

THE DEVELOPMENT OF SOCIAL CAPITAL AMONG BOLASHAK GRADUATES AND THE  
ALUMNI OF OTHER INTERNATIONAL PROGRAMS IN ASTANA

АСТАНА ҚАЛАСЫНДАҒЫ БОЛАШАҚ СТИПЕНДИЯСЫ МЕН БАСҚА ХАЛЫҚАРАЛЫҚ  
БАҒДАРЛАМАЛАРЫНЫҢ ТҮЛЕКТЕРІ АРАСЫНДА ӘЛЕУМЕТТІК КАПИТАЛДЫҢ  
ДАМУЫ

РАЗВИТИЕ СОЦИАЛЬНОГО КАПИТАЛА СРЕДИ АСТАНИНСКИХ ВЫПУСКНИКОВ  
СТИПЕНДИИ БОЛАШАК И ДРУГИХ МЕЖДУНАРОДНЫХ ПРОГРАММ

By

ALIBEK AKHMETOV

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BY  
Alibek Akhmetov

NU Student Number: 201334827


**APPROVED**

BY

Dr. John Schoeberlein

ON

The 23th day of June, 2016.

  
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Signature of Principal Thesis Adviser

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By

ALIBEK AKHMETOV

Principal adviser: Dr. John Schoeberlein

Second reader: Dr. Spencer Willardson

External reviewer: Dr. Doug Blum

Electronic Version Approved: ✓

Prof. Alexander Morrison

Director of the MA Program Eurasian Studies

School of Humanities and Social Sciences

Nazarbayev University

5 July 2016

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## Abstract

In this master's thesis I focus on the development of social capital among Kazakhstani youth. In particular, I aim to investigate the way people with international qualifications enrich their social capital in Astana. Upon return to Kazakhstan, the international graduates join different (sometimes multiple) social networks which are involved in a variety of activities including but not limited to charity, team building, public meetings with state officials, volunteering in orphanages. In the thesis I analyze two social groups, Bolashak Association and Astana Alumni Association, which mainly operate in Astana. I draw primarily on James Coleman's conceptual framework, which supports an analysis of both the personal and social utility of social capital. In addition, such dimensions of social capital as bonding and bridging and Bourdieu's concept of habitus are employed to understand the graduates' rationale to become part of the social groups. The study demonstrates that while social resources, obtained in the networks, bring important benefits, social responsibility is another element that is at the core of the social activeness of the individuals. I also argue that the experience of studying and living abroad contributed to the development of a certain lifestyle that is reflected in how the graduates perform their civic responsibility. In addition, I focus on the way people with international education use their knowledge and skills, and on whether they have to conform at their workplace. While the discourse around international education is focused on the integration of new knowledge and modern approaches, the graduates are not always able to utilize their potential fully. The study contributes to the understanding of future elite formation in Kazakhstan and brings new ground for social research investigations.

## Acknowledgments

I became interested in the issue thanks to my first supervisor, John Schoeberlein, who helped enormously to generate ideas about the research topic investigated. Of course, there were plenty of unclear moments during the research process but the interest in the issue pushed me forward. Therefore, I would like to express my gratitude to Dr. Schoeberlein first.

Surely, the data collection would not be possible without the support of my friends and their social networks. This is when I first felt the advantage of the extended network. So I should say many thanks to Baurzhan Bokayev, Dauren Akhmetov, Nurbolat Bisengaliev and Bota Dabylova for connecting me to those proactive personalities who kindly agreed to be interviewed.

I am also extremely thankful to my external supervisor, Doug Blum, who was very supportive, providing valuable feedback without which I cannot imagine my finished thesis. My second supervisor, Spencer Willardson, played a special role, too. He constantly encouraged me by saying positive words, though my work did not always look good enough. Meirzhan Baitas, Yuan Gao, and Yermek Mussin are those who contributed a great deal by giving important feedback on my writing.

Although, I mention my family last, they played a huge role supporting me at each stage of the writing process. I am thankful to my mother and my sister, Ainur, who encouraged me to enroll to the program. I thank my wife, Ainash, for being always next to me and proofreading my assignments. Finally, my father and younger brother, Alisher, were very kind providing practical assistance when I needed it.

## Chapter I Introduction

The recipients of the Bolashak International Scholarship are a large group of people comprised of more than 11,000 Kazakhstani citizens today.<sup>1</sup> They represent a social group, the members of which have international qualifications, good command of foreign language, intercultural experience, and international connections. Upon graduation these people come back to Kazakhstan and unite into alumni associations enriching their social capital. Before I delve into details of the research I should give some background on the program itself and what life opportunities it provides. The graduates of the program are special for Kazakhstan not just because of the significant financial resources spent on them but due to an important role which has been given to the Bolashak program in the nation-building project.<sup>2</sup>

The dissolution of the Soviet Union resulted into numerous economic and social problems that inevitably affected education. Brain drain was one of the negative consequences of the outflow of such ethnic groups as Russians, Ukrainians and others (many of whom were highly educated professionals) back to their ethnic motherlands. Meanwhile, the Kazakhstani state had to do something because along with the degradation of national cadres, there were poor quality textbooks and low-level educational programs which had to be adjusted to the demands of the modern world. Taking into account the existing situation, in the beginning of November 1993, the President of Kazakhstan signed a decree on the creation of Bolashak International

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<sup>1</sup> "Istoriia programmy." AO "Tsentr mezhdunarodnykh program" - Glavnaia. Accessed December 27, 2015. <http://bolashak.gov.kz/ru/o-stipendii/istoriya-razvitiya.html>.

<sup>2</sup> Saïasat Nurbek et al, *Mezhdunarodnaia stipendiia Prezidenta respubliki Kazakhstan "Bolashak" kak faktor razvitiia chelovecheskogo kapitala*, (Astana: TOO "Shanyrak Media", 2014), 42.



Scholarship.<sup>3</sup> It is not surprising that the program was given such a name as *Bolashak* which means “future” in Kazakh.

The scholarship has provided many Kazakhstani citizens with the opportunity to live abroad and obtain their qualifications in internationally recognized universities.<sup>4</sup> More than 20 years passed since the birth of the presidential scholarship program, but what are its results in terms of human capital? Has the state benefited so far? If yes, how? From the academic literature I learned that the effect of the Bolashak program on the country’s economy has not yet been evaluated. However, key advantages of the program were identified and presented by Nazarbayev University researchers in cooperation with Pennsylvania State University. For instance, interviews with employers revealed that the graduates possess such knowledge and skills as critical thinking, content knowledge and ability to work in teams.<sup>5</sup> It should be noted, meanwhile, that the study does not consider the extent to which the graduates can use their knowledge and skills at their workplace. Nevertheless, the learning experience in foreign educational institutions clearly plays a positive role for the self-development of the graduates. This program has also proved to be crucial in contributing to the social upward mobility.<sup>6</sup> As revealed by Nurbek et al., graduates from ordinary families with low or middle income have been able to become competitive and obtain well-paid jobs. Some of the interviewees used to be from rural areas where going abroad with the help of the Bolashak program seemed to be

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<sup>3</sup> Kadisha Dairova, Zakir Jumakulov, and Adil Ashirbekov. “Government support for student mobility: the case of Kazakhstan’s international scholarship program ‘Bolashak’” 92. Proceedings of Eurasian Higher Education Leaders’ Forums (EHELFL), Astana.’

<sup>4</sup> “Istoriia programmy.” AO “Tsentr mezhdunarodnykh program” - Glavnaia. Accessed December 27, 2015. <http://bolashak.gov.kz/ru/o-stipendii/istoriya-razvitiya.html>.

<sup>5</sup> Laura W. Perna, Kata Orosz, and Zakir Jumakulov. “Understanding the Human Capital Benefits of a Government-funded International Scholarship Program: An Exploration of Kazakhstan’s Bolashak Program,” *International Journal of Educational Development* 40 (2015): 89.

<sup>6</sup> Saïasat Nurbek et al, *Mezhdunarodnaia stipendiia Prezidenta respubliki Kazakhstan “Bolashak” kak faktor razvitiia chelovecheskogo kapitala*, (Astana: TOO “Shanyrak Media”, 2014), 52.

something unachievable.<sup>7</sup> The development of human capital with the help of the program looks to be researched comparatively well.

Therefore, in the thesis I focus instead on the development of social capital among graduates with international qualifications. Upon graduation and sometimes while studying abroad the graduates unite into social organizations of different types. Social groups look attractive for the graduates to enrich their social capital. For instance, the Bolashak Association offers a database of vacant job positions. Moreover, it sends out emails to grant recipients about career opportunities and announcements about important events.<sup>8</sup> It is important to mention that the social capital that the graduates develop may bring personal gains. For instance, today one can observe how the younger generation of the Bolashak graduates comes to occupy top official positions displacing their older predecessors. In this regard, one appointment can lead to more, opening huge opportunities for the rest of the graduates.

Some of the other activities such social networks support include: raising public awareness about social issues in Kazakhstan, promotion of Kazakh language, helping children in orphanages, and organizing study abroad fairs to provide information to prospective students. For instance, the social fund “Best for Kids” is mainly engaged in helping orphanages outside of Astana. Interestingly, they do not only bring presents on holidays but also organize self-development trainings for children. Basically, it is what the graduates learned themselves abroad that they would like to teach the kids (critical thinking, the ability to earn money, etc.)<sup>9</sup> The groups often organize public events. One of them was TEDx organized by Astana Alumni

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<sup>7</sup> Saíasat Nurbek et al, *Mezhdunarodnaia stipendia Prezidenta respubliki Kazakhstan “Bolashak” kak faktor razvitiia chelovecheskogo kapitala*, (Astana: TOO “Shanyrak Media”, 2014), 99.

<sup>8</sup> “Tsentr kar’ery Assotsiatsii ‘Bolashak’.” Bolashak. Accessed February 25, 2016. <http://bolashak.kz/ru/projects/single/59>.

<sup>9</sup> “Podderzhka.” Obshchestvennyi fond “Best for Kids” -. Accessed March 25, 2016. <http://www.bestforkids.kz/Support.aspx>.

Association's members on the theme "Living to 100%" in 2012.<sup>10</sup> Such famous people as Maxut Zhumayev (a conqueror of mountain peaks), Sayasat Nurbek (ex-president of JSC "Center for International Programs"), etc. were the speakers. These activities had the declared purpose of bringing improvements to society.

In the thesis, I focus on two official associations (social networks) in Astana: the Astana Alumni Association (hereafter AAA) and the Association of Kazakhstan President's Bolashak International Scholarship Fellows (hereafter the Bolashak Association). While the Bolashak Association has operated for about fifteen years (from 2001), the AAA has more recent history having been established in 2010. I should state that while I do not focus exclusively on the Bolashak graduates, they were the main focus of the research.

The concept of social capital has been actively used in social research recently, though, the first scholarly use of it goes back to Alexis de Tocqueville, the nineteenth century political thinker, and to Hanifan who published his work in 1916. The concept of social capital has been developed more recently by many prominent scholars including Robert Putnam, James Coleman, Pierre Bourdieu and Mark Granovetter. Each of these authors contributed in different ways by considering the concept of social capital through distinct conceptual frameworks. Bourdieu in his theoretical chapter "Forms of Social Capital" published in 1983 defines social capital as "the aggregate of the actual or potential resources which are linked to possession of a durable network of more or less institutionalized relationships of mutual acquaintance and recognition..."<sup>11</sup> He emphasizes the importance of the social network for the existence of social capital and accumulation of social resources. In his work, Bourdieu rather considers the concept as something used for the sake of an individual than for social good. Interestingly, Putnam, by

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<sup>10</sup> "Theme: Living to 100%!" TEDxYesil. Accessed March 25, 2016. <https://www.ted.com/tedx/events/5390>.

<sup>11</sup> Pierre, Bourdieu, "The forms of capital," In *Handbook of Theory and Research for the Sociology of Education* ed. J. Richardson (New York, Greenwood, 1986), 51.

contrast, defines the concept by showing how it is useful for public welfare.<sup>12</sup> He looks at the larger context and considers the decline of membership in associational life in the US. Putnam also presented a large-scale study (published as a book in 1993, called *Making Democracy Work*) in which he demonstrated that the regions in Italy with low civic participation had poorer governments. Having considered social capital in similar framework, Coleman, by contrast, pays more attention to the norms of reciprocity among denser communities like families, ethnic groups, and neighborhoods.<sup>13</sup> It is also important to mention that Coleman also looks at the personal benefits to the individual (as Bourdieu does) along with benefits to public well-being. This is an important distinction between Putnam and Coleman, which is why I draw primarily on Coleman's theoretical framework in my analysis. In this thesis, I aim to find out what social resources are available for the members of the networks, how these resources are obtained and whether this is the only rationale for the membership in the alumni associations. While I reveal further below that the members can get a broad range of resources, such as information, trustworthy friends, career opportunities, etc., I also found out that the graduates have a strong sense of civic responsibility. So while the members of the network benefit from social resources, they are not primarily engaged in something self-interested but rather have the intention to contribute to the development of their society.

Since I focus on the people who graduated from foreign educational institutions, I also look at how their habitus might have changed. I do not present an exhaustive study but rather focus on some noteworthy changes that cause some clashes between the old and new habitus of

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<sup>12</sup> Robert D. Putnam, *Bowling Alone: The Collapse and Revival of American Community*. New York: Simon & Schuster, 2000.

<sup>13</sup> James S. Coleman, "Social Capital in the Creation of Human Capital." *American Journal of Sociology* 94 (1988): S95-S120.

the graduates. I refer to Bourdieu's interpretation of the concept which he explains in his two influential works, *Distinction* and *The Logic of Practice*. Habitus, according to him, is:

... systems of durable, transposable dispositions, structured structures predisposed to function as structuring structures, that is, as principles which generate and organize practices and representations that can be objectively adapted to their outcomes without presupposing a conscious aiming at ends or an express mastery of the operations necessary in order to attain them.<sup>14</sup>

According to Bourdieu, these transposable dispositions systemize the whole set of practices which combine to form a certain lifestyle. Since the life conditions can vary, they produce different generative schemes which predetermine a certain habitus.<sup>15</sup> Bourdieu argues that habitus organizes people's perceptions so that they reflect social classes.<sup>16</sup> This is quite interesting claim since he also argues that one's habitus can change in the course of life. At the same time, change in habitus may not mean moving across social classes. An individual may still situate in the same class but his perception on his own class can change. So I also aim to find out how the graduates reflect on the changes in their habitus that clash with old habitus as a result of studying and living abroad.

In addition, I am interested in how the graduates utilize their knowledge and skills at their workplace. The Bolashak International Scholarship Program puts forward a discourse which states that the graduates help to integrate innovations. In addition to the aforementioned studies about human capital in Kazakhstan, I offer a contribution to this research area since the previous research has not addressed this.

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<sup>14</sup> Pierre Bourdieu, *The Logic of Practice* (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 1990), 53.

<sup>15</sup> Pierre Bourdieu, *Distinction: A Social Critique of the Judgement of Taste* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1984), 170.

<sup>16</sup> *Ibid.*, 170.

### *Structure of the thesis*

There are three chapters in this thesis. The first chapter consists of three sections. The first one provides background information on the associations I focus on in my research. It provides the context by showing the nature of the work performed by the networks and how helpful they are in terms of public well-being. The next section presents the methodology of the research and points out the main details of the study. It presents the data-gathering methods, information about study participants, and the overall setting. Finally, the last part aims to find out what kinds of social resources the graduates can obtain via bonding social capital and show how helpful the resources are for them. It also suggests some new approaches to the application of the concept of social concept as developed in previous scholarship

The second chapter sheds light on the changes in the habitus of the graduates due to the experience of living and studying abroad. It focuses on the clashes between their new and old habitus. It is here where I refer to Bourdieu's explanation of the habitus and other scholarly works based on his analysis. It is important to mention that in order to identify what changes they underwent in their lifestyles I asked the graduates to reflect on the official rhetoric about them. Interestingly, while all of the graduates declined to see themselves as belonging to a special group, all of them agreed on the rhetoric and pointed out the differences in the lifestyles of the graduates. Of course, I also asked some direct questions on whether the graduates feel themselves to have acquired anything which changed their perspectives, values and everyday life (habits). The chapter also aims to reveal the reasons for bridging (according to Bourdieu's concept) among the members of the network. Since I demonstrate that social networks play an important role in performing civic activity, I argue that the graduates develop a feeling of social responsibility.

The last chapter analyzes the functional knowledge the graduates obtained with the help of their international education. It also looks at whether the graduates can use this knowledge at their workplaces to boost the country's economy as it is mentioned in the Bolashak International Scholarship Program website. I present three interesting cases, where the reader may see how and when the graduates are able to utilize their knowledge and skills. I specifically selected those graduates who work in governmental and semi-governmental organizations since I think that such organizations have the least accommodating conditions for integration of new ideas. So my aim is to identify the existing problems the graduates face and how these problems contradict the official mission of Bolashak International Scholarship. Therefore, at the end, I provide some discussion on the discrepancy between the realities that the graduates face and official statements about the program.

## **Chapter II Social Capital and Social Resources of Alumni Associations in Astana**

### *Introduction*

In this chapter, I provide some perspective into the associations I focus on. I refer to their official missions, projects the associations do, membership criteria and members, and my field observations. Doing that I lay out the contextual background within which the Bolashak Association and AAA operate. While the first part of the chapter is more descriptive, in the second part, I focus on the analysis of the empirical data that I collected during my fieldwork in the summer of 2015. The analysis of the interviews is presented with reference to theorists of social capital, including Pierre Bourdieu, James Coleman, Nan Lin, and Robert Putnam. In this chapter I focus on the types of social resources the members can obtain from their involvement in the associations, the ways that members gain access to these resources, and how they become useful. Thus I narrow down the discussion of the theory of social capital to social resources and their accumulation within the network. I come to the conclusion that the members of the associations get a variety of social resources beginning with information about professional opportunities and choices to a good chance of expanding business. I also find out that the members are well aware of the benefits that networking can provide and argue that the associations create socially workable platforms for their members to exchange social resources and benefit from them. At the end, I emphasize the importance of mutual recognition within social networks as a key to social resources.



*Bolashak Association and Astana Alumni Association: history, missions, projects, and membership*

The Bolashak Association or the Association of Fellows of Bolashak International Scholarship was created by Bolashak graduates in 2001. Therefore, the association's history is closely related to the Bolashak International Scholarship which, in turn, was initiated by the President of Kazakhstan, Nursultan Nazarbayev. The scholarship was designed as a solution to the outflow of the most educated people after the collapse of the Soviet Union. Its aim has been to increase the level of expertise among national cadres to elevate the state's economy and improve social and political systems. The winners of the scholarship have gotten a chance to develop their qualifications in internationally recognized universities all around the world. Since its creation, the program works on building a cohort of highly qualified experts ranging from engineers to doctors. Today there is a comparatively large group of people who are informally called as *Bolashakers*. This nickname probably appeared as a result of adding English suffix *-er* to the name of the program. The *Bolashakers* are portrayed as a point of national pride that already benefits the economy and will necessarily play an important role in elevating the country's economy to join the world's top thirty, which is the official state developmental goal. The number of the Bolashak International Scholarship recipients has reached close to 11,000 people today.

Since its creation in 2001, the Bolashak Association has served as a voice of the graduates of the scholarship. The association has also done a good job in ensuring that the graduates are remembered by both the society and authorities. The association regularly contributes to the graduates' image via various social projects. It is worth mentioning that the largest proportion of the members in the Bolashak Association is comprised of the Bolashak

holders and graduates. This is mainly due to the fact that, at the beginning, the association's primary goal was to address different social issues specific to the graduates only.

The Bolashak Association accepts every person who wishes to be a part of the social group. Every person has the possibility to join the network, regardless of which university and place from where the person has received their education. However, there is a special procedure to undergo, consisting of several stages, before one can officially be recognized as a member. The first stage involves submitting an application and recommendation letter from at least one member of the association. The second stage requires writing an essay in which a person has to address the following points: one's general understanding of what the association does, one's personal contribution, and the expected outcome from the membership. It is a seemingly complicated process of registration; however, from the manager of the association, Daulet, I learned that this is made to maintain the quality of the membership. So if a person gets through both stages, he/she is considered as a worthwhile person to accept.

In 2008, the association created the Expert Council whose task was to involve the graduates into conversations on the state's policy-making discussions. It also has been playing a significant role in implementing various projects such as helping orphanages,<sup>17</sup> and organizing forums and other projects for talented youth.<sup>18</sup> For instance, a series of events in 2015 was directed at helping the youth to start their own businesses, and included a competition called "StartUp Bolashak", the objective of which was to enhance the interest in business among Kazakhstani youth.<sup>19</sup> I participated in two events of this kind. From one of them I received a

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<sup>17</sup> "Fond 'Bolashak' podderzhal provedenie Sleta studentov-vypusnikov detskikh internatnykh organizatsii," Bolashak. Web. 27 Mar. 2016. <<http://bolashak.kz/ru/news/single/1157>>.

<sup>18</sup> "Final respublikanskogo konkursa 'Zhas sarapshy' sovsem skoro!" Bolashak. Web. 27 Sept. 2015. <<http://bolashak.kz/ru/news/single/1823>>.

<sup>19</sup> "Konkurs 'Startup Bolashak'," Bolashak. Web. 27 Sept. 2015. <<http://bolashak.kz/ru/news/single/1789>>.

certificate of participation. The event was a meeting of student organizations abroad<sup>20</sup> which involved a set of lectures from popular state officials and professional trainings delivered by highly qualified people. So along with me, more than two hundred people had a chance to receive professional support in the sphere of business. It is worth mentioning that I did not have to become a member of the association to participate in the trainings.

The association puts forward a mission that is quite consistent with what they do:

To combine fellows' efforts and experience, consolidate and increase activity of Kazakhstani youth for the benefit of sustainable development of the country and promote the creation of the strong Kazakhstan.<sup>21</sup>

The mission entails the development of social capital that aims to create a specific kind of community. The community is meant to become an “expert community” in different fields including economic, social and political spheres which can provide valuable and professional opinion. The association tries hard to mobilize the Kazakhstani youth from various domains such as education, business, leadership, etc. This can be seen from the projects they launch.

The association has its structure which consists of board, audit commission and secretariat. There are fifteen members of the board plus a chairman. All board members hold high positions in different influential organizations such as JSC Samruk Kazyna , JSC Baiterek, the Nur Otan Party, etc. It is worth mentioning that the majority of these people are the graduates of the Bolashak International Scholarship. The audit commission is comprised of five members while twelve people make up the secretariat. So the association is quite institutionalized. One should also know that the Bolashak Association is well funded by banks, national companies, and other financial institutions which help the association to implement its projects.

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<sup>20</sup> “IV Slet zarubezhnykh studencheskikh organizatsiĭ Kazakhstana,” Bolashak. Web. 27 Mar. 2016. <<http://bolashak.kz/ru/news/single/1773>>.

<sup>21</sup> “Mission.” *Bolashak*. Web. 20 Mar. 2015. <<http://bolashak.kz/en/pages/mission>>.

The Astana Alumni Association (the AAA) is another active group, having started its work in May 2010. The group was initiated by Muskie Program graduates<sup>22</sup> who got their education in US in a program funded by the US government. The AAA's areas of interest are education, social issues and healthcare. There are several goals they strive for, including: uniting US funded students across the country, promoting of civil activity, developing society, and promoting a "positive reputation of the US-government programs alumni in Kazakhstan."<sup>23</sup> The association's mission is as follows:

Contribution in the raise of living standards in our region by taking part in the development of civil society, sharing the knowledge, experience, by organizing and implementing socially valued events and projects.<sup>24</sup>

The group's self-regulation is based on a structure consisting of the General Assembly, Executive Council and regular meetings. Having its main function to oversee the work of Executive Council, the General Assembly takes place at least once a year. The Executive Council does a job related to social activities, elaborates projects, informs members, organizes the agenda, etc. The council has the following members: the president, two vice-presidents (one is for membership issues and the second for public relations), executive secretary and project supervisors.

According to the official website of the AAA, there are four projects in Astana: "Discussion club", "*Zhivi na sto*" ("Living to 100%"); "*Chitaem vmeste*" ("Reading together") and "*Soile kluby*" ("Speaking club"). "Reading together" or "*Chitaem vmeste*" can be interesting for those who love reading fiction or books in general. The members of this project decide on a book and then meet to talk about the content. As for "Discussion club," it is similar to the one

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<sup>22</sup> The Edmund Muskie Graduate Fellowship provides an opportunity to emerging leaders from Eurasia to obtain a Master's degree in the US. The fellows also have a chance to be exposed to American values via community service.

<sup>23</sup> "Nash Ustav," Assotsiatsiia Vypusnikov, Accessed April 11, 2015. <http://www.astana-alumni.kz/105310721096-10591089109010721074.html>.

<sup>24</sup> Ibid.

Bolashak Association organizes (“*Ashyk oi*”). However, out of all projects mentioned there are only few operating actively, namely, “*Soile kluby*” and “*Chitaem vmeste*”, which I visited myself. I did observations in the former and was impressed by the usefulness of the club.

Surprisingly, the AAA has no funding; it is purely a volunteer-based organization. The members rely on their social ties to realize their projects. For instance, if they need a place to organize an event, they use their social network to look for a person or organization who would agree to assist. In addition, in the AAA, it is more about initiative coming from below. The projects are mostly proposed by the members who identify the needs of the population and offer special projects.

The AAA has a less formal structure. There is a minimum formality of positions and rules and allocation of authority to participants is less than in the Bolashak Association. This means that the members are more or less equal in their positions, and thus, can reach each other more easily than in hierarchical networks. In addition, the AAA is much smaller than the Bolashak Association; hence, it is a more cohesive group. The Bolashak Association, by contrast, is a larger network whose members may not know each other.

Lastly, to become a member of the AAA, according to Danara, one of the leaders of the association, one has to start his own project or join another. This sounds simpler than in the Bolashak Association; however, it requires active participation from the members.

### *Methodology*

The development of social capital among the graduates of Bolashak program and alumni of other international programs is very important to study since the state declares that it has great expectations of these people. Such research can shed light on the opportunities the graduates have to become future elite of the country. For instance, the social ties they establish and the

social activities they are involved in can demonstrate the life chances they have for upward social mobility. In addition, such analysis can reveal some features of the graduates' identities. The active participation in the voluntary events, charities and other social events can be a sign of civic responsibility. I apply a qualitative approach in my study in order to investigate whether social capital can play the role of an instrument to facilitate certain actions and social responsibility. My research addresses the following research questions:

- What kind of social resources can the members of the associations obtain?
- To what extent are these resources useful for the graduates? Do these resources facilitate certain actions? If yes, how?
- What sort of a bridge can the networks serve between individuals? Or is it about bonding only?
- Do the members of the associations consider themselves as special social groups?
- Are there any changes in the lifestyles of the graduates which can cause clashes between old and new habitus?
- To what extent can the graduates use their knowledge and skills at the workplaces?

### *Setting*

The summer of 2015 was good time to start my fieldwork in the capital of Kazakhstan, Astana. Since Astana is famous for its cold weather, I tried to use warm part of the year as much as I could because I felt that the respondents would be more inclined to get out when it is warm. Meanwhile, I had to conduct more interviews later in the autumn and winter to obtain additional data.

I decided to do the ethnographic fieldwork in Astana because two alumni associations, the Bolashak Association and AAA, mainly operate in the capital. Thus, I was able to conduct

the interviews face-to-face and to participate in the clubs' activities and trainings. The interviews were done in a variety of places. For instance, a couple of times, I did interviews in the Keruen shopping mall, twice in each the headquarters of Nur Otan (the largest political party) and Nazarbayev University. In most cases, it was for the convenience of my respondents to decide where and when to hold the interview. As for the events I observed, for example, the speaking club "*Soile kluby*" usually takes place in a coffee house called "Shokoladnica" on the left bank of the city.

### *Participants*

The participants in my study are members of either of the associations and are those young people who traveled abroad for educational purposes. The majority are graduates and holders of the Bolashak International Scholarship. There are also interviewees who graduated by Muskie Program and one individual who self-financed his study abroad. The total number of interviews conducted is 18.

Out of 18, only four respondents went abroad without any prior working experience. Today all of the participants are employed full-time in Astana. Some of them are self-employed while others work for governmental and semi-governmental institutions. The majority are involved in a variety of volunteering events ranging from charity to conference organizing. All of them are involved in self-development processes, either into specific courses at learning centers or other types.

The age of the respondents ranges from 26 to 33. There are 11 male and seven female respondents. A majority of them are married with children.

I used Facebook as a tool to search for my respondents. The social media proved to be useful since it provides sufficient information to decide whether an individual is relevant for the

study or not. For instance, I could trace the potential respondents' regular participation at different volunteering events and their connection to the social networks. The snowballing method of getting additional participants was effective as well. Since I focused on the social networks, it was implied that the research participants should know many other people.

### *Research Methods*

Interviews and observations are two kinds of data gathering methods applied in this study. Interviews were used as research method in order to collect qualitative data. I asked respondents to answer open-ended questions allowing them to provide more extended replies. The interviews were divided into three parts. The first part was about educational experience. I asked the respondents to reflect on the reasons why they went abroad to study, why they chose the specific program and what they got in terms of knowledge and skills. The second part focused on participation in the social networks. This part aimed to explore the rationale for participation, benefits for the respondents and usefulness for society. The last phase of the study focused on whether the respondents can apply their knowledge at work and to what extent they have to conform. The interviews were arranged in advance and for the sake of convenience of the interviewees, they chose the venue. Each interview was tape-recorded and lasted from 18 to 40 minutes. All of the research participants gave their consent to record their answers. Pseudonyms are used to keep anonymity of the interviewees.

Observations were done via participation in clubs and networks' events. There are some clubs, as I have mentioned above, where people meet each week and others only monthly, so I had the opportunity to participate in a couple of them. I chose the role of participant observer and focused on my respondents. It was interesting to see how certain respondents bond and bridge and what it can tell about them. In particular, I looked for answers to the following questions:



Who do they rely on to organize events? How are the events useful for bridging/bonding purposes? This research method was useful to see what unites the respondents together and why they want to connect themselves to other social groups.

### *Data*

The data were collected and saved on two electronic devices (tape recorder and computer) and Google Drive. The transcripts of the interviews were done carefully, recording full answers of each respondent. The answers of the participants were categorized according to the questions and themes. The data were analyzed by applying an interpretive method. One possible limitation of the data is the small number of interviews, limiting the ability to make representative categorizations. However, some of the issues investigated were quite well explored. For instance, the kinds of social resources the members of the networks can acquire are thoroughly analyzed and results are provided.

### *Theory and ethnographic evidence: social resources of the social networks*

The French social scientist, Pierre Bourdieu in his theoretical chapter “Forms of Social Capital” published in 1986 (English translation) defines social capital as “the aggregate of the actual or potential resources which are linked to possession of a durable network of more or less institutionalized relationships of mutual acquaintance and recognition...”<sup>25</sup> Bourdieu emphasizes at least three major aspects that are involved: 1) collection of resources; 2) the place (or space) those resources are stored within; and 3) the key to those resources. It is necessary to mention that I adhere to this definition (which is similar to those of other scholars) in my analysis below.

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<sup>25</sup> Pierre, Bourdieu, “The forms of capital,” In *Handbook of Theory and Research for the Sociology of Education* ed. J. Richardson (New York, Greenwood, 1986), 51.

What kinds of resources are meant by Bourdieu? He briefly touches upon a couple of types such as material and symbolic. For instance, a member of a certain social group can acquire a set of services or can get associated “with a rare, prestigious group” obtaining symbolic resources.<sup>26</sup> Bourdieu explicitly notes that the resources can take multiple of forms.

One of my first respondents, Aibar, noted potential material importance of the membership in the Bolashak Association. Aibar is a Bolashak graduate and a personal coach. He left his full-time job to develop himself in coaching. Aibar has entered the association at the beginning of 2015 having concrete reasons. In answer to the question why he decided to become a member of the association he said: “For any professional coach, the association is a good audience.” He clearly sees the potential to cooperate with the association in order to develop his training courses and get more financial benefits in the future. Interestingly, in the events organized by Aibar, the emblem of the Bolashak Association is always used as a link to the social group. At the same time, it should be mentioned that these events are organized with support from the Bolashak Association.

According to Bourdieu, social capital is located and circulated within certain networks which can be a family, a school or other social groups and places, and the members of such a group may have a common name,<sup>27</sup> as in the case of the Bolashak Association or the AAA. Bourdieu emphasizes the importance of the network for the resources to be accumulated, noting further that:

the network of relationships is the product of investment strategies, individual or collective, consciously or unconsciously aimed at establishing or reproducing social relationships that are directly usable in the short or long term, i.e., at transforming contingent relations, such as those of neighbourhood, the workplace or even kinship, into relationships that are at once necessary and elective, implying durable obligations

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<sup>26</sup> Pierre, Bourdieu, “The forms of capital,” In *Handbook of Theory and Research for the Sociology of Education* ed. J. Richardson (New York, Greenwood, 1986), 52.

<sup>27</sup> *Ibid.*, 51.

subjectively felt (feelings of gratitude, respect, friendship, etc.) or institutionally guaranteed.<sup>28</sup>

Bourdieu demonstrates the importance of the social ties within one's network highlighting their usability and purposefulness. Nevertheless, Bourdieu views social capital as something which is used more for the sake of the individual rather than social good. For instance, Bourdieu claims that capital is something an individual gains by the means of his/her labor and then is able to use to obtain profit. Capital, including social capital, is what makes life chances not equal and the uneven distribution of it reflects the social structure of the world.<sup>29</sup>

Notably, Nan Lin presents a definition of social capital which is, in principle, consistent with other theorists, including Bourdieu. Lin claims that social capital is an "investment in social relations with expected returns in the marketplace."<sup>30</sup> The expected returns are explicated "as resources embedded in a social structure that are accessed and/or mobilized in purposive actions."<sup>31</sup> So this looks very similar to Bourdieu's use of the concept.

Unlike Bourdieu, Lin goes a little further in defining social resources. Lin discusses an important issue related to "value assignment".<sup>32</sup> As he argues, the importance of social resources may change as time passes by depending on "its scarcity relative to the demand or expectations."<sup>33</sup> Thus, unlike such things as money or credentials, some other goods may become valuable depending on time and place. Therefore, it is interesting what social resources are valued attributes for the members of the networks.

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<sup>28</sup> Pierre, Bourdieu, "The forms of capital," In *Handbook of Theory and Research for the Sociology of Education* ed. J. Richardson (New York, Greenwood, 1986), 52.

<sup>29</sup> Ibid., 46.

<sup>30</sup> Nan Lin, *Social Capital: A Theory of Social Structure and Action* (Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 2001), 3.

<sup>31</sup> Ibid., 29.

<sup>32</sup> Ibid., 30.

<sup>33</sup> Ibid.

One of the ways Lin explains why social capital works is in terms of information as a social resource (or a valued good) in his analysis. For instance, useful information can be difficult to access accessed, especially if such information is “located in certain strategic locations and/or hierarchical positions.”<sup>34</sup> However, information can be easily obtained via social networks in the associations, clubs, voluntary projects, for example. So if an individual has the appropriate social ties, he/she may have better access to useful information about certain “opportunities and choices”<sup>35</sup> which may range from job openings to interesting events.

Bibigul, a Bolashak graduate who completed her MA in Economics in the UK, says that she attends the meetings organized by the Bolashak Association in order to stay up-to-date. She points out the value of the seminars and trainings organized by the Bolashak Association for her professional development. It should be noted that I met Bibigul in August 2015 at a workshop on how to promote business in social media such as Facebook and Instagram. This workshop was organized by the Bolashak Association in the framework of the 3<sup>rd</sup> Meeting of Kazakhstani Students’ Associations Abroad. Bibigul is an economist and her participation in seminars like the one organized in August 2015 seems to be very important for her. The Bolashak Association clearly plays the role of a useful source of new ideas and valuable information in Bibigul’s case. It is worth mentioning that the seminars and the trainings organized by the Bolashak Association were given by successful and quite famous people either from Kazakhstan or abroad. In addition, one can usually meet people holding high governmental position at such meetings. Seibert et al. found out that the value of social capital may be different depending on the nature of social ties. “Consistent with traditional mentoring research, higher-level contacts provided more career

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<sup>34</sup> Nan Lin, *Social Capital: A Theory of Social Structure and Action* (Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 2001), 20.

<sup>35</sup> *Ibid.*, 3.

sponsorship than did those across functions.”<sup>36</sup> The high hierarchical arrangement of social ties benefits more in getting necessary social resources for career success. I do not argue that this is the case in Bibigul’s situation, though it is more likely that participation in such events can have a positive impact on her career.

Granovetter looked at how weak social ties within the network can be helpful in certain circumstances. He elaborates his argument from the proposition that “Ego” (an individual) having close friends has a link to his friends’ close friends. This set of acquaintances or “weak ties”, as Granovetter argues, can play the role of a “bridge” between several different groups of friends.<sup>37</sup> So he claims that people with a small number of “weak ties” will have access to information that is limited in its amount and diversity. This means that they may be restricted from receiving new ideas, job opportunities, current fashions, etc. So the structural consideration of social networks gives a clearer picture on how social capital can play a significant role via “weak ties”.

In contrast to Bourdieu, Robert Putnam views the development of social capital as a means to enhance the quality of public life. In particular, civic engagement, according to him, assists in reducing crime rates, increasing quality of education, and enhancing efficiency of governance.<sup>38</sup> Putnam conducted a 20-year study of the regional governments in Italy and came to conclusion that the regions where civic engagement is higher, the governments work more effectively. “Voter turnout, newspaper readership, membership in choral societies and football clubs — these were the hallmarks of the successful regions.”<sup>39</sup> In addition, some norms

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<sup>36</sup> S. E. Seibert, M. L. Kraimer, and R. C. Liden. “A Social Capital Theory Of Career Success,” *Academy of Management Journal* 44, no. 2 (April 2001): 232.

<sup>37</sup> Mark Granovetter, “The Strength of Weak Ties: A Network Theory Revisited,” *Sociological Theory* 1 (1983): 202.

<sup>38</sup> Robert D. Putnam, “Bowling Alone: America’s Declining Social Capital,” *Culture and Politics* (2000): 2.

<sup>39</sup> *Ibid.*, 2.

established in a society and close interaction of the members of the network can result into self-identification with the social group and developing of a “we” perception rather than just “I”. Similar to physical and human capital, social capital can be productive, too. Social trust and mutual recognition in the social organizations, for instance, lead to “cooperation for mutual benefit.”<sup>40</sup>

In comparison to the aforementioned authors (in particular, Bourdieu and Putnam), James S. Coleman tries to mediate between the economic and sociological explanations of social action. While economic description claims that the action is directed by pure self-interest to increase one’s benefit, the sociological explanation describes the action as confined and dictated by social norms in the society.<sup>41</sup> Coleman uses social capital as a conceptual tool in his theoretical enterprise which claims that the purposive action operating within certain social context does not only aim to pursue self-interest but also contributes to “the development of social organization.”<sup>42</sup> This theoretical framework allows considering benefits of social capital for both an individual and the society. I would emphasize that this framework is more relevant to my research and I use it as the basis of my analysis below and in the next chapter.

Coleman’s theoretical framework can offer a good explanation of Danara’s case. Danara, who pursued her MA degree through the Muskie Program, makes a very interesting point about how communicating with different kinds of people can open doors to new opportunities and choices. When I asked what the association gave to her that she values the most, she said that it was “networking”, and continued: “It is all about communications. It is always like that. Everything happens through the interaction of people.” By organizing different events such as,

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<sup>40</sup> Robert D. Putnam, “Bowling Alone: America’s Declining Social Capital,” *Culture and Politics* (2000): 2.

<sup>41</sup> James S. Coleman, “Social Capital in the Creation of Human Capital,” *American Journal of Sociology* 94 (1988): S95.

<sup>42</sup> *Ibid.*, S96.

for instance, TEDx and a conference called “Building Civil Society”, Danara could expand her social network and launch her own project called “*Zhivi na sto*” (“Live to 100%”). This project aimed to organize meetings with people of different occupations depending on the topic. For instance, if the topic was about food, they invited a cook who shared his/her experience in terms of what it means to live at 100 percent in relation to food. These projects were purely voluntary and aimed to contribute to public welfare.

Now Danara started a new social online project related to child-rearing. This project was started to help young mothers in solving their issues connected to safe upbringing of children. Danara’s social ties assist very much in realization of the project since now she can consult many people of different occupations as cooks, doctors, psychologists, and so on. This can be very helpful because she can offer more professional help in terms of how to treat a child if he/she misbehaves, for example. Her new project is purely social; however, it may potentially result in a good project that can bring some material benefit.

### *Mutual recognition and social capital*

Notably, Bourdieu explicitly claims that even in the case of “institutionalized” forms of networks such as families, constant reinforcement “of lasting, useful relationships” is necessary to obtain resources.<sup>43</sup> What does constant reinforcement mean? How does it happen? This leads to the third point mentioned in the definition given by Bourdieu, namely “mutual recognition.”<sup>44</sup> So to be mutually accepted one needs to reproduce the relationships repeatedly. Bourdieu

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<sup>43</sup> Pierre, Bourdieu, “The forms of capital,” In *Handbook of Theory and Research for the Sociology of Education* ed. J. Richardson (New York, Greenwood, 1986), 52.

<sup>44</sup> *Ibid.*, 51.

mentions “exchange of gifts, words...” as examples of how mutual recognition can be long-lasting.<sup>45</sup>

Coleman, considering social capital as providing social benefits, sheds light on mutual recognition and acceptance by a set of practical examples. Coleman gives the example of the process of examining diamonds, involving a high risk of having precious stones replaced by fake ones, which shows how social capital in the form of trust, mutual recognition, and fear of being excluded act as a guarantee that the members of one ethnic group will not be cheated by one another. In explaining his concept of social capital, Coleman focuses more on normative rules or behavior in a society, implicitly showing the context that makes social interactions possible.

What is necessary for mutual recognition in the associations? To be mutually recognized or accepted within the AAA, an individual needs to be constantly involved into the activities of the association. Launching your own social project is highly appreciated and respected. Joining the other projects is also supported. Danara says that “to be a member of AAA, one just needs to stay regularly involved.” And this makes sense since the association is voluntary and regular participation by the members is needed. From my other respondent, I learned that social trust and mutual support can also be valued goods obtained via AAA’s network, thus leading to mutual recognition. So it is from the interview with Kairat that I found out that the social resources he obtains are true friends. “I met true friends in the association [who are trustworthy]. You know, those people who are not really reliable, do not stay for a long time in the network. They just come once or twice, take pictures, post them and never come back again.” Kairat differentiates sharply between those who are constantly involved and those who come occasionally. He

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<sup>45</sup> Pierre, Bourdieu, “The forms of capital,” In *Handbook of Theory and Research for the Sociology of Education* ed. J. Richardson (New York, Greenwood, 1986), 52.



thereby differentiates who can be his friend and who cannot; the network thus provides useful social resources in the form of reliable and trustworthy friends.

By contrast, to be a member of the Bolashak Association, one does not have to participate in the organization of events. This can be linked to the fact that the Bolashak network has a paid secretary which performs quite well. So, in the Bolashak Association, it is enough for a person to be officially a member of the network to participate in meetings, elections, etc. One of the examples is Nurdaulet, who is not involved in any voluntary activities of the Bolashak Association. However, he attends the meetings annually for the purpose of staying up-to-date on any changes and potential opportunities. For him, the association plays the role of a link to networking opportunities.

### *Bonding Social Capital*

It should be noted that those who are directly involved in the organization of events or leading clubs obtain more resources than those who just come to these events. Those who actively participate in the lives of the associations get more and different social resources than those who are just passive members. For instance, as I have mentioned, there are members who initiate and lead projects or organize events and those who just attend those events, like Bibigul, for example. So those members, who are actively involved into organization of the events, obtain such substantial resources which help in the realizations of their ideas into projects. And these projects, being social in nature, can bring some material profit in the future. Active members obtain not only such resources as information (from workshops) but also social ties with people of high hierarchical positions who can contribute to this or that initiative. The active members also get useful experience in managing projects which includes a variety of skills and knowledge. Therefore, the active members obtain more diverse social resources in comparison

to passive members. This is evident in the case of Esen who was not just a passive member but has been very active since the beginning of the AAA's activity when it did not include non-Bolashak graduates yet. Esen after coming back to Kazakhstan (from the US) decided to stay in Astana. Since he knew a few people in Astana, he decided to get into the activity of AAA. Sometime later he was able to get a good job at one of the best universities in Kazakhstan and even got an apartment from it. Nevertheless, he was still involved in the AAA's activity and even started his own project which aimed to provide public meetings with psychologists to anyone who wishes. This helped him to get truly useful social ties which played a positive role in launching a social business project. Now, he is also one of the chief coordinators in "Best for Kids" social fund which is a product of the AAA, but is operating independently from it now.

This brief account from of Esen's experience demonstrates the effects of bonding which certainly had a positive influence on him to help achieve his goals. Bonding social capital connects people who are similar in some key respect, which can be economic level, political interests, educational attainment (as in the study's case), etc. For instance, a group of politicians may unite into a certain club which can accept only people of the same political orientation. Interestingly, Putnam describes bonding social capital as "inward looking [networks that] tend to reinforce exclusive identities and homogeneous groups."<sup>46</sup> At the same time, Putnam does not claim that formation of bonding social capital is bad.<sup>47</sup> Other social scientists do ascribe negative connotations to bonding social capital. As Callois and Aubert argue:

Bonding social capital can solve agency and collective agency problems, but also fosters redundancy of information, low incentives, collusion and discrimination. Conversely,

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<sup>46</sup> Robert D. Putnam, *Bowling Alone: The Collapse and Revival of American Community* (New York: Simon & Schuster, 2000), 22.

<sup>47</sup> Robert D. Putnam, "Introduction," in *Democracies in Flux: The Evolution of Social Capital in Contemporary Society*, ed. Robert Putnam (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2002), 11.

bridging social capital is essential for bringing new ideas and opportunities, but the potential resources it carries are much less reliable.<sup>48</sup>

Thus, Callois and Aubert define the positive as well as negative sides of both dimensions of social capital. My own research likewise supports this approach, since bonding does play a good role in solving certain problems of the graduates. While I talk about bridging in the next chapter, these researchers explicitly point out that bonding social capital is more reliable to facilitate actions. Bonding is observed to take place when the graduates would like to get social resources to facilitate their actions. The graduates are aware of the benefits they can derive from the membership in the network of people like them. The purposes of bonding can range from organizing public events to support developing your own business. For instance, Aisha, who was one the chief organizers of TEDx in Astana, in response to the question of why she joined the AAA but not Zhas Otan or Alliance of Kazakhstani Students, responded, “because they could help me.” Of course, it could be that this is not the only reason. Nevertheless, the graduates’ ability to pursue their professional objectives played an important role. From the observations I made by participating in the events and clubs, I can confirm that the events are well organized. The other members of the AAA were a good social resource for Aisha. Another example is the case of Miras, a Bolashak graduate, who purposefully joined the Bolashak Association upon the graduation since he knew that he can benefit from it someday. Miras had worked in the organizing committee of one of the very important sport events in Asia, and when it was over, he had to look for other job opportunities. So the social resource that Miras was able to derive from being a member of the network was a job that he learned about via an announcement sent by the Bolashak Association to its members.

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<sup>48</sup> Jean-Marc Callois and Francis Aubert, “Towards Indicators of Social Capital for Regional Development Issues: The Case of French Rural Areas,” *Regional Studies Regional Stud. CRES* 41, no. 6 (2007): 811.

Bonding also takes place within narrower circles. For instance, Nurdaulet, an MSc in Educational Leadership, constantly keeps in touch with those graduates who used to study with him in the same university in similar disciplines. He and another two graduates used to spend a lot of time together in the UK exploring local communities and educational experiences. They saw positive sides of the Western communities in terms of voluntary activities and thought to bring back to Kazakhstan some of these practices, such as giving free lessons to village children. After they came back to Kazakhstan, they continued to work in the same sphere and organization as they did before. Nurdaulet says that this connection to his friends helps them to cooperate and exchange ideas since they work in one field. The experience and knowledge they could get abroad can be easily integrated into Kazakhstani secondary education because they can well understand each other and local issues in Kazakhstan.

Focusing on how the graduates bond to obtain social resources will certainly not give a full picture. Nevertheless, it should be mentioned that the graduates more bond, though this happens rather unconsciously. Shared identities also play an important role in bonding graduates together. And the next chapter is about this important topic.

### *Conclusion*

I focus on two alumni associations which operate mainly in Astana. The activities of the networks unite graduates and aim to utilize their potential for promoting public well-being. At the same time, social interaction within social networks created by the means of clubs and social projects provide some personal benefits for the groups' members. I have sought to identify what these incentives are and how they are obtained. According to the members of the associations, the networks can help to get useful information and social ties. They facilitate the members' actions whether in obtaining material benefit or social support. I also attempted to show that the

networks require constant investment or reinforcement of relationships, whether it is through participating in the events or leading social projects. Mutual recognition plays an important role in ensuring the flow of resources among the participants of the interaction. This recognition is sustained by living a similar lifestyle or adhering to certain norms which are generated by their habitus. I develop further this topic in the next chapter.

### **Chapter III New habitus and bridging social capital**

#### *Introduction*

In this chapter I focus on kinds of improvements Bolashak graduates would like to see in their society and what they do to bring these about. By applying the concepts of habitus and social capital, in particular bridging social capital, I consider the development of behaviors and lifestyles which aim to contribute to the betterment of society in Kazakhstan. The Bolashak graduates and other international alumni are regularly involved into various bridging activities which are intended to bring about changes and improvements. Besides the direct socializing, some graduates use Facebook as a tool to exert some influence on their online friends. Almost each graduate has an account and a long list of friends with different backgrounds. I argue that through bridging the graduates enact social responsibility which is a part of the graduates' identity. In addition, I provide an analysis of how the graduates make distinctions between themselves and those who do not have the experience of studying and living abroad. I also claim that the educational experience abroad generated certain practices in the lifestyles of the members of the networks that they would like to integrate into the larger society in Kazakhstan making use of bridging social capital. While the graduates deny that they belong to any "special" group of people who can "save the world", it is striking how they attribute elite characteristics to members of their group, and they agree with the elevated official rhetoric about the Bolashak graduates which I outline in the chapter below. Interestingly, the graduates associate their distinctiveness with education abroad. Thus, this experience is important to consider, as according to Bourdieu, "the different fractions of dominant class distinguish themselves precisely through that which makes them members of the class as a whole, namely the type of capital which is the source of their privilege and the different manners of asserting their

distinction which are linked to it.”<sup>49</sup> In the cases I present below I am looking for what features the Bolashak graduates exhibit, how they can be manifested in their lifestyles and how bridging social networks help them communicate new ideas and opportunities. Before I delve into the theory and ethnographic evidence, I provide an account of what is said about Bolashak graduates by the President and by the official media. Afterwards, I look at the ethnographic cases and explain them by reference to theory.

*“Savers of the world”*

The Bolashak International Scholarship has helped more than 11,000 Kazakhstani citizens acquire their qualifications in foreign educational institutions.<sup>50</sup> This number is not large and the state plans to continue sending people abroad despite the downturn in the Kazakh economy, though after introducing a modernized application process.<sup>51</sup> The large spending is supported by the official rhetoric of state leadership figures such as the President, the State Press Secretary, the Minister of Education and others. The official discourse tends to put great hopes on the outcomes which are expected from the program.

The graduates are frequently represented as successful and knowledgeable people who have the ability to improve the state of affairs in the country. At a forum with the graduates, the President emphasized the role of those who glorify the country by their successes.<sup>52</sup> He also

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<sup>49</sup> Pierre Bourdieu, *Distinction: A Social Critique of the Judgement of Taste*, (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1984), 258.

<sup>50</sup> “Istoriia programmy,” AO “TSentr mezhdunarodnyx program” - Glavnaia, Accessed September 17, 2015. <http://www.bolashak.gov.kz/ru/o-stipendii/istoriya-razvitiya.html>.

<sup>51</sup> Valerii Surganov, “Bolashak uzhestochit otbor i sdelat upor na xoziaistvennikov,” *Delovoi portal Kapital.kz*. August 17, 2015. Accessed October 21, 2015. <https://kapital.kz/economic/42817/bolashak-uzhestochit-otbor-i-sdelat-upor-na-hozyajstvennikov.html>.

<sup>52</sup> “Uchastie v Forume molodezhi ‘S Liderom natsii – k novym pobedam!’,” Ofitsial’nyi sait prezidenta respubliki Kazakhstan, April 10, 2015. Accessed December 13, 2015. [http://www.akorda.kz/ru/events/astana\\_kazakhstan/participation\\_in\\_events/uchastie-v-forume-molodezhi-s-liderom-nacii-k-novym-pobedam](http://www.akorda.kz/ru/events/astana_kazakhstan/participation_in_events/uchastie-v-forume-molodezhi-s-liderom-nacii-k-novym-pobedam).

pointed out the knowledge the graduates have and its importance to the development of Kazakhstan's industrial sector. The speeches are often accompanied by presenting figures about how many graduates there are and where they work.<sup>53</sup> The decision to start the scholarship is referred to as fateful<sup>54</sup> and Aslan Sarinzhapov, the recent Minister of Education, pointed out that the educational policy of the state will produce large benefits in the form of “effective managers, scientists and inventors.”<sup>55</sup>

Nursultan Nazarbayev mentions the graduates very often. Moreover, he recently appointed a Bolashak graduate, Baurzhan Baibek, as a mayor of Almaty, the biggest city in Kazakhstan.<sup>56</sup> The wave of this kind of appointments did not end with Baibek but has included some others. For instance, the appointment of the mayor of Shymkent, previously the head of the Almaty 2017 Winter Universiade Organizing Directorate, and many others who fill key positions today. Nazarbayev even suggests that every mayor has a Bolashak graduate deputy.<sup>57</sup> This suggestion is based on the assumption that the Bolashak graduates who specialized in industrial sphere can make great inputs to the industrialization of the regions. Recently, Kuandyk Bishimbayev, the head of national holding Baiterek was put forward by the Nur Otan Party as a

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<sup>53</sup> “Nazarbaev: ‘Bolashak’ dal vozmozhnost’ detiam bezrabortnykh i pensionerov uchit’sia za granitsej,” *NUR.KZ*, November 23, 2013. Accessed March 17, 2016. <http://www.nur.kz/292562-nazarbaev-bolashak-dal-vozmozhnost-detyam-bezrabortnyh-i-pensionerov-uchitsya-za-graniczej.html>.

<sup>54</sup> “N.Nazarbaev pozdravil bolashakovtsev s 20-letiem Mezhdunarodnoj programmy ‘Bolashak’,” *Zakon.kz*, November 29, 2013. Accessed December 17, 2015. <http://www.zakon.kz/4589129-n.nazarbaev-pozdravil-bolashakovcev-s.html>.

<sup>55</sup> “‘Bolashak’ - za uverennoe budushchee,” *Obshchestvenno-politicheskaia gazeta ‘Vremia’*, April 23, 2015. Accessed February 17, 2016. <http://www.time.kz/articles/territory/2015/04/23/bolashak-za-uverennoe-budushee>

<sup>56</sup> “Nazarbaev prokomentiroval naznacheniiu Baibeka i Esimova,” *NUR.KZ*, August 9, 2015. Accessed February 17, 2016. <http://www.nur.kz/846878-nazarbaev-prokomentiroval-naznachen.html>.

<sup>57</sup> “U akimov poiaviatsia zamestiteli-bolashkovtsy, spetsializiruiushchiesia na industrializatsii — Nazarbaev,” AO “Tsentr mezhdunarodnyx program,” January 27, 2012. Accessed January 17, 2016. <http://www.bolashak.gov.kz/en/novosti/124-u-akimov-poyavyatsya-zamestiteli-bolashkovtsy-spetsializiruyushchiesya-na-industrializatsii-nazarbaev.html>.



candidate for the Mazhilis (the lower house in parliament of Kazakhstan).<sup>58</sup> In addition, the Bolashak graduates are mentioned to be those people who should comprise the main part of “National Movement - 2050” which aims to implement the ideas of the President’s “Kazakhstan - 2050” strategy.<sup>59</sup> One of the social activists, Syrym Abdrakhmanov says: “... the naked eye can see that the President will rely on ‘bolashakovsev’...”<sup>60</sup>

The media portrays them as already successfully contributing to a variety of social and economic spheres. One of the examples is the Bolashak Association’s activeness in launching the projects which aim to solve social issues. For instance, it has been involved in the translation of world-renowned American movies like “Star Wars”, “Cars 2”, and “Men in Black 3” into Kazakh language.<sup>61</sup> The association tries to contribute to the development of Kazakh language and enrich media content with current blockbusters in Kazakh language. It is necessary to mention that such movies used to be available in Russian translation only while Kazakh language is important for the national project of building Kazakh identity. The availability of more entertainment media content in Kazakh makes the language looks more attractive and easier to learned. Of course, there are also other projects which focus on charity and attract large sum of money. The Bolashak graduates are also referred to as patriotic, progressive, and reliable people who support the current political orientation of Kazakhstan.<sup>62</sup>

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<sup>58</sup> “Polnyĭ spisok kandidatov v deputaty Mazhilisa Parlamenta RK ot partii ‘Nur Otan’,” *Zakon.kz*, Web. 27 Mar. 2016. <<http://www.zakon.kz/4771932-polnyjj-spisok-kandidatov-v-deputaty.html>>.

<sup>59</sup> Īaroslav Krasienko, “Programmu ‘Kazakhstan-2050’ budet vypolnĭat’ novoe obshchenatsional’noe dvizhenie – v nego voĭdut i bolashakovtsy | Novosti | KTK,” *Ktk.kz*, November 29, 2013. Accessed February 10, 2016. <http://www.ktk.kz/ru/news/video/2013/11/29/25551>.

<sup>60</sup> “S. Abdrakhmanov: ‘Kogda k vlasti pridut bolashakovtsy?’” *NewTimes*, April 13, 2015. Accessed February 17, 2016. <http://newtimes.kz/eshche/mneniya/item/13488-s-abdrakhmanov-kogda-k-vlasti-pridut-bolashakovtsy>.

<sup>61</sup> “Shest’ fil’mov produblirrovany na kazakhskĭĭ ĭazyk za 2 goda,” *Tengrinews.kz*. December 27, 2013. Accessed January 15, 2016. <http://tengrinews.kz/cinema/shest-filmov-produblirrovanyi-na-kazahskiy-yazyik-za-2-goda-247989/>.

<sup>62</sup> Vadim Makarov, “Bolashakovtsy prizvali molodezh’ strany podderzhat’ ĭnĭtsiativu ANK po vyboram Prezidenta,” *Kazakhstanskaĭa Pravda*, Accessed February 17, 2016.

*Habitus: new and old habitus*

The concept of habitus is one of the most interesting notions elaborated by Bourdieu. He defines it as

... systems of durable, transposable dispositions, structured structures predisposed to function as structuring structures, that is, as principles which generate and organize practices and representations that can be objectively adapted to their outcomes without presupposing a conscious aiming at ends or an express mastery of the operations necessary in order to attain them.<sup>63</sup>

According to Bourdieu, habitus is a product of history — i.e., of a certain set of living conditions. He calls habitus as a “present past”<sup>64</sup> which restricts an individual’s practices to some extent. For instance, Bourdieu claims that the individual is free to produce thoughts and practices, however only those which are immanent to a particular set of conditions.<sup>65</sup> Thus, the most unpredictable actions or practices are excluded.

It is important to reiterate that individual habitus is changeable throughout one’s life. The habitus can generate new principles based on old ones.<sup>66</sup> There are a plethora of studies which focus on class mobility of the youth, and in particular, of students. One such study by Lee and Kramer demonstrates that living in another place produces new predispositions. The study does not, however, demonstrate that the students stopped being identified as belonging to the working class, but rather that their perspective on their class changes over time.<sup>67</sup> Lee and Kramer focus on the students studying in elite universities where the change in habitus tends to happen more. They presuppose that having similar a habitus makes it easier to establish social ties. They found out that their respondents, after spending quite a long time in elite campuses, increasingly felt

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<sup>63</sup> Pierre Bourdieu, *The Logic of Practice* (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 1990), 53.

<sup>64</sup> *Ibid.*, 54.

<sup>65</sup> *Ibid.*, 55.

<sup>66</sup> *Ibid.*, 60.

<sup>67</sup> E. M. Lee and R. Kramer, “Out with the Old, In with the New? Habitus and Social Mobility at Selective Colleges,” *Sociology of Education* 86, no. 1 (2013): 21.

alienated in their home places (feeling as outsiders).<sup>68</sup> Surprisingly, these respondents even report to use “interaction management strategies to navigate their relationships with parents, siblings, and high school friends” back home.<sup>69</sup> Such cases point to the idea that living in certain social conditionings produces a set of dispositions which transform one’s previous habitus to the extent that it hinders understanding between people with differing habitus.

Such a situation can be observed in Esen’s case. Esen, after being employed in one of Kazakhstan’s more prestigious universities, left the job to become involved into social entrepreneurship. The project he administers does not bring any profit so far, so the job is more like volunteering. Even before his employment in the university and during that time, he never stopped volunteering. So the most interesting is what Esen says about perceptions of others regarding the social practice of volunteering. Esen says that: “My friends back in my hometown do not understand me. They do not understand how a person can do something for free.” Esen refers to his experience of living and studying abroad and claims that it helps to broaden horizons and to understand some things much deeper. So this experience helped him to understand the benefits of volunteering to the society.

Another research participant, Danara, also engages in volunteering. While studying for her MA in the Muskie Program (funded by American taxpayers) Danara had to engage in volunteering as a requirement of the program: she had to work in some social organization for a certain amount of hours without any payment. So the Muskie Fellowship Program offered her to choose among several public organizations. Her choice was to perform social work at a women’s support center, where she ultimately worked for more hours than she was required to. Danara

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<sup>68</sup> E. M. Lee and R. Kramer, “Out with the Old, In with the New? Habitus and Social Mobility at Selective Colleges,” *Sociology of Education* 86, no. 1 (2013): 23..

<sup>69</sup> *Ibid.*, 30.

reports feeling so involved that she wanted to do additional hours. Upon return to Kazakhstan, Danara decided to devote herself to volunteering in Kazakhstan, too.

It should be mentioned that misunderstanding and clashes between habitus are not limited to the case of graduates who engage in volunteering. Kairat, who studied social sciences in one of the European countries, states strongly what he dislikes the most in the social surrounding back in Kazakhstan. Even if he claims that his judgments are not based on his experience abroad, he frequently makes comparisons with the country he lived and studied in. One example he gives involves an elderly couple who did not clean up the lift right away after they moved took out an old their refrigerator using it. They simply did not have enough time to go in apartment and get cleaning equipment before Kairat took the lift. So before Kairat reached the first floor, the couple had run down to meet him there. They apologized that Kairat had to use dirty lift because of them. Even if they pay for cleaning, what amazed Kairat was that they still felt obliged to clean up after themselves. And such behavior cannot be observed back in Kazakhstan, as he says. Instead, Kairat says that Kazakh people would assert that they pay for the cleaning and so there is no need to clean it oneself.

Another example he gives is connected to the queue to get a place at a state kindergarten in Astana. Kairat strongly dislikes how people organize themselves in the queue. For instance, when he wanted to take a place in the queue, it was chaotic and in fact, there was no queue. He also mentions how the state institutions close their eyes to such disorder because it is easier for them to do corrupt deals when there is chaos.

Kairat explicitly points out the difference in how people behave and which norms they adhere to. He presents himself as a good citizen who cares about the state and people living around. His negative attitude towards how people throw rubbish out of the windows of their cars,

their inability to organize themselves in a queue, their unwillingness to take responsibility for making a better life, and so on — all these things show how he positions himself as a caring, responsible, proactive person. While he denies that it is related to the experience of having lived abroad, his examples often are based comparisons with the lifestyle that he saw there.

Another of the research participants, Yerzhan came back to his hometown of Almaty upon completion of his MA in the USA. He then took a job at the same educational institution where he had received his BA. Unfortunately, he worked there for no more than year. Yerzhan connects this to the clash between perspectives. After he left his job and before he came to Astana, he traveled for some time, including a trip to a film festival in Europe where he presented his graduate work. In Astana, he worked for some time and now he is engaged in writing of his own project. In the capital, Yerzhan sometimes participates in *Soile kluby*, though, his spoken Kazakh is quite good. He visits the club when he feels that he is stuck and needs to refresh his mind. Yerzhan says that he likes to be engaged into provocative discussions where he can argue this or that opinion. This is connected to his specialization as a film director.

Though he is a Bolashak graduate, he is not a member of the Bolashak Association. He considers that the association puts out political messages that he does not like. He mentions participating in a public meeting where the speaker talked for twenty minutes and only three minutes were given for Q and A. He says that “only his opinion [a speaker’s] is given. If you ask a question and do not agree with the ideas presented you become marginal... the association should be like sitting at a round table... Their words do not end with “question” but with a full stop. My voice is not heard. My wish is to deliver my opinion.” Obviously, Yerzhan has a different opinion from those of other respondents about the association. However, for Yerzhan it was not just about the association, but about the general context, and he experiences a clash of

habitus. He mentions non-acceptance and unwillingness to hear his voice, which are normal experiences in the local context.

Interestingly, Bourdieu also asserts that “early experiences have a particular weight”, attributing a conservative tendency to habitus.<sup>70</sup> He further notes that habitus usually favors the experience which tends to consolidate itself. For example, people are more likely to talk about political issues with those who have similar perspectives.<sup>71</sup> However, another similar study shows, particularly in the context of higher education, that there is a hidden challenge in relationships with those who did not get the same level of education. Baxtor and Britton consider education as a means of empowerment — as an instrument to develop the self.<sup>72</sup> They argue that obtaining higher education influences respondents’ class identities. These influences can be seen in the context of relationships with relatives and friends. Their respondents say that they experience two changes: “‘becoming more assertive and confident’ and ‘taking on a new language of academia’.”<sup>73</sup> This is quite interesting since it shows how changed personal qualities and cultural practices lead to identity change.

One of the respondents whom I have already mentioned earlier, Aibar, already had quite good working experience and MA in his profile before he went abroad through the Bolashak program to earn his second master’s degree. When Aibar was asked whether he agrees with the official rhetoric that Bolashak graduates can “save the world”, he responds affirmatively. Moreover, he adds that all Bolashak graduates were already leaders even before they applied for the program. The program just served as a boost for them to become more effective.

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<sup>70</sup> Pierre Bourdieu, *The Logic of Practice* (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 1990), 60.

<sup>71</sup> *Ibid.*, 61.

<sup>72</sup> Arthur Baxter and Carolyn Britton, “Risk, Identity and Change: Becoming a Mature Student,” *International Studies in Sociology of Education* 11, no. 1 (2001): 87.

<sup>73</sup> *Ibid.*, 96.

Aibar clearly makes a distinction between the Bolashak graduates and non-Bolashak graduates. He describes the Bolashak graduates as being leaders who are effective in what they do. He does not dismiss the importance of the impact of education on the graduates' way of life and he also does not say that it is an essential key for the Bolashakers to become leaders. However, he claims that the education helps them to be more efficient in what they do. So Aibar draws distinction people who are leaders and non-leaders, and who are efficient and non-efficient. It should be mentioned that by "efficiency" he means the ability to bring about immediate and practical changes. In his case, it is his occupation which makes him more efficient since he considers that coaching is capable of bringing about substantial changes in people's thinking, way of living, values, and goals. Aibar said, "Imagine how society changes when all people become more effective and will live the right way of life."

As regards Miras, who is from the small town of Northern part of Kazakhstan, when he was asked whether the rhetoric about the graduates is justified, he also answers positively. Furthermore, he argues that it is not only about the study abroad graduates, but rather it is about all who had an experience of living abroad. He claims that these people while living abroad experience a breaking of their frames of thinking. Miras claims that these people upon return to Kazakhstan are very keen on changing things to the match what they experienced in the country where they studied. And he claims that they actually achieve it. For instance, he says that they do it by breaking stereotypes, bringing innovations, demanding better services, and so on. He claims that their attitude to everything changes. The awareness of how backward the society and its achievements are in Kazakhstan makes Miras understands that there are a plenty of things should be done to improve the situation. He expresses a strong desire to build a better social environment.

Miras mentions clashes between habitus, and specifically the problem of non-acceptance by the social environment that one experiences once back in Kazakhstan. He gives an example of himself trying to set up a business. Interestingly, his family does not support him. He sees the root of the problem in people having those frames of thinking that make them think that doing business is not worthy since it is risky and unstable. By studying abroad, he could see how business is built and how much effort should be put in first before one can gain any profit.

As discussed above, there is an influence of higher education on people's way of living. Bourdieu researched how a high level of education is related to enhancing an individual's social class. He provides a thorough examination of how consumption of cultural products varies between the low-educated people and people having high education. For example, he offers his respondents certain pieces of culture and asks for their opinions. The results show that there is an explicit difference between the tastes of the respondents with high education and with no/low education have. Bourdieu claims that people lacking cultural competence based their judgments on their own ethos.<sup>74</sup> When people were asked to judge a photograph of the hands of an old woman, the manual workers, provincial teachers and craftsmen clearly disliked it while most of the senior executives found it attractive as a piece of art.<sup>75</sup>

Another of my respondents, Bekezhan, who is studying in the US on a Bolashak International Scholarship, sees the difference in himself before and after his enrolment to Y University. In his opinion, it is reflected in how he thinks about a couple of issues. For instance, he mentions his negative attitude towards corruption. In his opinion, nothing can be improved while corruption is present in Kazakhstan. For him, as a state official and a person who studies public administration in Y University, the significance of the issue looks more compelling today.

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<sup>74</sup> Pierre Bourdieu, *Distinction: A Social Critique of the Judgement of Taste* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1984), 44.

<sup>75</sup> *Ibid.*, 45.



Secondly, he claims that today he manages his time better than before. So time management is what he has learned during his education and what he applies in contexts ranging from his work to his personal life. His education has helped him to become more efficient and understand that some issues cause huge problems.

In his large-scale study, Bourdieu found that the cultural practices depend firstly on the educational capital and only secondarily on social origin. This is why I think that Bourdieu's thinking about classes is relevant to the Bolashak graduates because these people are distinguished by their level of education. As I have mentioned in the first chapter, the Bolashak graduates are highly qualified by internationally recognized world universities starting from Harvard to the Lee Kuan Yew School of Public Policy. Moreover, the list of universities which are available through the Bolashak program was shortened to the top-ranked 100. Thus, the application and the process of learning have become more competitive in selecting the best and producing more effect on people's habitus.

I should emphasize that I am not comparing dominant class with low class and their perceptions about certain cultural preferences (for food, sport, or music) as Bourdieu did. My study rather focuses on what distinctions the graduates make about themselves based on their educational experience abroad.

*Bridging social capital: Being an example and exerting some influence*

Esen's involvement into social entrepreneurship implies that there is more than bonding once he faces the limits of it. The nature of the work he performs leads him to cooperate with many non-Bolashak graduates who are also keen to help. He needs to use Facebook to promote the product his business produces by showing how he collects necessary material, demonstrating

how his employees perform their work, and sharing the experience of doing business. Moreover, he attends numerous events dedicated to social entrepreneurship, public speaking and the like.

I pointed out the positive side of bridging social capital (in the first chapter) as means of spreading new ideas and information. Larsen et al. mention bonding social capital as a foundation for bridging: “Bonding social capital is a necessary antecedent for the development of the more powerful form of bridging social capital.”<sup>76</sup> Close relationships, trust and mutual recognition formed by bonding social capital help to generate bridging social capital. Bridging social capital is able to link people to a broader social environment. Larsen et al. show a corresponding pattern that can be traced in the social behavior of the graduates:

Bridging social capital occurs when members of one group connect with members of other groups to seek access or support or to gain information. Examples of bridging social capital include calling a city department to voice a complaint about public services or forming a neighborhood group to conduct a protest.<sup>77</sup>

Bridging social groups, unlike bonding social groups, are heterogeneous. The members of such groups are usually from different backgrounds (social class, race, religion, level of education, etc.). It is necessary to reiterate that both associations were originally for the graduates only. Today these networks are open for anyone who wishes to join. For instance, Aizhan, who is one of the AAA members coordinating *Soile kluby*, is a graduate of a local Kazakhstani university. She expressed a strong wish to contribute to the development of Kazakh language and joined the social group later when the network started to accept non-international alumni. The activities of the networks imply regular bridging and actually aim at bridging heterogeneous social groups. The gatherings of heterogeneous groups are inspired by various intentions. It is important to note that while the graduates gain social resources, in many cases, they get involved in order to give

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<sup>76</sup> Larissa Larsen et al., “Bonding and Bridging: Understanding the Relationship between Social Capital and Civic Action,” *Journal of Planning Education and Research* 24.1 (2004): 65.

<sup>77</sup> *Ibid.*, 66.

back to society. Whether it is education, charity, or voluntarism, the activity aims at promoting better life.

Talgat, while studying in China for several years, had a good experience of networking. It is because of him and young people like him that Kazakhstani students in China stay united today. Talgat was one of the leaders of this network and organized several large-scale meetings during his studies. The network was not limited to team-building parties alone but was more systematic. It was directed to help newcomers and anyone else in the network who was in need of help.

His motivation was to direct students to studying hard. He believed that Kazakh students should create a good image in a foreign country so that there is a positive attitude towards Kazakhstan. Today Talgat largely uses social media to promote a progressive lifestyle. His pictures with high officials, pictures taken in factories of China or Kazakhstan are often accompanied by the comments encouraging the youth action. In addition, as I have noted, regular participation in public events and clubs is common among the graduates including Talgat. Talgat is often engaged in giving lectures about education and culture in China. From his Facebook page, one can often see him sitting among the youth of different local universities who are interested to continue their study abroad.

So the use of Facebook is quite common among the graduates. From the interview with Talgat, I learned that he feels it is essential for him to use Facebook because he believes that his posts can motivate and teach good things. The social media can help to reach larger audience simultaneously. Obviously, Talgat presents himself as a true patriot of his country. He distinguishes himself as progressive person who should give an example to others and the social media play an important role. Another example of the usage of Facebook presents an interesting

case, too. Dauren, a businessman, uses Facebook for a variety of purposes. Along with sharing his recollections about certain political or economic events, he voices his support for a certain political decision or a person. So it is explicitly seen that the members of the networks, having some respect among other youth as progressive people, use the social media to exert influence on their online friends for purposeful outcomes. Bridging social capital, as stated by Callois and Aubert, is helpful to spread new ideas and perspectives to a society.<sup>78</sup> Whether it is connected to education, volunteering, job opportunities, or charity, bridging social ties can assist to disseminate information more easily and convince people to take some action.

AAA volunteers attracted a large audience to TEDx event in Astana, which opened discussion on a variety of issues that were very relevant at that time. The audience, which usually consists of the youth, is quite keen on participating in such events, especially when such popular figures as Sayasat Nurbek (ex-president of the center which grants Bolashak scholarships), Kuandyk Bishimbayev (Chairman of Managing Board of Bayterek), Aidyn Rakhimbaev (Head of the BI Group construction company), and others are invited. The events organized by the Bolashak Association usually have aimed to direct the youth to certain actions. For instance, starting from mid-2015, the Bolashak Association began actively inviting different sorts of young people to start their own businesses. People like those I have mentioned above recommend the youth not to go to the ministries and national companies but instead to set a business.

Business competitions are organized, such as the “Bolashak StartUp” competition that was conducted in the fall of 2015. This involved a large amount of work. The committee, made up of bankers and economists, evaluated hundreds of applications and selected just a few. The

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<sup>78</sup> Jean-Marc Callois and Francis Aubert, “Towards Indicators of Social Capital for Regional Development Issues: The Case of French Rural Area,” *Regional Studies Regional Stud. CRES* 41.6 (2007): 811.

selected candidates were from different parts of Kazakhstan and involved one person with special needs. They were invited to Astana where a group of professional coaches gave them business trainings. Finally, three people were awarded a significant sum of money so that their projects could be realized.<sup>79</sup> Interestingly, the whole process was shown to the public by national TV.

*Bridging social capital and voluntary activity*

As I have mentioned, the members of the networks are regularly involved in voluntary activity and integrate many other social groups as well. Putnam claims that the networks are good instruments for appealing to people to do good deeds. In his opinion, “social networks foster norms of reciprocity that encourage attention to others’ welfare.”<sup>80</sup> Voluntary activity, altruism and philanthropy are more likely to take place among those who are involved in formal or informal social networks. Through the projects that the associations launch, there is good opportunity to reach a variety of groups. For instance, such projects as “*Chitaem vmeste*” and “*Soile kluby*” invite all sorts of people. Best for Kids, Winter Charity Balls and other such activities invite non-Bolashak graduates to contribute, as well. As argued by Putnam, any analysis of social capital has to take into close consideration the trends of altruism, volunteering and philanthropy.<sup>81</sup> So voluntarism can be a good sign of social capital.

Best for Kids, in particular, does a great job today. From the interview with Kairat, I learned that the network (which used to be a part of AAA) constantly organizes the trips to orphanages. Sayasat Nurbek, Asset Abdualiyev, and other prominent progressive figures

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<sup>79</sup> “‘Startup Bolashak’ Contest Winners Announced,” *Kazakh TV* -. Web. 10 Mar. 2016. <[http://kazakh-tv.kz/pda.php/en/view/news\\_kazakhstan/page\\_147384\\_'startup-bolashak'-contest-winners-announced](http://kazakh-tv.kz/pda.php/en/view/news_kazakhstan/page_147384_'startup-bolashak'-contest-winners-announced)>.

<sup>80</sup> Robert D. Putnam, *Bowling Alone: The Collapse and Revival of American Community* (New York: Simon & Schuster, 2000), 117.

<sup>81</sup> *Ibid.*, 117.

contribute a lot and are on the board of Best for Kids together with Kairat today. While Kairat emphasizes that now it is not only those who have foreign education who are involved in these activities, he admits that it was the Bolashak graduates and other international graduates who initiated them. From my fieldwork, I also understood that the larger the network, the more chances for an organization like Best for Kids to fulfill its social role. As Kairat said, “now we have about one hundred people you can send a message to, asking who can do the job, and someone will respond positively for sure. And in the past, we had to ask for time off from our work [to get such things done].” Kairat also pointed out the diversity of people involved who can design websites, for example. It is worth mentioning that the network started from a few graduates and has gradually grown to these numbers. He also mentions activities they do in orphanages with the help of volunteers that are reminiscent the Western way of life. They do not go to these children’s homes just to present toys but go and organize activities which develop children’s critical thinking skills, for instance. In addition, they teach children how to earn money instead of just bringing them something. Best for Kids collects different things from volunteers such as pieces of cloth, threads, plastic bottles, old mobile phones, and such, so that the children can create different things like toys, wall pictures, small bags and so on. Best for Kids invites special teachers to help the kids to create things. I would note that the things they create very beautiful and can be very useful in the household. In addition, Best for Kids organizes a fair during the holidays when people are prone to spend more money for charity purposes. It is worth mentioning that the money is not just given to those children but the volunteers ask children about concrete thing they would like to get (what toy in particular). And the main thing is that the volunteers explain to children that this is money they earned themselves.

### *Conclusion*

The graduates develop similar habitus and identity which generate the practices aimed at changing social conditions in Kazakhstan. These practices inspired by the experience of living and studying abroad, look strange for those who have not had the same experience. First of all, the graduates demonstrate a feeling of civic activism and social responsibility which is seen from how they approach their social environment and are engaged into volunteering. They regularly participate in public events and clubs. This leads to social bridging between the members and non-members of the social networks. Moreover, the respondents demonstrate an understanding that the changing social situation is in their hands and they feel they have a pretty good idea of how to do that. The use of Facebook is one of the ways some graduates try to change things for the better. Via the social media, the graduates invite the wider public to volunteer, to live a progressive lifestyle and to feel patriotic. Broadened horizons help the graduates to use new ideas, for instance, in volunteering at orphanages. The graduates have a good picture of what kind of society they think can and should be developed in Kazakhstan since they have seen different societies and can compare and choose the best models. Each of the members of the networks tries to contribute in the area they are good at. Whether it is education, job opportunities, or promoting Kazakh language, it is aimed at helping without any compensation. Finally, the graduates are very conscious of their abilities to exert influence and improve the state of affairs in their country.

## **Chapter IV Conformism versus the integration of new approaches**

### *Introduction*

In many countries of the world the state exerts strenuous efforts to make their citizens as educated as possible because it can help the country to become more competitive in the world arena. Kazakhstan is no exception. The Bolashak International Scholarship Program is one of the life chances for Kazakhstani citizens to get an internationally recognized diploma from the best universities of the world and become competitive in the domestic employment market. The knowledge acquired is meant to bring improvements to the country's economy and social sphere. How well do the graduates integrate their knowledge and skills? To what extent do they have to conform to a conservative system that is not ready to accept the new skills and practices that they have acquired? These are the main questions I raise in this chapter. The reader should understand that the governmental organizations in Kazakhstan such as ministries have a top-down, hierarchical bureaucratic structure. Directions are always originated from those who occupy senior positions and any deviations from the directions can be harshly punished. The structure of the organizations is such that it does not allow any disobedience. From the ethnographic responses below, it is clear that it is impossible to integrate new knowledge and skills unless those who hold top positions also change their perspectives and encourage others to change. However, it should be mentioned that some of the middle rank officials (among the graduates) are able to elaborate strategies which help them to achieve their goals in integrating their knowledge into the system. In this chapter, I refer to the concept of conformity and provide a short review of the literature on it. I also refer to Blum's extended research on cultural changes and I draw on his term, "functional knowledge" in my analysis.



*“Functional Knowledge”*

Douglas Blum recently published a book called *The Social Process of Globalization: Return Migration and Cultural Change in Kazakhstan* in which he focuses on hybridity as a result of globalization. In particular, Blum considers how specific cultural changes occur as a result of extended visit to the US. He presents quite rich empirical research focusing on Kazakhstani youth who for various reasons, primarily education, went to the US and came back. The strategies of confronting and adapting cultural changes are the main area of investigation. This is particularly interesting since it helps to see what meaning the youth give to different cultural borrowings. Blum is not engaged in investigation of individual stories but rather seeks to reveal the tendencies in terms of “absorption, enactment, and negotiation.”<sup>82</sup> So, along with other cultural changes, he sheds light on the “functional knowledge” acquired by Kazakhstani youth who studied in the US. Blum conceptualizes “functional knowledge” as something which can assist to do things more effectively. Not surprisingly, Blum points out the presence and “persistence of a typical (post)Soviet mentality, including bureaucracy, resistance to individual initiative” as a deep-rooted explanation to the attitudes of migrants towards cultural borrowings.<sup>83</sup> He found that Kazakhstani youth are very keen to absorb new knowledge and that for some the functional knowledge is the only reason to go to the US.<sup>84</sup> While the reasons for seeking this knowledge vary, one of the first reasons is to contribute to the development of the state. Practically useful skills and efficient ways to do things are considered as one of the primary reasons to travel to the US.<sup>85</sup>

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<sup>82</sup> Douglas W. Blum, *The Social Process of Globalization: Return Migration and Cultural Change in Kazakhstan*, (Cambridge University Press, 2016), 4.

<sup>83</sup> *Ibid.*, 71.

<sup>84</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>85</sup> *Ibid.*

Interestingly, Perna et al. conducted a set of interviews with employers who give their evaluations of how well the Bolashak graduates perform at work. Critical thinking, content knowledge, and knowledge of foreign language make the graduates look attractive in Kazakhstan's employment market.<sup>86</sup> The analysis presented by Blum provides similar perspectives about particular knowledge and skills acquired by the young people. So they mention critical mindedness, pragmatic attitude, taking responsibility and leadership, the "spirit of entrepreneurship", etc. as the borrowed skills and practical mentality. From my ethnographic evidence I learned that being challenged is reported to be an essential part of the graduates' life. One of the respondents, Dauren, constantly increases his human capital by taking various sorts of courses in his free time. During the interview he mentioned doing an MBA, studying in the New York Film Academy, and so on. Of course, to do this one has to have some financial capacity and Dauren, doing business, does have such financial resources. To improve one's professional skills or other abilities is cited as a priority for many other participants in my research. For instance, Aibar indicates that while giving his courses, he constantly also learns himself. One of the international coaching schools was a place where Aibar could get improved his skills in coaching. The Astana Toastmasters Club is an activity which Aibar also visits regularly to listen to the speeches of the participants of the club. It should be mentioned that the latter does not cost any money, so, it is not a matter of whether or not a person has financial resources, but is about their will to improve.

Study in the US and other foreign countries obviously assists individuals in acquiring technical knowledge which may bring many benefits such as more chances to get a job or better paid job. And indeed, the study by Nurbek et al. comes to the conclusion that the graduates of the

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<sup>86</sup> Laura W. Perna, Kata Orosz, and Zakir Jumakulov. "Understanding the Human Capital Benefits of a Government-funded International Scholarship Program: An Exploration of Kazakhstan's Bolashak Program," *International Journal of Educational Development* 40 (2015): 89.

Bolashak International Scholarship obtain relatively good job positions.<sup>87</sup> In addition, they report that a third of the Bolashak graduates are aware about their career advantages.<sup>88</sup> However, as also revealed by Blum, some young people face numerous challenges regarding future prospects at their workplaces. While they feel that in the US people have more chances to achieve something, in Kazakhstan, they think people are limited. This opinion seems to be supported by the feeling that only money is valued in Kazakhstan and not person's expertise. Nevertheless, as Blum points out, such an opinion is rather the exception than the rule.<sup>89</sup>

### *Conformity*

Conformity is a well-researched concept. The scholarly literature proposes different frameworks for analyzing it. Feldman, for example, looks at authoritarianism. In particular, he looks at “conflicts between individual rights and the well-being of the social unit.”<sup>90</sup> Living in a society implies potential clashes between people's autonomy and social cohesion. Why would the autonomy of the individuals be restricted? Or why would some people want the “rights” to be limited? In his theoretical framework, conforming to a certain set of rules and norms is helpful in maintaining social order.<sup>91</sup> According to Feldman, “left to their own devices, people pursuing their self-interest and behaving as they choose will not produce a stable social order.”<sup>92</sup> This assumes that people have self-interested and unpredictable personalities and they need to be

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<sup>87</sup> Saïasat Nurbek et al, *Mezhdunarodnaïa stipendiïa Prezidenta respublikï Kazakhstan “Bolashak” kak faktor razvitiïa chelovecheskogo kapitala*, (Astana: TOO “Shanyrak Media”, 2014), 90.

<sup>88</sup> *Ibid.*, 83.

<sup>89</sup> Douglas W. Blum, *The Social Process of Globalization: Return Migration and Cultural Change in Kazakhstan* (Cambridge University Press, 2016), 75.

<sup>90</sup> Stanley Feldman, “Enforcing Social Conformity: A Theory of Authoritarianism,” *Political Psychology* 24, no. 1 (March 2003): 46.

<sup>91</sup> *Ibid.*, 46.

<sup>92</sup> *Ibid.*, 48.

compelled to conform to social norms. So authoritarianism is portrayed as maintaining social order and having a strong influence on autonomy, hence, prejudice and intolerance.

Conformity, as defined by Gylling, should be differentiated from self-chosen behavior. There is a sharp distinction between when a person wishes to conform himself because he values it and does not like to be confronted, and when a person feels a fear of potential sanctions in case of disobedience.<sup>93</sup> So if a person is submissive without considering any other alternatives, there is no ground to talk about conformism. It is only when one experiences a feeling of being subjected to “enforced values and habits” that it is meaningful to talk about conformity.<sup>94</sup> It is worth mentioning that it does not have to be conformism when teenagers copy each other’s behavior since it happens unconsciously and automatically. In such cases, they are not consciously abandoning their values, beliefs and old way of living.

Conformity, though, can be used for purposeful actions. Gylling gives an interesting example of young people of certain ethnic or religious group who are forbidden to date young people from another group. What is interesting is that young people are interested not to do so for a while because they know that dating “others” will, immediately, result in the loss of useful social ties. Since they are still young and need parents’ financial support, it is more rational for them to wait and get enough support first. However, in some cases, those girls who date young men from other ethnicity and religion can be killed by their own brothers.<sup>95</sup> So, while in some cases, it is fear which compels young people to conform, in other cases, it is more about the instrumentality of conformity.

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<sup>93</sup> Heta Aleksandra Gylling, “Desire for Conformity,” *Homo Oeconomicus* 31, no. 4 (2014): 562.

<sup>94</sup> *Ibid.*, 562.

<sup>95</sup> *Ibid.*, 567.

Solomon Asch was among the first scholars who conducted an experiment in which two associates spoke incorrect answers before a subject gave his answer to the question.

Interestingly, he found out that the level of conformity is quite high. So it was proposed that the price of being incorrect is lower than the price of conformity. Tillich claims “conformity is a negative force if the individual form that gives uniqueness and dignity to a person is subdued by the collective form.”<sup>96</sup> The author calls such conformity as “patternization” which is reflected in how we live.<sup>97</sup> The concept is presented as power restricting the choices to be made by people on how to behave.

As regards Kelman, he proposes quite similar explanations to those above. He just categorizes conformity and offers three kinds of it, namely, compliance, identification and internationalization. By compliance, the scholar means that conformity takes place not because a person believes in what he/she accepts but because he/she is aware about benefits or punishment following disconformity. Identification is similar to compliance but the goal for conformity is specifically because of desired relationship with a certain group. As regards internationalization, it is about “the content of the new behavior” that is behavior adopted correlates with a person’s existing values and beliefs.<sup>98</sup> It is necessary to understand that, according to the author, three types of conformity imply three different ways of accepting new behavior.

In the ethnographic cases below, I look at when the graduates have to conform at their workplaces. I am also interested in what, in particular, makes them do what they would not in different conditions.

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<sup>96</sup> Paul Tillich, “Conformity,” *Social Research* 24, no. 3 (1957): 354.

<sup>97</sup> *Ibid.*, 354.

<sup>98</sup> H. C. Kelman, “Compliance, Identification, and Internalization Three Processes of Attitude Change,” *Journal of Conflict Resolution* 2, no. 1 (1958): 53.

*Ethnographic cases**Case #1 When doorkeeper changes*

Nurdaulet holds his MSc in Leadership in education from one of the UK universities. He is a Bolashak graduate. Having worked in one of the best schools of Kazakhstan for a year, he understood that he lacked necessary knowledge and, therefore, went to the UK. He was astonished about how the educational system in the UK works and what it focuses on. At the beginning, it was very difficult for him to study because of a difference in how knowledge is given abroad. He explicitly distinguishes research-based education which, in his opinion, helps a student a lot but quite challenging for those who are not used to it. It is this skill of research which is functional knowledge for Nurdaulet and which he values a lot. He views himself as a researcher in educational sphere in the future.

He thinks that the large effect from the Bolashak graduates can be reaped only in about 20 years. He admits that Bolashak graduates face bureaucratic barriers in the form of authorities with old-fashioned thinking. However, he assumes that this most likely to happen at ministries since they have a hierarchical structure. At the same time, Nurdaulet refers to his experience as well. He says that “now after our Principal spent a couple of years in foreign university, he understands that there are changes needed in our school system. Three years ago this would not happen. Any idea could have been rejected.” So, he clearly says that in the past he had to conform, though, today it is no longer needed since his boss is aware about potential improvements if the policy at school changes. Since Bolashak International Scholarship is available not only for young people there is now one more Vice-principal in the administration who got an internship in Europe. Surprisingly, now she also supports new approaches and even initiates them. When Nurdaulet jokes and says to her: “a couple of years ago you would not even

listen to this. And today you propose this idea yourself.” And her answer from his words is “I do not know. [In Y country], they do it like this.”

So the case of Nurdaulet demonstrates that the application of functional knowledge is possible and even desired if the people taking decisions can understand the importance of inventions. Otherwise, it is impossible.

### *Case #2 The power of bureaucratic machine*

Indira has got her BA from one of the UK universities. Indira was one of those who studied their undergraduate programs abroad for 5 years (including foundation). She shows strong impression of borrowing a number of perspectives and values. For instance, she mentions her earlier thinking about marriage. By finishing her high school, Indira thought that her ultimate goal is to marry a person and then raise children. Now her opinion on the marriage changed. She thinks that there are a lot of different things to do besides marriage. The main functional knowledge she could obtain was an understanding that there is not only one way to do things. People can choose and it is their right to do so.

Upon the graduation, Indira went to work to one of the state organizations in Astana. It was very interesting and informative to get her thoughts about conformity at work since she clearly points to social effect of conformity that is compliance. Indira says that: “there is 200% conformity at the place I work... You cannot really integrate any new ideas because if you are just an expert nobody will listen to you. I mean that there is a hierarchy of positions and if you are at the bottom of that hierarchy, you are just required to do your job as it was done before you. No inventions are welcome. Even if your direct boss approves the project you designed, it will definitely be stopped somewhere before it reaches a Vice-minister. People just say that they would not go to the Vice-minister with such a project. Everyone is afraid to take responsibility.”

So, from her words, it is clear that there is no way for disagreement or doing things other way. The whole system is built to counter behavior which is about disconformity.

### *Case #3 Strategic approach*

Bekezhan is a second-year graduate student at Y University, though, he already has his PhD from one of the local universities in Kazakhstan. He also has a rich working experience in one of the Ministries. Bekezhan had two reasons to study abroad. First, he felt that those who graduated abroad had good knowledge he lacked and strongly needed to climb career ladder. Second, he needed high proficiency in English since it also can contribute to his career development. The reason why he chose the Bolashak International Scholarship was because the scholarship matched him the best, since, it could provide him extended course of English language abroad.

He thinks that the rhetoric about the Bolashak graduates that they will boost the economy is justified. He assumes that they bring new knowledge and experience. They also borrow different personal qualities. Bekezhan mentions feeling disgust towards corruption which holds the development of everything in the state. He says that “here [at the university] we talk about corruption and how to fight it. The program offers good knowledge because we analyze corruption in different countries. There are a lot of countries where corruption is even worse than in Kazakhstan, though, I always try to use my country to look at when a certain problem in public policy area is discussed.” In addition, Bekezhan mentions time-management to be a functional knowledge which he developed. He claims that he began to manage his time more efficiently in terms of everything - personal life, study and etc.

Bekezhan admits that one has to conform while working at the Ministry. He claims that for him it is better to step back once but to make two steps forward later. So Bekezhan elaborated



a strategy which helps him to achieve his goals anyway. However, it should be mentioned that unlike Indira he holds a higher position which allows him to escape many bureaucratic procedures. I mean that he does not have to have as many approvals as Indira since he is placed higher and have fewer people he has to negotiate with. It is worth mentioning that he also claims that when he wants to launch his project he does not hurry to push it ahead. Bekezhan says that “it is necessary to listen to other people first because if they oppose they may have good reasons. What is more they may have more experience and know the situation better even if they did not study at foreign educational institutions.” So, being more experienced than other two respondents, Bekezhan understands the value of experience and necessity to conform if it proves to be useful for a certain project. From the interview with my other respondent, Kairat, I learned that at the beginning of the program, a negative opinion was formed about the graduates. It was connected to inexperienced graduates, who having no knowledge of the local context, for example, in the sphere of industrialization, wanted to invent new things. As Kairat says, “some young graduates were coming and demanding new technologies and laughing at old-fashioned technology. But the local workers knew that there are new technologies invented, the plants simply do not have enough money to buy them. Therefore, in some cases, they still use the Soviet technology.”

#### *Discussion and implications*

While I presented three ethnographic cases which show that the respondents have to conform, it is necessary to understand that the picture is more complex than it looks. As it can be drawn from the ethnography, the respondents have to conform and face numerous barriers to implement new ideas. Surprisingly, these ideas and innovations are, in fact, expected by Bolashak International Scholarship and the whole idea about international education in

Kazakhstan.<sup>99</sup> Moreover, as the reader may remember there is the official discourse which supports and promotes an idea about Bolashak graduates bringing innovations and technologies.

The following question arises - who should the graduates conform with?

Kazakhstan became an independent country in 1991 as a result of the dissolution of USSR. Since then it has been integrating some reforms which meant to improve the state governance. Kazakhstan designed a number of Ministries which undergone some transformations afterwards. Some of the Ministries disappeared as a result of joining two Ministries into one just recently.

The main point is about how the governmental institutions operate at present. Each state designs the governmental system which it finds useful due to certain reasons. In Kazakhstan, as in some other states, the organizations have hierarchical structures which are found to be useful for stable public service delivery. However, they are very slow in adapting to the rapidly changing economic, social and political situation in the world. In addition, such organizations are less useful in taking integrated solutions which are necessary for policy development.<sup>100</sup>

Muijzenberg claims that the ministries frequently operate “in a manner resembling internal stovepipes with each department focusing on its own traditional work, regardless if this is best suited to the strategic priorities of the organization.”<sup>101</sup> Such practices do not benefit and even harm the whole system of civil service. According to Merton, “If the bureaucracy is to operate successfully, it must attain a high degree of reliability of behavior, an unusual degree of

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<sup>99</sup> “Istoriia programmy,” AO “Tsentr mezhdunarodnykh programm,” Accessed December 27, 2015. <http://bolashak.gov.kz/ru/o-stipendii/istoriya-razvitiya.html>.

<sup>100</sup> Marc Van Den Muijzenberg, “N. Nazarbayev and Modern State Building The Quest for a Professional Civil Service as Part of Modern State Building (1992-2013): Towards the next Phase,” *Memleket* 1 (2014): 46. <http://journal.apa.kz/images/books/1-2014/index.html>.

<sup>101</sup> *Ibid.*, 47.

conformity with prescribed patterns of action.”<sup>102</sup> Such system forces a person to turn into highly disciplined official who is always under social pressure. Even worse, bureaucracy can result into having a large amount of officials being accustomed to strict rules who may not be able to adjust to rapid changes when necessary.<sup>103</sup> This can prevent from integrating new knowledge and skills of international alumni.

At the same time, bureaucracy is stated to have positive connotations too. For instance, Max Weber provided deep analysis of bureaucracy and states some positive sides of it. He claims that:

Precision, speed, unambiguity, knowledge of files, continuity, discretion, unity, strict subordination, reduction of friction, and of material and personal costs - these are raised to the optimum point in the strictly bureaucratic administration, and especially in its monocratic form.<sup>104</sup>

In Weber’s opinion, bureaucracy is the most effective way of administration because it represents systematic hierarchy which enables to maintain strict order. Strict bureaucratic organizations can ensure the speed of operations which function unambiguously. The more bureaucracy is “dehumanized”, the more objective and calculated decisions can be taken.<sup>105</sup> So, Weber vividly supports bureaucracy due to its efficiency in terms of keeping order and speed of operations. However, his argument implies that those on the top positions should be well-qualified to make right and quick decisions.

If bureaucracy has both positive and negative sides, how can the state deal with integration of new ideas? Muijzenberg offers several measures to improve the state civil service which, actually, focus on senior cadres. This solution also can find support in other studies. For

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<sup>102</sup> Robert Merton, *Bureaucratic Structure and Personality*, in *Social Theory and Social Structure* by Robert K. Merton, (IL: Free Press, 1957).

<sup>103</sup> Ibid.

<sup>104</sup> Max Weber et al., *From Max Weber: essays in sociology*, (Routledge, 2009), 214.

<sup>105</sup> Ibid., 216.

instance, a group of Kazakhstani researchers conducted a survey among state officials which, along with low motivation, reveals poor administrative work as one of the significant issues.<sup>106</sup> So the measures offered by Muijzenberg include appointments based on merit, well-thought rotation scheme, and regular training of relevant skills.<sup>107</sup> These measures are meant to increase the effectiveness of the governance. As it is seen from the case of Nurdaulet (see empirical case above), the professional development is very important. An internship in a foreign educational institution seems as one of the good steps to bring innovations.

The President of Kazakhstan put forward five institutional reforms which represent one hundred steps aimed to modernize the country. The very first reform is about the modernization of the governmental system by the means of improving official cadres. The steps focus on meritocratic selection of state officials, regular professional development and attestation, higher salaries and etc. One of the interesting steps is about allowing foreign managers to work for the state organization. Along with the internship to foreign countries, this measure also can help senior managers to learn new approaches in management system. In addition, the president, Nursultan Nazarbayev, publicly declared that those state officials who are at retired age should retire and give an opportunity for younger state officials.<sup>108</sup>

### *Conclusion*

In this chapter I considered the context in which the graduates of the Bolashak program can and cannot apply their knowledge and skills at their workplaces. Evidently, the Bolashak

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<sup>106</sup> Sh.A. Esimova and Shonbaeva A.N., “Slabye storony v deiatel’nosti gosudarstvennykh organov Kazakhstana,” *Memleket* 4 (2013): 119. <http://journal.apa.kz/images/books/4-2013/index.html>.

<sup>107</sup> Marc Van Den Muijzenberg, “N. Nazarbayev and Modern State Building The Quest for a Professional Civil Service as Part of Modern State Building (1992-2013): Towards the next Phase.” *Memleket* 1 (2014): 47. <http://journal.apa.kz/images/books/1-2014/index.html>.

<sup>108</sup> “Nursultan Nazarbaev predlozhl izbavliat’sia ot zasidevshikhsia na mestakh chinovnikov,” 31 kanal, Accessed January 27, 2016. <http://www.31.kz/video/show/id/10428/model/Video/lang/ru>.

International Scholarship expects the graduates to utilize their new knowledge and bring innovations to every sphere of development in Kazakhstan. At the same time, there are clear discrepancies between official expectations and the reality the graduates face in the governmental and semi-governmental organizations. Of course, this cannot be considered as ineffectiveness or uselessness of the program. On the contrary, the program helps the graduates to enhance their level of human capital and become competitive at the job market. It should be mentioned that the aforementioned knowledge and skills are not the full list at all. Anyway, as it can be seen from the empirical evidence, the new knowledge and skills can be applied only under certain conditions and circumstances. This leads to the idea that the issue is embedded in the norms and the structure of the organizations. As I learned it is the system of governmental organizations along with old-fashioned senior officials who do prevent integration of innovations. On the other hand, the bureaucratic system is seen to have positive sides as well. And in some cases it is helpful.

## Chapter V Conclusion

The main focus of the research has been the development of social capital among the graduates of international educational programs. Social networks are crucial elements in the exchange of various social resources among the members of the groups I focused on. A variety of social resources can be acquired in the networks ranging from job opportunities to free self-development courses. These social resources can be very useful in different respects. For some members, information about certain opportunities and choices is important, while for others, it is true and reliable friends who are valued resources. Bonding social capital helps the members to utilize their knowledge and skills in organizing social events such as TEDx. The human capital of the graduates plays a significant role in implementing certain project effectively. Bonding social capital proves to be useful in starting longer projects that contribute to social development. Good examples are Best for Kids (a AAA project) and GreenTAL which focus on helping those who are in real need. While BFK does a great job in helping children from orphanages, GreenTAL provides jobs for people with special needs. Bonding social capital facilitates the graduates' actions in achieving their goals.

Different dispositions can create new practices, according to Bourdieu. How can these different dispositions be acquired? Living and studying abroad is observed to be crucial for changes in habitus. Today the graduates certainly stand out among other youth by the distinctions that they acquired as a result of living and studying abroad. At the same time, the changes or differences in the habitus cause certain clashes between old and new habitus. The graduates indicate that old friends, their close relatives, and others may not understand some of what they value and pursue. Voluntary activity is one of the activities the graduates value and which non-migrants do not understand. Why to do something for free? Social responsibility is a

part of the graduates' identity which is seen from how they unite to do something good for the society. It is worth mentioning that bridging social capital is found to be a means of bridging those values and perspectives into larger social groups. Even if the respondents report to gain personally, the projects or business they are involved in imply social benefits for other people, too. For instance, Aibar's trainings, in addition to bringing him material benefits, can be very useful for all sorts of people. So the social projects the graduates initiate can contribute a lot to the process of bridging those new ideas and perspectives to a larger society.

The Kazakhstani government relies on the youth to boost the country's economy. It creates a variety of policies to increase human capital through helping young people to get higher education including education abroad. Today, more than 11,000 people went abroad and got their international qualifications through the state initiated program, the Bolashak International Scholarship. These people constitute a relatively small number of people so far to produce the desired effect in economic terms. Moreover, there are some obstacles the graduates have to face. As I have shown in the study, the integration of new knowledge and skills is possible under certain conditions only. Otherwise, the graduates have to conform and not to use their potential as expected by the Bolashak International Scholarship. This is where one can observe a discrepancy between official discourse and reality. Although I provide only three ethnographic cases, I believe that it is not rare when the graduates have to conform. Of course, improvements are possible, though there will need to be some changes to make that possible.

Nevertheless, the official rhetoric proclaims the graduates to be the national hope. They are given a special place in the formation of the future elite. Even today one can see that preference is given to those who received their degree through the Bolashak International Scholarship. The mayors of Almaty and Shymkent, the governor of the Western Kazakhstan

Province, the head of national holding “Baiterek”, a head of department in JSC “Samruk Kazyna”, and other leading figures are graduates of the program. So if one is interested in future elite who may bring new reforms in Kazakhstan, it is important to look at the lifestyle and dynamics of change in the habitus of the graduates.

### *Implications*

The study has shed some light on the formation of the future Kazakhstani elite. In particular, it points to the values, perspectives and beliefs of those graduates who are the members of the social networks. More extended study can be done in the area of elite formation by looking at the upward mobility of the graduates. In particular, it is interesting to look at what form upward mobility takes for the graduates and what they do to achieve that. For instance, starting your own business has become respected and defines you as a progressive person among the youth. Steve Jobs, Mark Zuckerberg, Bill Gates, Jack Ma and others are considered as good examples of people whose success can be and should be emulated. It would be interesting to do a thorough investigation of how the graduates perceive doing business and what it means for them. On the other hand, there can be different understandings of how to climb to the upper social class. For instance, to become “*agashka*”, a person who holds senior position and can solve any problem is seen to be one of the motivations. So to explore about the interpretations and practices of social mobility can reveal more about the identities of the graduates.



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