

## **Bearing the Woken Bear: Kazakhstani Educators Making Sense of the Russian Invasion in Ukraine and its Consequences for Internationalization of Higher Education in Kazakhstan**

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### **Abstract**

*This paper explores how faculty in Kazakhstan perceive the current and potential effects of the Russia-Ukraine war and sanctions on internationalization and international mobility in higher education in the Central Asian country. The purpose of the study was to provide some initial insights into the perceived effects of the conflict on international mobility and higher education in the country, which has the longest border with Russia. The study uses grounded theory as an approach to research design. The data was collected via semi-structured interviews whereby the participants were selected from among faculty of Kazakhstani universities using a combination of snowball and maximal-variation sampling approaches. The results of the analysis revealed that the participants interpret the impacts of the conflict predominantly in neoliberal terms with only some faculty members noting potential effects in terms of academic colonialism. Identified themes are best interpreted in terms of the conceptual construct of capital. We suggest a combination of several capital theories as a potential theoretical framework for understanding perceptions of the effects of war on internationalization and international mobility in higher education.*

Keywords: higher education, internationalization, Kazakhstan, post-Soviet, Russian invasion in Ukraine

### **Abstract Translated to Kazakh**

*Бұл жұмыс Қазақстандағы профессорлық-оқытушылар құрамының Ресей-Украина соғысының және санкциялардың Орталық Азия еліндегі жоғары оқу орындарындағы интернационализация мен халықаралық*

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ұтқырлыққа қазіргі және ықтимал әсерлерін қалай қабылдайтынын зерттейді. Зерттеудің мақсаты Ресеймен ең ұзын шекарасы бар елдегі халықаралық ұтқырлыққа және жоғары білімге қақтығыстың әсер етуі туралы кейбір бастапқы түсініктерді беру болды. Зерттеу зерттеу дизайнына көзқарас ретінде негізделген теорияны пайдаланады. Деректер жартылай құрылымдалған сұхбаттар арқылы жиналды, оның барысында қатысушылар Қазақстан университеттерінің профессорлық-оқытушылар құрамы арасынан қарлы және максималды вариациялық іріктеу тәсілдерінің комбинациясы арқылы таңдалды. Талдау нәтижелері көрсеткендей, қатысушылар қақтығыстың әсерін негізінен неолибералдық терминдермен түсіндіреді, тек кейбір оқытушылар академиялық отаршылдық тұрғысынан ықтимал әсерлерді атап өтті. Анықталған тақырыптар капиталдың концептуалды құрылымы тұрғысынан жақсы түсіндіріледі. Біз соғыстың интернационализацияға және жоғары оқу орындарындағы халықаралық ұтқырлыққа әсерін қабылдауды түсіну үшін әлеуетті теориялық негіз ретінде бірнеше капитал теорияларының комбинациясын ұсынамыз.

Түйін сөздер: интернационалдандыру, посткеңестік Қазақстан, жоғары білім, Ресейдің Украинаға басып кіруі

### Abstract Translated to Russian

*В статье приводится анализ мнения профессорско-преподавательского состава Казахских вузов относительно текущего и возможного влияния войны между Украиной и Россией и антироссийских санкций на интернационализацию и международную мобильность в высшем образовании в этой Центральноазиатской стране. Целью исследования было выявление воспринимаемого воздействия конфликта на интернационализацию высшего образования в стране, имеющей наиболее протяженную границу с Россией. В статье используется обоснованная теория в качестве исследовательского дизайна. Сбор данных осуществлялся посредством полуструктурированных интервью с использованием комбинации максимально-вариативной и сетевой выборки. Результаты исследования показывают, что большинство преподавателей интерпретируют последствия войны с точки зрения неолиберализма с незначительным количеством преподавателей, отмечающих потенциальное воздействие в свете академического неокOLONIALИЗМА. Выявленные темы лучше всего объясняются различными концептуализациями капитала. Мы предлагаем совокупность нескольких теорий капиталов в качестве потенциальной теоретической рамки, которая может быть использована для объяснения существующих мнений о воздействии войны на интернационализацию и международную мобильность в высшем образовании.*

Ключевые слова: интернационализация, пост-советский, Казахстан, высшее образование, Российское вторжение на Украину

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### Introduction

The conflict between Russia and Ukraine has brought unexpected and radical changes to all countries of the former Soviet Union. Kazakhstan, as a country with 30 percent of the Russian-speaking and ethnic Russian population, which neighbours Russia along its longest international border, has been affected by the destabilization in the geopolitical situation in the region more than any other post-Soviet state. Some effects of the conflict include the influx of Russian refugees and, to a lesser extent, Ukrainian refugees to Kazakhstan, disruption of global and regional supply chains, interruption of cross-border transit and financial transactions with Russia (Domoulin, 2023). In the realm of higher education visible short-term implications include an increase in the number of applications for study and employment at Kazakhstani universities from current and potential international students and faculty from both Ukraine and Russia. There has also been a decline in the number of applications to Russian and Ukrainian universities from Kazakhstani students (ICEF Monitor, 2023). Other effects are yet to be seen and understood. For example, it is not yet clear how the conflict will affect longer-term patterns of higher education internationalization, cross-border research collaboration and international mobility.

Importantly, some of the most radical changes have been occurring in the minds of people living in post-Soviet states. Many of them are trying to make sense of the new reality and envision what the conflict may mean for their

individual and collective future. On a large scale, this meaning-making has strong repercussions for social cohesion and the future of fragile peace in the whole Eurasian region (Heyneman, 2003). In addition, the new meanings, and attributions, the newly emerging and evolving existing discourses, especially meanings created by academics, will inevitably affect education, including the processes of internationalization, mobility, and exchange (Oleksiyenko, 2023). Hence, understanding how educators in the post-Soviet neighborhood are making sense of the conflict and construct new visions of the future in the reality of the ongoing conflict is important for scholars exploring the process of educational reform and, more specifically, higher education internationalization in the region.

Despite the importance of understanding the effects of the war and sanctions on higher education, as well as the process of new meaning-making among educators in the post-Soviet space, scholarly interest in the topic is still relatively nascent. We are aware of only a couple of studies on this topic. Most papers have thus far focused on the actual or perceived effects of war on higher education in Ukraine. Suchikova et al. (2023) analyzed the effects of the war on research and scientists at Ukrainian universities. Oleksiyenko, Shchepetylnykova, & Furiv (2023) explored Ukrainian academics' perceptions about the challenges, opportunities, and approaches to internationalization in the context of war, revealing "the transformative power of crisis-driven internationalization in redefining the ontological and axiological foundations of universities" (p.1103). Gharaibeh, Ahmad, and Malkawi (2023) explored the effects of the war on international students, who continue to study or have left Ukrainian universities, as well as implications of the conflict for international research collaborations of Ukrainian universities. Outside the field of higher education research, Kurapov et al. (2023) and Limone, Toto, and Messina (2022) conducted studies, that revealed the negative effects of the war on the mental health of academic personnel and university students in Ukraine, whereas Sritchawla et al. (2022) explored the broad implications of the war on the experiences of Ukrainian students at medical universities and Roy, Shubhajeet, and Ozair (2022) analyzed the experiences of overseas medical students in Ukraine during the war. In addition to the early explorations of the effects on Ukrainian higher education, Zavadskaya and Gerber (2023) revealed the impact of the conflict on academic freedom in Russian higher education. studies have not been conducted, on the actual or perceived effects of the war on other countries of the post-Soviet region. This could be due to the fact that the immediate effects are still unfolding, and the longer-term implications are yet to be seen.

This study will make one of the first contributions to the scholarship on the effects of Russo-Ukrainian war on higher education in general and on internationalization and international mobility in higher education in the region more specifically via a focused exploration of Kazakhstani higher education faculty and researchers' perceptions and anticipations with respect to the effects of the war and sanctions on higher education internationalization in their native country. Our paper is exploratory in nature and its general research question is: How do Kazakhstani academics conceptualize the effect of the Russo-Ukrainian war on internationalization and mobility in Kazakhstani higher education in the short and long term?

## **Methodology**

To achieve the purpose of the study we used a grounded theory approach. Grounded theory, pioneered by Glaser and Strauss (1967), is an interpretive research approach that seeks to induce theory from empirical data, in contrast to deducing from preconceived hypotheses. This approach is particularly appropriate to use for understanding emergent phenomena, where it may aid in understanding of its underlying patterns and processes (Charmaz, 2006). In addition, it is effective in understanding diverse perspectives and experiences related to a specific topic (Glasser, 1978). Finally, the approach is particularly useful for generating mid-range theories—those that are more specific and contextual than grand theories but still offer explanatory power (Bryant & Charmaz, 2007). The decision to employ the approach was driven by the exploratory nature of our endeavor—unveiling emerging and diverse university academics' perceptions regarding the near-and long-term repercussions of the ongoing Russian-Ukrainian conflict on the internationalization of higher education in the post-Soviet region. Grounded theory seemed well-suited for this endeavor, as it allowed for the development of insights through the systematic engagement with complex data without being restricted by predetermined theoretical frameworks, which we had not been able to identify for the object of our inquiry from the limited available research. We started our exploration from the ground allowing the data to bring us to a theory appropriate for interpretation.

The data was collected via semi-structured in-depth interviews. In-depth interviewing is invaluable when the aim is to delve into participants' lived experiences (Gubrium & Holstein, 2002), understand complex phenomena (Rubin & Rubin, 2011), and explore qualitative nuances (Seidman, 2013). They offer a means of gathering in-depth, contextualized data that contributes to a rich and multifaceted understanding of the research topic (Kvale & Brinkmann, 2009). Compared with the more structured approaches, the unstructured approach to the interviews allows for flexibility in questioning, enabling researchers to adapt and follow up on responses to gain deeper insights (Rubin & Rubin, 2011). Given the emerging complex, multifaceted nature of the war and its repercussions for education, as well as diverse views on the implications of the war for higher education, we thought that semi-structured in-depth interviewing would be well founded.

More specifically, we conducted extended online interviews with higher education faculty and researchers in Kazakhstan. The participants included 10 individuals (see Table 1) selected via purposeful sampling from among faculty and full-time scholars at various public and private universities in the country. We used a combination of a maximal variation and snowball approaches, whereby we selected some participants based on their profile descriptions on their employing university websites trying to include faculty varying on such parameters as (1) age; (2) sex; (3) institutional type; and (4) discipline. These parameters were shown as relevant by prior studies of factors affecting faculty views about and engagement in internationalization (Shwartz, 2014). This approach was aimed to ensure the representation of various perspectives (Creswell, 2013). We also asked the participants to indicate some other potential candidates and to provide their contacts, approaching some of the suggested individuals if they could provide additional diversity to the sample based on the desired parameters of variation indicated above.

Each participant was requested to take part in one interview, which lasted for approximately one hour. The interviews were conducted online to increase participation rates and to ensure greater confidentiality for the participants. Our prior experience shows that Kazakhstani faculty are more willing to participate in interviews online because they have very busy schedules at work and find it more compelling to answer questions from the comfort of their own home outside the working hours and without the risk of being accidentally overheard by a colleague in a shared office or a packed university canteen/library.

The interviews were conducted and analyzed in Russian with resulting themes and quotes translated into English in preparation of this manuscript. The analysis process commenced with thorough familiarization with the collected data. Initial open coding was performed, involving a line-by-line examination of the data to identify meaningful concepts, incidents, and ideas. These codes were generated inductively, allowing emerging patterns and themes to surface organically from the data. Following open coding, axial coding was undertaken to explore relationships between codes and to develop categories. In the subsequent stage, selective coding was carried out to further refine the core categories. Through iterative cycles of data comparison, the theoretical framework was eventually refined.

**Table 1**

*Summary of Participant Characteristics*

ID	Age	Sex	Institutional type	Discipline
Participant 1	30	M	Public, national level*	Political Science
Participant 2	42	M	Private, state level	Physics
Participant 3	35	F	Public, state level	Biology
Participant 4	40	M	Private, state level	Psychology
Participant 5	50	M	Private, state level	Computer science
Participant 6	39	M	Public, national level	History

Participant 7	38	F	Public, state level	Education
Participant 8	52	F	Private, national level	Sociology
Participant 9	58	F	Public, national level	Chemistry
Participant 10	27	F	Private, national level	International Relations

(\*) In the context of Kazakhstan “national-level” means that this university admits students from around the country, conducts research important at the national scale, and receives more funding given the role. “State-level” universities tend to attract students from a specific “oblast” (comparable to a state in the US) in the country and devote their research efforts to topics of the oblast’s importance.

## Results

This section reports the main results of the study. One of the key findings is that most of the participants of the interview anticipated that the Russian-Ukrainian conflict and sanctions imposed on Russia would create mostly positive changes for higher education internationalization and international mobility in Kazakhstan. The majority of faculty and researchers mentioned that the geopolitical changes had disrupted some long-established patterns and might create some new opportunities, which, in the long term, would have positive effects on Kazakhstani higher education. These opportunities were frequently conceptualized in terms of (1) occupying the place previously taken by Russia in higher education provision for international and Russia-bound domestic students; (2) benefiting from the exodus of Russian academics escaping from the current political regime and mandatory conscription; (3) becoming more attractive as potential international collaborative research partners as a replacement for previously attractive Russian scholars/institutions given the emerging centrality of the country in the post-Soviet region; and (4) greater diversification of educational and research connections as a result of breaking from overdependence on Russian academia in the past.

The key emerging themes representing academics’ views about the anticipated impacts of the war and sanctions on internationalization and mobility in higher education in Kazakhstan are summarized below. In the subsequent section, we provide a possible theoretical interpretation for the themes emerging from the data.

### Novel Approaches to Performing Research, Teaching, and Administrative Tasks Related to Internationalization

The trade and cross-border transportation disruptions have created some complications for Kazakhstani faculty and scholars in the process of teaching and research. Some research labs had closely collaborated with Russian scholars before the war with experiments conducted in laboratories abroad or equipment being supplied or repaired by Russian companies. The old approaches to collaboration led to underutilization of domestic equipment, as well as to occasionally questionable publication practices, where Kazakhstani grant recipients would pay Russian scholars for conducting and publishing the studies in exchange for co-authorship on the resultant publications. After the beginning of the war, these labs had to reconsider their supply routes and had to come up with ways to run independent experiments and to make better use of the equipment at home. This has led to some innovative solutions to conducting research (including collaborative ones) with faculty purchasing a 3D printer to print broken parts or using Russian immigrant scholars to show domestic teams how to properly use the existing equipment or underutilized software. Most of our participants believe that the short-term challenges will eventually lead to more independence and better approaches to running experiments and labs, to better utilization and care about domestic equipment, and to improvements in the processes of procurement and repair contracts with supplying companies from abroad. In the long run, improved quality of the research infrastructure and skills in using it by domestic scholars might strengthen the ability of Kazakhstani scholars to diversify international research collaborations.

Our team was affected by sanctions at the beginning of the war, so we had to change some of our old approaches to purchasing equipment and replacing broken parts in our new projects. In one of the ongoing projects, a machine we use for our testing had broken a month before the war and we had ordered a replacement from Russia. The new

machine has not yet been delivered. We tried to be creative, figured which part of the machine needed to be replaced and printed the broken part with a 3D printer (Participant 2).

Prior to the war, given the poor skills of many Kazakhstani faculty in speaking and writing in foreign languages, some Kazakhstani academics relied on publications in Russian journals and had minimal experience with international peer-reviewed journals. The questionable publication practices mentioned above were one of the attempted solutions to the lack of language and publication skills. Due to moral concerns about the Russian aggression on Ukraine, some scholars have made a conscious choice to reduce the number of articles they send to Russian journals and to redirect their efforts to producing manuscripts for international journals. Some faculty and researchers anticipate that this will increase interest among scholars to learn English and will improve the publication skills of academics. Others indicated that the changes might also contribute to the development of local journals.

For some of my colleagues, it was just easier to continue to rely on their Russian partners in their research and publication. The war has pushed them to start learning English or to start exploring collaborations with universities in Turkey and China (Participant 5).

### **Student Mobility Changes**

Two key changes have been noted by the participants concerning student mobility. First, as has been noted earlier, the faculty members believed there was an increase in the number of international students at Kazakhstani universities. This change was perceived as largely positive. The majority of the participants felt that the short-term change would improve the capacity of universities to serve international students, will make universities more attractive to international clients in the long term, will bring additional profits, and will improve the quality of education for both international and domestic students, thus enhancing the competitiveness and the position in international rankings of some Kazakhstani institutions.

There is an increasing interest of students from Russia to get admitted to KZ universities as a mechanism to escape military conscription and, potentially, as a pathway for immigration to the country. The issue is that there is no clarity about mechanisms yet. There are Kazakhstani scholarships for international students, there are grants for hosting Russian students coming on short-term mobility, but there is lack of information about these opportunities and Russian students have difficulty getting access to it (Participant 1).

In the long term, Central Asian students will start to consider KZ because of the departure of Russia from the Bologna process. This will increase inbound mobility, and this will have positive effects on our education. This will lead to an increase in the quality of education and will improve self-expectations from the faculty, will help people to wake up from inertia, and to focus on good teaching and advising practices (Participant 2).

We have an increasing interest from Mongolian students. In the past, they chose Russia to be able to study in Russian. After a visit to our university, they started to consider sending students to Kazakhstan. There was an increase in the number of applications from Russia and Belarus from what I heard. This will be all beneficial in the future. Our university has started to take international students more seriously and tries its best to support the ones, who are coming now (Participant 7).

Another change, which was observed with respect to student mobility patterns was a reorientation of domestic student flows from Russia to other countries. Several faculty members noted that they had noticed more youth choosing to go to Turkey, South Korea, China, and Western countries for their education after the beginning of the conflict. In the past, Russia attracted a significant share of internationally bound Kazakhstani students, which created an imbalance in the distribution of the mobility flows. Most of our participants thought that emerging patterns would bring positive changes by diversifying the knowledge, skills, linguistic repertoire, and cultural experiences of Kazakhstani youth and by enriching the pool of ideas for reform in the future with expertise from a greater variety of countries.

Russians left the Bologna process. Individual decision-making students would no longer be interested in degrees in Russia because their diplomas are not recognized in KZ any longer. Their system at the level of Baccalaureate is now going to be very different. In the past, our students went there, got their Bachelor's and came back to KZ to continue with Master's. Now students are not interested because they cannot continue in KZ (Participant 2).

I can see in our university that more parents are interested in sending their children to Turkey now, even ethnic Russians. I am glad to see this. We need people with an understanding of different cultural contexts and neighbors other than Russia (Participant 7).

Some positive changes have happened not only in research but also in approaches to teaching and supporting international students. Four faculty members (Participants 1,6,8,10) reported an increase in the number of international students at their institutions. This increase was linked to (1) the transfer and new applications from young Russian males, who are trying to escape mandatory military conscription; (2) the transfer and new applications from Asian and African international students, who were previously interested in pursuing their degrees in Russia and Ukraine; as well as to (3) a small increase in the number of applications from Central Asian students, who have reconsidered Russia as an attractive destination for higher education. The participants believed that the need to accept a growing number of international students has created some unanticipated challenges for universities, such as a lack of dormitories and facilities, English-speaking personnel, and novel issues in processing student visas. When dealing with these issues, universities may have come up with various creative approaches and may improve their capacity to deal with international students and to provide proper support and accommodations. Most faculty believe that this will benefit the process of internationalization in the long run.

### **Faculty Mobility Changes**

In parallel to the student flows, two key changes were observed by the participants in the patterns of faculty mobility. First, almost all participants talked about an influx of Russian scholars to Kazakhstani universities. Some of the scholars sought an escape from military mobilization. Others were abandoning their positions at Russian universities for ideological reasons, unwilling to comply with the changes in the political discourse and the regime. Several participants reported that their universities have hired some Russian intellectuals in full-time and part-time faculty and researcher positions. The influx of Russian scholars is largely perceived as beneficial for the Kazakhstani higher education in the long run. Many domestic faculty believe that those who would stay in the country after the end of the war would enrich the academic environment with their knowledge and skills, while those who would leave – would most likely continue international collaborations with Kazakhstani partners.

We have this new faculty member who was hired from among Russian professors, who trained our scholars to use an international plant and animal biodiversity database. In the past, nobody in KZ knew how to do this. After this training, we have launched our own system and have started digitalization of our species... The Institute of Zoology in Almaty has accepted many scholars from Russia trying to escape mobilization. They have started a conference, started to push the initiative for Kazakhstan's joining Global Biodiversity Digitalization initiative. We are also planning to bring another person from Russia, who is an expert on plant physiology. We have lots of equipment, but we don't know how to use it. The expert promised to teach us how to use the equipment (Participant 3).

I know of at least 10 Russians who moved to work in Kazakhstani universities after the beginning of the war... I am actually actively attracting Russian scholars to my projects myself. They have much greater research skills and capacity in my particular discipline. They now cost more in terms of hiring. They also do not have a choice. So, I am hiring them. We are also trying to help the best, most promising scholars, sometimes at the request of our senior Russian colleagues (Participant 6).

The war has also modified international mobility and international collaboration preferences of Kazakhstani scholars. At least five respondents mentioned that there was some sort of inertia among their colleagues in the past, whereby they had relied on the path of least resistance and tended to collaborate and visit predominantly Russian

universities due to shared linguistic and research training backgrounds. The war, ideological disagreements with Russians, and concerns about potential aggression on Kazakhstan in particular, have pushed many to overcome the inertia and to start exploring mobility and collaborative opportunities with universities from far abroad, as well as to consider learning a foreign language.

I studied in Russia and had many colleagues there. My English was also weak. So, I used to collaborate mostly with Russian scholars in the past. It was a safe zone. After the war, I have reconsidered some of my relations. I just can no longer work with people, who share different beliefs about the war. I have stopped publishing with Russians and started to work more with Turks. They have expressed interest and I have supported this (Participant 5).

Most faculty saw the development in a positive light. They expected that the change in the faculty mobility orientation would contribute to the strengthening of the research potential of the domestic faculty, would push local scholars to attend international conferences, to expand the basis of their international partners, and pursue independent research instead of resorting to the current practice of paying Russian collaborators for a place in the list of co-authors on a publication from projects funded by the Kazakhstani government.

### **New Roles in International Research Collaboration**

Several interviewees noted the changing nature of international research collaborations. Two types of changes were noted. The first way in which international collaboration changed is that Kazakhstani scholars became more attractive as collaborators for Russian scholars. Due to the change in geopolitical situation, the Russian government has reoriented its international research funding to Central Asia encouraging Russian scholars to pursue more collaborations with scholars from the “stans”.

Russians, not all of them, but most progressive ones for sure, have started to reconsider how they engage in work with Kazakhstani researchers and how they look at Central Asia in general. For example, in one of the partner universities, the head of postdoctoral studies is a Central Asian person now... There has been a change in the requirements of the key grant giving agency in Russia. Scholars are now being awarded points for engaging scholars from Central Asia in PI and co-PI capacities. The expectation is that projects must be led by a regional scholar. (Participant 1).

While this is not widely spread, but it seems that the younger generation of scholars, who are not as infected with the imperial discourse, are starting to look at Kazakhstani scholars and collaboration with Kazakhs in more positive ways. They are also becoming more open to the idea of exploring the ideas of orientalism and reconsidering the role of Russia as a colonial state (Participant 6).

The second way in which international collaboration changed is that Kazakhstani scholars became more attractive for Western scholars. The frequently provided explanation was that Russia had stopped being attractive for the Western partners as the main co-applicant, who had coordinated data collection from the whole post-Soviet region, where Kazakhs had played a minor supportive role. Consequently, some scholars anticipate that Kazakhstan may become more attractive as the key regional collaborator to replace Russian scholars in the capacity. This effect may be restricted to some disciplines, however, because Kazakhstani scholars in some fields may lack the research capacity to sustain large collaborative research programs.

In the past, much Western funding was directed to Russia because they have research capacity and more interesting sites for research into nuclear ecology. Now, our region and scholars became more attractive for exploration and collaboration because access to Russian nuclear sites is closed (Participant 2).

The interviewees believed that the new roles of Kazakhstani scholars in international partnerships are there to stay. There was an optimism that Kazakhstan would become a more attractive partner in international research partnerships. In addition, the participants believed that both changes would bring positive developments for Kazakhstani



research. Domestic scholars would be better positioned to shape research agendas and to conduct research, which meets the interest of the country and Kazakhstani people. They would be empowered to determine research questions and design. They would have a better capacity to support graduate students and to train the next generation of scholars, as well as to develop their own research capacity.

### **Income Flow Changes**

When asked about the potential effects of the war on funding redistribution in higher education about internationalization the participants noted both potential financial gains and losses for Kazakhstani higher education. Among the gains was the increase in access to research funding from the Russian government and from international donors, which resulted from the exclusion of Russian scholars from international funding schemes and partnerships, as well as from the reorientation of the Russian research funding priorities from the West to Asia and Africa, including Central Asia.

Ministry of Education in Russia must have given the order to engage more with post-Soviet Central Asia in terms of research...Russian universities used to spend their grant funding on interaction with Western scholars. However, they can no longer do this. So, they have to find new ways to internationalize and to engage in partnership research, they need to reorient and strengthen their relationships with scholars in Kazakhstan and other countries of Central Asia now (Participant 1).

One of my doctoral students is in Russia now. She was allowed to go to Russia by the Kazakh government, and I quickly learned that the Russian side understands now that they have to turn to post-Soviet Central Asia, in particular Kazakhstan. This has become a reality. They started to discuss collaborative projects with me and my students. They have provided free housing and a meal plan to her. Seems like they do not know where to redirect their resources and Kazakhstan is one of their few choices now (Participant 2).

Another gain was connected to the changing patterns of domestic student international mobility. Several faculty members noted that due to the decline in the attractiveness of Russia for outward-bound domestic students, they would be more likely to invest in their education at home and this will increase the tuition income for Kazakhstani universities. Similarly, the influx of international students would bring additional revenue for higher education institutions in Kazakhstan.

I am glad that our students are staying home now. We saw an increase in applications this year and would benefit from the heightened competition for admission both in terms of quality of students and tuition income (Participant 7).

In parallel with the income gains, the war has brought some inevitable economic losses. Some participants were concerned that the economic decline, and global inflation would have negative consequences for the government funding of international mobility and research, as well as, to some extent, for the demand for international student mobility. If the economic conditions continue to worsen, fewer students will endeavor to go abroad or to come to Kazakhstan in the context of shrinking funding, dwindling job prospects, and lowering family incomes. One of the main concerns was about the potential negative effects of secondary sanctions if those were to be applied towards Kazakhstan.

### **Local Capacity Effects**

One of the themes in the interviews was concerned with the potential effects of the war on the development of the local capacity. Some faculty members were optimistic about the potential effects. They believed that the influx of highly qualified Russian academic cadre and previously unavailable external funding might have a transforming impact on the development of the capacity of local researchers and universities. These faculty anticipated that the Russian scholars would share their expertise with the local researchers, would raise the quality of teaching of the young generation of scholars, and would create healthy levels of competition, which would push the local faculty members to work harder and to develop their skills in both teaching and research. Similarly, positive effects were predicted from the increase in

external research funding, as well as from the repositioning of Kazakhstani scholars in international research collaborations. Several respondents thought that this would stimulate research activity and the emergence of new international collaborations with both Russia and other countries.

On the other hand, some of the participants anticipated negative effects from the influx of Russian scholars. They were concerned that the arrival of the Russian counterparts would reduce chances for local researchers due to the age-long beliefs in the higher research capacity of the Russians. As a result, government money will be invested in the foreigners, whereas local capacity development will not be sufficiently supported.

This is like in sports. We have news all over now about Russian sportsmen and sportswomen coming to compete for Kazakhstan. However, some Kazakh athletes are saying that this deprives them from opportunities and potential funding from the government. The same is with scholars. In some ways, the quality of our scholars will improve since the competition will be greater, but then we always have this obsession with everything foreign and some of our scholars may not get hired or paid because they will be considered less qualified than Russians (Participant 3).

### **Changes in Dependency Status**

An overarching theme for many of the predictions was related to the expected change in the dependency status of Kazakhstani research and higher education. Russian aggression in Ukraine has undermined the previously unshakable belief of many Kazakhstani in the “eternal friendship” with the Northern neighbor. Most of our participants became critical of the previously held interpretations of the benefits and losses arising from collaboration with Russian colleagues, in the equal distribution of the benefits in particular; as well as of the potential losses in terms of developing local capacity, meeting local needs, and preserving the Kazakh identity, language and culture. In this sense, the participants implied positive changes in Kazakhstani higher education and research becoming less dependent on the influence of the Russian academia. They thought that with “the leash from Russia getting loose” (Participant 6), Kazakhstani scholars would finally overcome its inertia, the tendency to rely on old post-Soviet connections with Russians and on the knowledge of the Russian language, and would start to explore other possibilities, to learn other languages and to seek new partners. In the long term, this will lead to greater diversification of ideas, better opportunities for self-determination, and greater sustainability.

There is a window of opportunity. In the past, we used to be too integrated into Russia in many senses. Now we have the opportunity to collaborate with other countries, which can give us better technologies and better knowledge. In the past, we continued collaborating with Russians due to inertia. We shared the language. We were a part of the old system. We just continued existing ties. Now, the world has turned upside down. A new generation of scholars will come, and they will reorient themselves (Participant 5).

I think that breaking up with Russia will open more opportunities for collaboration with other countries. We will reorient our minds from Russia to the rest of the world. I think we have been too dependent on post-Soviet Russian thinking. To some extent, the Iron Curtain is being demolished for KZ only now (Participant 2).

However, very few of the scholars are critical of the dangers of over-engagement with new allies, with the possibility of new dependencies. Only two scholars in our sample thought that it is important to continue to maintain balance and not over-engage.

We should not get too excited about these new opportunities, and we should stay sober and try to continue to balance and pursue our primary interests. We should not over-rely only on Russia or China or West. We should develop our own capacity both in military and in science. We should engage only in relations/collaborations, which will be beneficial for us only. Russia is not going to disappear, and we should continue to engage with it, but we should be prepared for the worse changes in the political regime there. The government should continue to balance and, most importantly, should invest in our domestic potential (Participant 4).

We will have more attention from Western countries to the countries of Central Asia. For us, this will be a chance. However, we should pay more attention not only to European countries, but also to Arab countries, which now offer more funding, and which are interested in collaboration with partner universities in our region. We should also collaborate with China more. I can see an increasing interest from Chinese universities to collaborate with our universities. If in the past we looked only at Europe, we should now expand our geography of collaboration. We should diversify our partners. We should look at China, Turkey, Arab countries, Singapore. We should just make sure that we engage with top world universities. We can learn from any of them. Position in the ranking is more important than the country of origin (Participant 7).

### **Discussion and Conclusions**

The study of the perceptions of Kazakhstani scholars about the potential effects of the war between Russia and Ukraine (and associated sanctions) on internationalization and international mobility in higher education in the country and in the region, in general, revealed two important findings. First, Kazakhstani academics tend to see most changes related to the war in a positive way as a set of new opportunities. They anticipate several gains, including gains in skills, expertise, funding availability, and status/positionalities. Operating within the broader neoliberal discourse of competition and economic effectiveness, most of our participants see the current situation created by the war in terms of market reconfiguration, which will make Kazakhstani higher education and Kazakhstani scholars more competitive and attractive for external partners. On the other hand, higher education professionals are highly optimistic about the changing dependency status of Kazakhstan in the global colonial system relying more on the humanistic decoloniality discourse in conceptualizing the benefit. This decoloniality-related theme, however, is not very salient and is not associated with a critical perspective concerning non-Russian players. Faculty are cognizant of the weakening dependence on Russia but are not concerned with the potential of the increasing dependence on the West or China.

Regardless of the ideological orientation, all respondents seem to interpret the effects of the war in terms of redistribution of assets which influence the ability of the holder to advance in economic competition. This understanding led us to the realization of the potential relevance of the concept of capital and the explanatory value of the different forms of capital. We tried to reconceptualize the themes emerging from the findings in terms of five forms of capital: financial, experiential capital, human, social, and political. As a result of this effort, we were able to account for all of the themes with the help of the system of five capitals. Table 2 provides a snapshot of matches between our themes and the types of capital differentiated by the type of discourse – neoliberal or decolonial.

To conclude, the results of our analysis revealed that the effects of war between Russia and Ukraine on internationalization and international mobility in higher education in the post-Soviet region are conceptualized by Kazakhstani academics mostly in positive terms. There is less awareness about any negative consequences at this point, possibly, due to the early stage in the process of emergence of the new world order. Our study points to a promising way to conceptualize these effects in terms of various types of capital, which can capture the complexity of the influences on individuals, scholarly communities and practices, political statuses, aspirations, connections, and funding redistribution. Future studies of the effects of the war on higher education and internationalization in the region might find the types of capital framework useful in developing research questions and data collection and analysis strategies.

**Table 2***Matching discourses, types of capitals and themes from the findings*

Types of capital	Definition	Gains (neoliberal economic discourse)	Losses (decolonial educational discourse)
Financial	Financial capital includes anything with a monetary value, contingent on the company using it to pursue revenue (Bourdieu, 2011)	Funding redistribution to KZ from former Russian partners and Russians.  Return of domestic students and increase in supply of int. students -> more money for higher education.	Less funding for science due to economic decline
Experiential capital	Experiential capital is the knowledge gained through a variety of firsthand experiences over the course of one's life (O'Shea, 2016).	New experiences for KZ scholars working with foreign journals.  New approaches to accommodate international students.  Skills to use own equipment, which will allow to become more attractive collaborator.	
Human capital	Human capital involves a person's knowledge, skills, and expertise, and is acquired through the development of skills and capabilities that enable people to perform in new ways (Becker 1964).	Supply of skilled Russian scholars.  More students will stay in KZ.  More students will go to other countries.  Opening of branches and increase in foreign specialists.	Competition for local scholars, negative effects on them, equity effects
Social capital	Social capital takes the form of social networks but also concerns the relations among individuals in a group or organization. Such networks result from the prevalence of norms such as trust, collaboration, and a sense of obligation (Coleman, 1988).	Former Russian partners will come to KZ with increased interest in the region.  Diversification of ties, brokerage gains (due to positionality with respect to Russia).	Loss of connections with Russian scholars
Political capital	Political capital - sum of combining other types of capital for purposive political action or the return of an investment of political capital which is returned into the system of production (reinvestment) (Cassey,	Greater interest in KZ for int. collaborators and funders due to its positionality near Russia and China.  Weakening of overdependence on Russia in research, opportunity for a more balanced development of research and higher education in general.	Potential of new dependencies on the geopolitical players, who became strengthened as a result of the war (West, China)

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