh, Kalamov. “Astana—bol’shaia ‘potemkinskaia derevnia’.” *Vremia po* (24, January 2000).
- ³ Matloff, Judith. “Puzzle over capital move in Central Asia.” *Christian Science Monitor* (3 February 1999).
- ⁴ Bransten, Jeremy. “Kazakhstan: Waiting For Nazarbayev In His New Capital,” *RFE/RL* (14 October 1997).
- ⁵ It is possible that significant funding for the capital reconstruction came from extra-budgetary funds, which play a significant role in Kazakhstan’s national economy. In addition, many foreign governments and contractors embarked on construction works in the new capital to gain a foothold in the lucrative extractive industries of the newly independent country.
- ⁶ When I began fieldwork in 1997 I found it hard to imagine that this move would be executed in any meaningful way. I underestimated the resources and the political will that were made available for the move.
- ⁷ For the sake of simplicity, I call the city “Astana,” unless I am explicitly referring to the period before the capital move.
- ⁸ This is not a suggestion about optimal strategies. I do not argue that capital relocation solves state-or nation-building dilemmas. By themselves, capital city moves cannot create Weberian bureaucracies or produce national identification. Rather, I offer a structural and probabilistic logic: when alternative institutions and alternative popular loyalties challenge the position of the state élite, capital relocation is likely to appeal as a tool.
- ⁹ Not all élites seek to build viable states and national identification; the most predatory élites simply appropriate the country’s wealth for personal aggrandizement. As this paper demonstrates, many élites attempt both: to build states and nations, and do so in ways that bring them enormous personal benefits.
- ¹⁰ This much is easy to forget since, by most measures, the situation in Kazakhstan became relatively stable—due, in no small part to the authoritarian rule of Nursultan Nazarbaev. The United States, for example, has come to rely centrally on Kazakhstan for providing what former Energy Secretary Bill Richardson called “a base of stability in a very uncertain part of the world.” See his editorial, “Crazy for Kazakhstan,” *Washington Times* (July 30, 2001), accessed May 20, 2002 from http://sites.hsprofessional.com/kazakhembus/Crazy_for_Kazakhstan.html
- ¹¹ Sartori (1970).
- ¹² Mill, John Stuart. “Two Methods of Comparison.” In *A System of Logic*. New York: Harper & Row 1888.
- ¹³ Tilly, Charles. *Coercion, Capital, and European States, A.D. 990–1992*. Cambridge: Blackwell 1990.
- ¹⁴ Clapham, Christopher. “Sovereignty and the Third World State.” In *Political Studies* 1999. XLVII, 522–37.
- ¹⁵ This table is largely from Peter Hall, in Taylor, John, Lengellé, Jean G., and Andrew, Caroline “The Changing Role of Capital Cities.” In *Capital Cities/Les Capitales: Perspectives Internationales/International Perspectives*. Ottawa: Carleton University Press.
- ¹⁶ Not even dictators produce preferences endogenously—i.e., in ways that bear no relation to the social and political forces they face.
- ¹⁷ Such projects are typically grandiose by design, although they bear superficial similarities to large-scale public works projects. Below, I cast doubt on the notion that capital moves can be in the public interest.
- ¹⁸ I distinguish between cases of initial capital location cases of capital relocation. The decisions to locate capitals in Washington, DC, Canberra, and Ottawa were different from physical moves from one site to another.
- ¹⁹ Allison, Graham. *Essence of Decision: Explaining the Cuban Missile Crisis*. Boston: Little Brown, 1971.
- ²⁰ See Murphey, Rhoads. “New Capitals of Asia.” In *Economic Development and Cultural Change**. 216–43.
- ²¹ Herbst, Jeffrey. *States and Power in Africa: Comparative Lessons in Authority and Control*. Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2000.
- ²² Potts, Deborah. “Capital Relocation in Africa: The Case of Lilongwe in Malawi.” In *The Geographic Journal* 151 (2) 188.
- ²³ Thanks to Hakan Yavuz for suggesting this term (personal communication).
- ²⁴ I do not equate the effectiveness of institutions with their service of the public good. An effective institution simply functions smoothly and largely without being troubled by significant internal or external challengers. Contrast Putnam’s work, for whom democracy and effectiveness are synonymous. See Putnam, Robert. 1994. “Capital Relocation in Africa: The Case of Lilongwe in Malawi.” *Making Democracy Work*. Princeton: Princeton University Press.
- ²⁵ Potts, p. 188.

²⁶ Best, Alan C.G. "Gaberone: Problems and Prospects of a New Capital." *The Geographical Review* 60, (1), 1970: 4.

²⁷ See Scott, James C. "The High Modernist City." In *Seeing Like a State*, 103–46. New Haven: Yale University Press, 1998.

²⁸ Rapoport, Amos. "On the Nature of Capital Cities and their Physical Expression." In Taylor, John, Lenggellé, Jean G. and Andrew, Caroline. *Capital Cities/Les Capitale: Perspectives Internationales/International Perspectives*, (40). Ottawa: Carleton University Press, 1993.

²⁹ I use the term "citizenry" loosely since many of these contexts are authoritarian. When rights are poorly protected and obligations to the state are ill-defined, "citizenship" becomes an ambiguous concept.

³⁰ Of course, there are innumerable differences between Central Asian and African cases. I merely wish to suggest a dimension along which similarities can be found.

³¹ Prosser offers a detailed description of the move in Prosser, Sarah. "Capital Movement: Kazakhstan's New Center." *Central Asia Monitor* 5 (2000): 5–20. My purpose is not to repeat her description, but to explore the political dynamics of the move, which is a narrower exercise with regard to Kazakhstan but one that opens up possibilities for broader comparison.

³² Kazakhstan is underpopulated not from the perspective of the natural environment, which has difficulty supporting a large population, but rather from the perspective of political control and economic growth.

³³ By the late 1990s Almaty had become the commercial center for much of Central Asia. This was the result of both Kazakhstan's free-market orientation that attracted foreign capital and the slow pace of economic reform in the alternative regional power, Uzbekistan, that cut off an early flow of foreign capital to that state.

³⁴ See Beissinger, Mark R. and Young, Crawford, editors. 2002. *Beyond State Crisis? Postcolonial Africa and Post-Soviet Eurasia Compared*. Washington, DC and Baltimore, MD: Woodrow Wilson International Center for Scholars Press and Johns Hopkins University Press.

³⁵ Askar Akaev, President of Kyrgyzstan, is the lone exception.

³⁶ World Bank. *Kazakhstan: Transition of the State*. Washington DC: The World Bank, 1997.

³⁷ Institutional redundancy and bloating do not *require* addressing. In part through force of habit and in part through effectiveness in performing certain social tasks, many bureaucracies fall well short of the Weberian ideal. The long-standing critique of functionalism reminds us that a "need" (in this case, for reform of the state) does not create its own fulfillment (actually successful reform).

³⁸ This list is a composite from Amrekulov (1998), Masanov (1996, 1997), and the newspaper *XXI vek*, * June, 3.

³⁹ Rapoport, Amos. "On the Nature of Capital Cities and their Physical Expression." In Taylor, John, Lenggellé, Jean G. and Andrew, Caroline. *Capital Cities/Les Capitale: Perspectives Internationales/International Perspectives*, (36). Ottawa: Carleton University Press, 1993.

⁴⁰ *New York Times*, 16 December 1998, A19

⁴¹ Kalamov 2001, p.*

⁴² In the extremely unlikely event that China adopted a truly aggressive posture, the location of the Kazakhstani capital would hardly seem to matter, given the tremendous size and technological advantages of Chinese forces.

⁴³ Benedict Anderson's modifier "imagined"—used to describe the process by which people who will never come into contact with each other begin to identify with a larger, abstract community—remains apt, even for processes in the 1990s. It captures the psychological shift that ordinary people undergo as "nations" are built. I accept Rogers Brubaker's objection that "nations" are not physical entities, but they are nonetheless treated, and imagined, as such. See Benedict Anderson, *Imagined Communities* (London: Verso, 1991) and Rogers Brubaker, *Nationalism Reframed* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1996).

⁴⁴ Separatist sentiment existed, although Nazarbaev raised the issue at strategic moments, suggesting that it may not have been as extensive as the President implied.

⁴⁵ Aleksandr Solzhenitsyn. 'Kak nam obustroit' Rossiuu?' *Literaturnaia gazeta*, 18 September 1990.

⁴⁶ Interview, Khasen Qozhaakhmet, 26 March, 1998.

⁴⁷ The regions are East Kazakhstan, Akmola, Karaganda, Kostanai, Pavlodar, and North Kazakhstan. *Predvaritel'nye rezul'taty*.

⁴⁸ Ian Bremmer, "Nazarbaev and the North: State-Building and Ethnic Relations in Kazakhstan," *Ethnic and Racial Studies* 17, 1994, p. 632.

⁴⁹ Anatoly M. Khazanov *After the USSR: Ethnicity and Nationalism in the Commonwealth of Independent States*. Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 1995: 173.

⁵⁰ See Edward Schatz, "Framing Strategies and Non-Conflict in Multi-Ethnic Kazakhstan," *Nationalism and Ethnic Politics* 6, summer: 70–92.

⁵¹ See Edward Schatz, m.s., *Kinship and Power: Clan Politics in a Central Asian State*.

⁵² Middle Horde Kazakhs are disproportionately Russified in a linguistic and cultural sense, thus making the prospect of a trans-ethnic movement plausible.

⁵³ See Mukash Omarov, *Rasstreliannaia step': istoriia Adaevskogo vosstaniia 1931 goda: po materialam OGPU*. Almaty: Ghylym.

⁵⁴ The Eurasianism used by the élite as a form of symbolic nation building had little to do with the revisionist historiography of émigré Russian scholars that generated its name. Kazakhstani Eurasianism was developed for entirely different purposes.

⁵⁵ Lev N. Gumilev, *Drevnie Tiurki* (Moscow, Nauka, 1967).

⁵⁶ Nursultan Nazarbaev, *Kazakhstan--2030: poslanie Prezidenta strany narodu Kazakhstana* (Almaty: Bilim, 1997), p. 104.

⁵⁷ Author's fieldnotes, 10 June 1998.

⁵⁸ Crawford Young, *The African Colonial State in Comparative Perspective* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1997).

⁵⁹ Herbst 2000

⁶⁰ These estimates are taken from http://www.overpopulation.com/faq/basic_information/population_density/europe.html and http://www.overpopulation.com/faq/basic_information/population_density/africa.html. Accessed: May 17, 2002.

⁶¹ See David Laitin and Daniel Poser, "Constructing Ethnic Fractionalization Indices," paper presented at the Laboratory in Comparative Ethnic Processes, Duke University, April 20–23, 2000. <http://www.duke.edu/web/liceep/1/posner/laitinposner.pdf> (Accessed: May 20, 2002.)

⁶² Thanks to Tobin Grant and Scott McClurg for consulting with me on these data. The three estimates of ethnolinguistic fractionalization make different assumptions about what is considered an ethnic group. In the first, all named groups are counted as distinct. In the second, racial distinctions within linguistic groups are ignored. In the third, racial and cultural divisions within linguistic groups are ignored. The first estimate has the largest number of subgroups and the largest ELF; the third estimate has the lowest number of subgroups and lowest ELF. See Philip G. Roeder. 2001. "Ethnolinguistic Fractionalization (ELF) Indices, 1961 and 1985." February 16. <<<http://weber.ucsd.edu/~proeder/elf.htm>>>. Accessed: May 17, 2002.

⁶³ Capital cities have been relocated during the postcolonial period in 7 of 54 African cases (13 percent). Kazakhstan is one of 15 postSoviet cases (6.7 percent). If we include East and East Central Europe (considering the former Yugoslav republics and Czechoslovakia as one case each) in the tally, then Kazakhstan is one of 24 post-socialist cases (4.2 percent), in which the capital was moved.

⁶⁴ Alexander H. Joffe. "Disembedded Capitals in Western Asian Perspective." *Comparative Studies in Society and History*, 1998: 549.

⁶⁵ Lucan Way, personal communication.