

THESIS APPROVAL FORM
NAZARBAYEV UNIVERSITY
SCHOOL OF HUMANITIES AND SOCIAL SCIENCES

KAZAKHSTANI KOREANS: DIASPORIC TIES IN
KAZAKHSTAN
AND TRANSNATIONAL PRACTICES
WITH SOUTH KOREA

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A thesis submitted in partial fulfilment of the requirements for the degree of

Master of Arts in Eurasian Studies

at

NAZARBAYEV UNIVERSITY –
SCHOOL OF SCIENCES AND HUMANITIES

Abstract

The Korean community of Kazakhstan had formed as a result of the initial migration from the Korean peninsula to the Russian Far East at the end of the 19th century and further forced relocation to Central Asia ordered by Stalin in 1937. These Koreans speak Russian as their first language and give their children Russian names. They are dispersed over the vast territory of Kazakhstan and represented in various professional fields. Although today this ethnic community, accounting to over 100,000 people, is represented by the fifth generation of Koreans, in the official sources this ethnic group is referred as the ‘Korean diaspora’.

This thesis argues that the Korean community of Kazakhstan doesn’t necessarily fits into the official narrative of diasporic identity as defined by scholarly literature or the officials of Kazakhstan and South Korea. Instead, this community demonstrates a distinctive distancing from diasporic claims and stances articulated by a small minority of the Korean community i.e., the Association of Koreans of Kazakhstan. This research project attempts to understand the reasons for such distancing from their ethnic community in Kazakhstan and motivation to reconnect with South Korea as their perceived ancestral homeland.

This thesis is mainly drawn on ethnographic interviews to provide a “bottom-up” perspective from the diasporans themselves. These interviews then are compared with the official rhetoric circulated by national information agents, the Embassy of South Korea in Kazakhstan, and the Associations of Koreans of Kazakhstan. The findings of this research suggest that diasporic boundaries within the examined community are loosening due to various factors such as forgetting of their native language, blurring of collective memory, high rate of intermarriage as well as the economic and technological development. Instead, the Korean community engages in

transnational practices with their perceived historic homeland: South Korea. These transnational practices, that have been recently expanding include educational and labor migration and associated with it financial and cultural remittances.

Acknowledgments

I want to express my deep gratitude to my thesis advisors: Dr. Saltanat Akhmetova and Dr. Eva-Marie Dubuisson for their thoughtful guidance. Their professional expertise and personal involvement were invaluable for me throughout this thesis development. I would also like to sincerely thank my external advisor, Dr. Alexander Diener, for his valuable feedback and support. I wish to thank Dr. Nikolay Tsyrempilov, the director of the Eurasian Studies MA program, the faculty of the School of Humanities and Social Sciences, and the Writing Center for mentoring me during my two-year-long program.

Thanks also go to my cohort for their help in the recruiting process and the motivation they shared with me during the program. I want to acknowledge the input of all the participants to this thesis and thank them for their time, enthusiasm, and honesty. It has been a very enriching experience for me as a researcher and a person.

And finally, I want to thank my family for their patience and support throughout the long process of developing and writing this thesis.

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Chapter 1

From the Korean Peninsula to Central Asia

Introduction

Due to its turbulent history, today Kazakhstan is a home for about 130 ethnicities with the Korean community or Koryo Saram representing one of its ten biggest ethnic groups (www.gov.kz, 2021). Koryo Saram, which translates into English as the people of Korea, is the term that the Korean communities of the post-Soviet states use to refer to themselves (Kim, 2018). A closer look at the history of the Soviet nationalities policy theorized and implemented by Lenin and Stalin in the early 1920s helps in better understanding Koryo Saram in the modern Kazakhstani context. The policy was promoting linguistic, cultural, and territorial consciousness of these nationalities previously oppressed by the Tsarist Empire. Lenin was convinced that “good nationalism” will ensure these nationalities’ loyalty to the new socialist regime (Skalnik, 1990; Slezkine, 1994). Ethnic groups located on the borders of the former Tsarist Empire were considered as the most vulnerable communities, given their proximity to foreign influence and, thus, were encouraged to promote their ethnic heritage. This was meant to strengthen the borders of the newly built Soviet Union (Slezkine, 1994, p. 414). However, while giving this policy institutional and financial support, the Communist Party expected all nationalities to eventually merge under the overarching Soviet identity in the following decade (Slezkine, 1994). This Soviet identity also acquired some traits of russification by the late 1930s when Stalin declared Russians as the ‘first among equals’ (Branderberger, 2004).

The shift in nationalities policy eventually led to the displacement of some ethnic groups. Thus, some ethnic communities located along the borders of the Soviet Union became the victims of repressions and mass deportations as “unreliable people” later during the Stalinist regime (Gelb, 1995). Among these communities, Koryo Saram were one of the first ethnic groups to be deported

from the Russian Far East to Central Asia based on their ethnicity alone (Gelb, 1995; Martin, 2001).

Kazakhstan, in turn, was viewed by the Soviet officials as a “settler region” (Dave, 2007). The deportations of some ethnic communities including Germans, Chechens, Chuvash, and Koreans followed by Khrushchev’s program of cultivation of “virgin lands” in the middle of the 1950s provoking the influx of Slavs, contributed to the multi-ethnic composition of today’s Kazakhstan (Dave, 2007). This ethnic shuffling is responsible for cultural heterogeneity on the one hand and certain commonalities that one can observe in the Kazakhstani society today, on the other.

Academic research on Soviet “nationalities question” started only after the USSR’s dissolution in 1991 when the state loosened control over archives (Kim and King, 2001). A wave of interest in diasporas and transnationalism was observed in the last couple of decades across the globe. Many Western, Asian, and post-Soviet scholars became interested in diasporas and their cross-border ties, yet Kazakhstani ethnic minorities still have a lot to offer as communities for research (Chang, 2016; Kim and King, 2001; Kokaisl, 2018; Mehendale, 2004; Saveliev, 2012). The literature reviewed within this research suggests that the scholarly focus of the last two decades was on the Stalinist period that was responsible for Koreans’ mass deportation to Central Asia and further marginalization to the agricultural sector (Chang, 2016). These works are mainly based on the official documentation retrieved from the state archives. Nevertheless, several recent studies look at the post-Soviet diasporic developments and mobility trends which are based on fieldwork (Chang, 2016; Dave, 2007; Diener 2009a; Kokaisl, 2018; Saveliev, 2012).

This work seeks to bridge the gap in understanding diasporic processes of the Korean community in Kazakhstan and their transnational practices with South Korea in a modern context

based on the diasporans lived experiences. Therefore, this research combines the existing scholarly works, review of media sources on the Korean community, and personal accounts of Kazakhstani Koreans themselves. This study explores such important aspects shaping diasporic identity as culture, intermarriage, languages, collective memory, concept of homeland, sense of community, and transnational practices. It also takes into consideration official narratives on the Korean diaspora of Kazakhstan as presented by media.

This research project seeks to understand from the participants' lived experiences how the Korean community maintains its diasporic boundaries. It also tries to understand how the Korean community is positioned by the officials of Kazakhstan and South Korea and how these governmental stances affect diasporic consciousness and encourage/discourage transnational practices with their perceived homeland – South Korea. I argue that the Korean community of Kazakhstan has developed a hybrid identity and demonstrates a distinctive distancing from their Kazakhstani co-ethnics and the claims that the Association of Koreans of Kazakhstan makes. Instead, this community tends to reconnect with South Korea. This thesis attempts to apprehend the reasons for such distancing from their ethnic community in Kazakhstan and motivation to reconnect with South Korea as their perceived ancestral homeland.

The first chapter discusses history of the Korean diaspora formation, theoretical framework as contended by some scholars, and the methodology used within this research. The second chapter explores diasporic identity through the attempt to understand current diasporic processes such as collective memory, observance of traditions, fluency in native language, and intermarriage. The third chapter introduces the actors that play a role in defining diasporic spaces and, thus, their consciousness. These are Kazakhstan and South Korea who are through their mediators such as the Associations of Koreans in Kazakhstan and historic figures communicate their political agenda

to the diaspora. And finally, the fourth chapter looks at the territorialization of the Korean community in Kazakhstan and the emergence of the transnational practices with South Korea. The findings of this research are summarized in the concluding chapter.

Historic overview

Currently, over 500,000 ethnic Koreans reside in post-Soviet countries, mainly in Russia, Kazakhstan, Uzbekistan, and Kyrgyzstan, out of which over 100,000 Koreans are Kazakhstani citizens (Saveliev, 2012). It is of particular importance for this study to look back at the origins of Koreans first immigration to the Russian Far East and further deportation to Central Asia to understand the origins of their dispersal and how the traumatic experience of first escaping famine and later being deported to Central Asia impacted the diaspora's identity. Kim and King (2001) refer to the Central Asian Koreans as Koryo Saram or continental Koreans underscoring that this term should be uniquely used regarding those Koreans who experienced the deportation of 1937 and their descendants. It is important to distinguish this group from the Sakhalin Koreans who were brought to the island during Japanese occupation after the deportation of 1937. Besides, they migrated to the Russian Far East from a different region of Korea. Sakhalin Koreans remained on the island and became Soviet citizens (Diener, 2009a).

Korean peasants' migration to the Russian Far East, mostly from Hamgyong province, was provoked by famine, search for land, and Japanese economic and cultural oppression. These peasants were joined later by the activists of the anti-Japanese liberation movement (Kim, 2001). The first migration of the Korean peasants to the Russian Far East was marked in 1863 during the drought in Korea, another wave of migration caused by the famine of 1869-1870 brought around 15,000 Koreans. The estimated number of the Korean population on Russian territory by 1883 accounted for slightly over 32,000 people (Gelb, 1995). A further influx of migrants to Priamur's

was stimulated by the bill on land allotments, tax, and military service exemption signed by Alexander II at the end of the nineteenth century. Although the bill was designed primarily for the Russian population, it has been mainly seized by the Korean and Chinese peasants, since at the time Russians believed that the land was unlivable there (Chang, 2016).

The number of Korean migrants to the Russian Far East increased by 1910 to 50,000. This is when they started cultivating rice and farming silk. Japanese oppression starting in 1905 insured further migration from the Korean peninsula. By 1925 almost all of 90,000 Koreans accepted Soviet citizenship and composed in their main places of settlement up to fifty percent of the total population. The population of the Far Eastern Koreans grew from 106,000 in 1923 to 170,000 in 1927. Although the flow of migrants ceased in 1931, the natural increase helped them to account to 200,000 people by 1935 (Gelb, 1995).

According to Kim and King (2001), the defeat of Russia in the Russo-Japanese War of 1904 was the main reason for the emergence of the "yellow peril" discourse which was initiated by the Priamur governor-general P.F. Utenberger. The Tsarist authorities perceived Koreans as potential Japanese spies; thus, they used this ploy to justify the first deportations of Koreans back to their homeland where they were executed by the Japanese government. Despite the bigoted attitudes, the Koreans of the Russian Far East (RFE) relatively easily assimilated to the local culture, learned the Russian language, and tended to demonstrate their loyal attitude toward both the Tsarist and Soviet regimes (Chang, 2016; Kim & King, 2001). Kim and King (2001) highlight that the Korean immigrants to the Russian land were flexible in meeting the regime requirements. Thus, they accepted Orthodoxy within the first two years then abandoned the religion to comply with the Soviet Party atheist ideology. Besides, Korean settlers actively participated in World War I and the Revolution of 1917. However, only the first generation of the Koreans of the RFE could

benefit from the Korean migrants' endeavors to assimilate during the korenizatsiia* (nationalization policy) of the 1920s (Kim & King, 2001). During this decade the Korean community of the RFE was institutionally and financially encouraged to operate schools and universities as well as to publish newspapers and books in their native language. Korenizatsiia brought all but the autonomy that Koreans of the RFE were hoping for.

The turning point in their lives was 1937 when Stalin issued an order on mass deportation to Central Asia. All the Koreans of Vladivostok Oblast and a few neighboring regions of the Russian Far East including the Khabarovsk, Amur, Nizhneamurskaia, Ussuri, Primorskaia, and Jewish Autonomous oblasts as well as Koreans of Buryat-Mongol Krai and Chita Oblast were deported to Central Asia (Gelb, 1995). This forced resettlement, "destroyed not only their economic base but also their roots, taking them far away from both their ancestral homeland and their new homeland in Russia", (Saveliev, 2012, p. 488). Some scholars argue that the deportation of 1937, which forced the displacement of around two-hundred thousand Koreans, is falsely presented in the research literature as a "spontaneous" and individual decision made by Stalin (Chang, 2016; Kim & King, 2001). These scholars unearth the facts that prove racist sentiments of locals as well as higher officials and thorough preparations to forced relocation (e.g., trial relocation of Koreans to Central Asia in the 1920s). The deportation was carried out in inhuman conditions which many deportees couldn't survive. Cattle carriers were used to transport families with elderly people and children during a month-long journey to Central Asia. People had to leave behind their homes and most of their household items taking just a bare minimum of possessions to survive (Akiner, 2004; Chang, 2016; Kim and King, 2001).

They were promised autonomy, financial reimbursement, and freedom in practicing their language and culture, while just some of them received promised financial aid, although partially,

and all were forbidden from speaking their native language and restrained from religious practice shortly after deportation (Chang, 2016). Koreans of the RFE were deported to different regions of Central Asia and were refused to have any independent form of organization (Akiner, 2004). Moreover, some families were separated and spent considerable time and effort to reunite (Akiner, 2004; Chang, 2016). The first years were especially harsh since the deportees were located in barren areas with no living facilities (tents and dugouts in best cases). Many didn't survive severe transportation conditions, but even more severe living conditions, and "starvation ration" of their new homeland (Akiner 2004, p. 45). Kim and King (2001) along with Chang (2016) view the deportation to Central Asia as a continuation of the Tsarist regime with the forced relocation of 1937 as a defining point in their fate and status in the Soviet context.

In this regard, Akiner (2007) adds that after unexpected deportation to Central Asia, they were labeled as "special settlers" and "fifth column", although the majority tended to demonstrate their loyal attitude to the Soviet regime (Akiner, 2004; Chang 2016). It was only in the 1950s when this regime was loosened and allowed them to obtain some mobility within the Soviet Union. Unlike other ethnic deportees who chose to live in rejection of exile and to return to their homeland, the Koreans pragmatically accepted their destiny and strived to make Kazakhstan their new home (Akiner, 2007). Thus, within three years after deportation, they successfully established collective farms and achieved impressive results in cultivating rice. Right after deportation, the deportees distributed between kolkhozes, mines, fishing, and handicraft artels, despite limited mobility allowed, managed to resettle to the areas suitable for traditional, such as rice farming, vocations. This commitment to agriculture will derive in kobonjil (a self-supporting for-profit agricultural activity), an economic phenomenon and an exclusive Korean niche during the Soviet time (Diener, 2009a; Kim and King, 2001).

Theorizing Diaspora and Transnationalism

The political context conditioned the way Soviet ethnographers viewed and studied ethnicities during the Soviet era. Thus, Bromley (1987) refers to ‘diaspora’ as ‘ethnos’ that represents a historically formed group of people who share linguistic and cultural features and who are aware of the ties uniting them and the characteristics differentiating them from other groups or communities. In other words, Bromley defines ‘ethnos’ in primordial sense somewhat neglecting surrounding socio-economic settings (Skalnik, 1990). Bromley’s approach has been criticized also for the lack of empirical field research and for preventing delving into ethnicity related issues through the framing of the ethnically diverse communities by the ‘rigid’ term ‘ethnos’ (Skalnik, 1990). Soviet terminology is still used by Russian researchers. Thus, Li (2012) describes Koryo Saram as an ethnic community with a distinctive ethnic consciousness (self-identification and self-determination) that assume differentiating themselves from other ethnicities or other human communities. From these definitions, we see that the Soviet ethnographers viewed ethnic and cultural backgrounds as the main determinants defining a diaspora while neglecting other factors such as exile or collective trauma.

If we look at how other researchers understand this term, we will see that *diaspora* has a different connotation in most of the Western scholarly literature. Thus, Safran argues that diasporas should meet a least some of the following criteria: considerable dispersal from an original ‘center’; conservation of “memory, vision, or myth about their original homeland”; conviction in incomplete acceptance by their host country; the anticipation of an eventual return to their ancestral homeland; commitment to their homeland rather than to their host-country; and the influence of their relationships with the homeland on the diasporic consciousness and solidarity (Safran, 1991, p. 83-84). Clifford (1994), too, believes that diasporas must be

characterized by long distances between current host-country and homeland, exile-type separation, and impossibility or postponement of return. Brubaker (2005) narrows down 'diaspora' to three main criteria: dispersion, homeland orientation, and boundary maintenance. Based on the above definition this work seeks to understand to what extent and in what forms such boundaries are maintained by the third and the fourth generations of Kazakhstani Koreans.

The term 'diaspora' (Greek: dia - over and speiro - to sow) was originally associated by the Roman empire with migration and colonization. Later it acquired a more dramatic meaning of 'collective trauma' and 'banishment' through the Armenian, Jewish, African, and Palestinian dispersion (Cohen, 1997, p. ix). This dramatic meaning has been proliferating within the academic world in the last few decades. Baubock and Faist (2010) critically remark that the term 'diaspora' after becoming popular in the 1990s is being overused and heavily politicized which can potentially lead to deterioration of its academic value by discouraging new discussions in the field. Besides, the overuse of the term by the academic circles and masses generalized it to almost any group of people living outside their historic homeland (Cohen, 1997).

Throughout the 1930s, a few ethnic groups of the USSR were dislocated in an inhuman way including Koreans to Central Asia. In this regard, Safran (1991) warns against underestimating the violent origins of the diasporic formation which determines its further evolution underscoring the necessity to look at the cause of a diaspora formation, which in the case of the Kazakhstani Koreans demonstrates its multifaceted nature. The migrants from the Korean peninsula initially settled in the Russian Far East voluntarily, then they were forcibly deported to Central Asia and finally found themselves on the debris of the Soviet Union in the newly independent Kazakhstan.

Do Kazakhstani Koreans view themselves as a diaspora? To answer this question, it is important to define a suitable research approach. As Cohen and Fischer (2019) underscore there can be a tension arising from the characterization of a diaspora made by a diaspora itself (emic) and the one made by external observers and perspectives (etic). The emic perspective then would mean self-perception of diaspora that is entangled with the historic background and experiences of an examined community. Thus, it is essential to look at a diaspora from below rather than using a ‘top-down’ approach (Cohen and Fischer, 2019). Kokot et al. (2004) also emphasize the necessity to study a diaspora from its members’ “lived experiences” and use fieldwork data as “testing grounds for theoretical concepts” (Kokot et al., 2004, p. 1). Therefore, the present work focuses on the participants’ personal accounts and perceptions that form diasporic stances and define their transnational processes which will be discussed below.

Furthermore, Cohen and Fischer (2019) alert that in some cases there can be “a tension between nationalism (more precisely nation-states) and diasporas”. The nation-state – diaspora relationships can result in the sense of natural (territorial) belonging to a state overlapping with the imposition of loyalty towards it, which promotes a multi-layered identity formation. Thus, Cohen and Fischer suggest, instead of assuming that a diaspora necessarily identifies itself with its ancestral homeland, to inquire into the actual perception of members of their diaspora group (2019).

Diasporic boundaries can shift over time depending on the host country’s relationship to these communities. Thus, Cohen and Fischer (2019) advise looking at the way diasporas’ ties can evolve (weaken or strengthen) in the context of demand for assimilation and political loyalty. In this regard, Tölölyan asserts that a state represents itself as a land, a territory that functions to homogenize, integrate through erasure or assimilation of differences making diasporas “self-

protectively silent about their own view of themselves” (Tölölyan, 1991, p. 6). Koryo Saram’s diasporic consciousness is shaped in Kazakhstan by two-faceted expectation of them to serve as mediators of relationships between Kazakhstan and South Korea on one hand, and to assimilate to the mainstream Kazakh culture on the other. Host-country’s attitudes towards their ethnic minorities also can promote development of transnational processes with their ancestral homeland. Although being of interest for many researchers, transnational processes are still finding their place in the growing body of literature.

Transnationalism, in turn, discusses the process of constructing and maintaining transborder social fields (Glick Schiller et al., 1992). These fields take the form of transnational communities that connect migrants with their communities of residence, their homelands as well as other diaspora communities. However, the spatial boundaries of such fields are blurred, and their symbolic repertoire paired with a high degree of cohesion are essential to the survival of these “imagined communities” (Anderson, 1991; Kokot et al., 2004). Therefore, while studying a diaspora it is equally important to look at transnational ties they develop and maintain since these ties influence blurring or strengthening of diasporic identity.

While connecting communities, diasporas sometimes cross borders which results in ‘bleeding’ of the terms ‘border’ and ‘diaspora’ into each other (Clifford, 1997, p. 304). Thus, transnationalism, as a younger concept, at times is being confused and interchanged with the concept of diaspora. While both terms describe cross-border processes, diaspora refers to religious or ethnic groups living outside their homeland whereas transnationalism encompasses migrants’ communal and organizational ties across borders (Faist, 2010). In other words, migrants should be deemed to have transnational ties when they develop and maintain economic, familial, social,

organizational, religious, and political cross-border relations. Thus, the degree of engagement of a diaspora in both home and host societies is the core of transnationalism (Glick Schiller et al., 1992).

Clifford (1997) stresses that transnational ties should be studied not only through a diaspora's homeland but through its lateral connections as well. Thus, shared history of displacement or trauma can be as uniting as a common place of origin. In the case of Koryo Saram, these ties should be reinforced by the intersection of common ethnicity, place of origin, and collective trauma. Glick Schiller et al. (1992) add that the way these communities conceptualize themselves depends on the political and economic premises of the host and home countries. The theory of transnationalism represents the ties these communities or organizations develop across the borders. Tölölyan calls diasporas “emblems of transnationalism” since they embrace “the questions of borders, which is at the heart of any adequate definition of the Others of the nation-state” (1991, p. 6). Blanc-Szanton et al. (1995) conclude that ‘transnationalism’ should be replaced by more appropriate term ‘transnational processes’ that are being heavily influenced by globalized capitalism and develop in various directions. Therefore, while researching transnational ties, it is important to focus on the people and their relationships under global restructured capitalism that conditions the emergence of new and multiple identities.

The degree of transnational ties is mostly defined by the diaspora’s historical homeland. In other words, these ties depend on how interested a homeland is in its diasporas and how willing it is to reconnect with them. The approach of studying Koreans at the grass-root level is of necessity for this research since it looks at individual cases of the diasporans. However, the stance of South Korea shouldn't be overlooked here. They play a significant role in promoting transnational practices between the two examined countries.

Methodology

The present work is mainly based on the semi-structured in-depth interviews carried out in the summer and fall of 2021 (see attachment 1 for the Interview Guide). Sixteen interviews were conducted with the third and fourth generations of Koreans deported to Central Asia from the Russian Far East. I decided to apply in-depth interviewing to avoid the “problem of groupism” (Brubaker, 2005, p. 12). Thus, the interviews aim at creating a ‘bottom-up’ image of the Korean diaspora as presented by the diasporans themselves. These interviews are further compared with the official diasporic narrative as outlined by the literature and the Kazakhstani and South Korean governments.

All of the interviewees are Kazakhstani citizens, although two respondents have been residing outside Kazakhstan for about seven years. The respondents' age ranged from 21 to 45 and their current place of residence included different regions of Kazakhstan. Semi-structured in-depth interviews allowed me to record lived experiences of the Korean community members in Kazakhstan. The interviews also provided this study with reach data on transnational practices that Kazakhstani Koreans involve in with their historic homeland: South Korea. Thus, interviewing shed light on labor migration trends and their implications on the socioeconomic status of ‘Soviet’ Koreans in South Korea.

In addition to semi-structured in-depth interviews, I reviewed media sources while applying elements of predictive content analysis. This method implies, as the title suggests, “the prediction of some outcome or effect of the messages under examination” (Neuendorf, 2002, p. 55). This method is popular in prediction of public opinion based on the news coverage. Thus, I attempted to predict possible outcome of the messages transmitted by the sources under review on their audience. This method usually requires combining it with other methods that involve people

as ‘units of data collection’ (Neuendorf, 2002, p. 55). Therefore, this study combines personal narratives of the interviewees with the review of publicly available online sources. These sources include: the official website of the Embassy of the Republic of Korea in Kazakhstan, news produced by the Kazakhstani regional information agents such as Khabar, Aqtobe News, Inform, etc. Types of online data reviewed include pictures, video of interviews and public events, newspaper article, documentary, and official documents such as the Constitution of the Republic of Kazakhstan and the Law on Education of the Republic of Kazakhstan. This approach informed this study on how the Korean community is positioned by the officials of Kazakhstan and South Korea and what effects such official narrative produces on Kazakhstani Koreans.

Due to the pandemic, most of the interviews were conducted online. However, some interviews were held in person with all necessary protective measures in place. Although during face-to-face meetings it was easier to observe the respondents' ‘body language’, zoom-meetings proved to be efficient as well since virtual space helped respondents to feel more comfortable. In-person meetings were aimed at accommodating those participants who didn't feel comfortable meeting virtually.

In order to comply with the Institutional Research Ethics Committee of Nazarbayev University, pseudonyms were used throughout this thesis. Since the Korean families in Kazakhstan have been giving their children exclusively Russian names after the deportation to Kazakhstan, Russian names have been used within this research to hide the informants' identities.

Recruitment and sampling

Following my original plan, I became a member of the Korean communities presented on social networks. Although I started approaching potential respondents individually, my attempts to recruit respondents through social media were unsuccessful. Thus, all recruitment has been

carried out using my network and the snowball method. I initially used my circle of friends and acquaintances to attract interviewees and then at the end of our conversation asked them to recommend me to someone who would be interested in my research. In some cases, the respondents returned with one or two potential interviewees quickly, but more often it took two to three weeks for a new contact to become available. There were a few cases when potential participants of the older generation initially agreed to participate in the research but later changed their minds. Perhaps, pandemic environments contributed to their unwillingness to interact. Some of such potential respondents have just overcome the coronavirus.

Besides, the following tendency has been observed during the interviews: the older generation (as old as 40+) was more cautious about being interviewed and recorded; the younger generation, on the other hand, expressed enthusiasm in participating in the present research. Moreover, many expressed gratitude for the interest in their community from a prestigious research organization such as Nazarbayev University. In my research that included fieldwork, data analysis and writing of the thesis, I was guided by the Institutional Research Ethics Committee (IREC) requirements. Thus, the IREC reviewed and approved the interview questions and confidentiality clause that stipulated for anonymity of participants.

The goal of the semi-structured in-depth interviews was to learn more about Korean culture, familial and communal ties, values, and transnational processes with South Korea. My respondents included residents or descendants of Nur-Sultan, Almaty, Taldykorgan, Aktobe, Zhezkazgan, Borovoe, Shymkent, Taraz, Atyrau, Ushtobe, and Kostanay. This diversity allowed me to compare culturally different regions and the influence they produced on diasporans self-perception.

Data collection and analysis

In-depth semi-structured interviews were meant to supply this research with data regarding the perception of Korean diaspora members of themselves, their wider community, and their plans. According to Silverman (2017), guidelines can take a researcher only halfway. Therefore, in-depth semi-structured interviewing, also presented by Silverman as a ‘conversational’ interviewing style, (2021, p. 391) was used since it allowed some space for respondents to think and speak frankly. Before conducting interviews, the respondents were requested to give their consent for audio recording. They were also informed about the possibility of not answering questions they felt uncomfortable with. The interviewer was mindful of body language or any other signals that could potentially influence participants' responses. Participants were given enough time to reflect on the questions.

All the interviews were conducted either in person in Nur-Sultan or online using software permitting video calls. Once the consent to participate in the research had been achieved, the respondents were asked to choose a physical place of meeting or a virtual means of communication. Most of the interviews were carried out using Zoom software which also allowed recording of the interviews with the interviewees’ agreement. Interview questions covered such topics as attitude to languages, inter-marriages, perception of one's homeland, cultural peculiarities, kinship, hierarchy, transborder ties, diasporic identification as well as migration experiences and plans. The interviews length ranged from 55 to 100 minutes and were performed in Russian. Some respondents chose to keep their cameras off during the whole interview. All the participants either were born and grew up in Kazakhstan or were born in Uzbekistan and moved to Kazakhstan at a young age. The study population can be divided into three age groups

Kazakhstani Koreans who are: a) above 20 years old, b) above 30 years old, and c) above 40 years old.

The themes emerging from quotes or patterns were recorded and classified. For instance, one participant (Tatyana, 27) reported full-fledged use of the South Korean dialect (Koryo Mar) by their grandmother. Whereas all other respondents admitted that the language of their ancestors was partially or, in most cases, fully forgotten by their families. Whereas a high rate of intermarriages was reported by all participants. Many participants stated that inter-marriages were so widespread within their extended families that it was harder to think of a family where both partners were Koreans. It is worth noting that this tendency has been introduced by the third generation of the Korean community in Kazakhstan. The second generation seems to be more bound to their ethnic community which is supported by the fact that all the informants were born in families where both parents are Koreans.

Researcher's position

My position as a researcher can be classified as an "outsider" since I neither belong to the Korean ethnic group nor do I have family members or friends from the Korean diaspora (Ritchie et al., 2014). However, several facts that unite the Korean diaspora and I potentially could produce a certain effect on the data and its analysis. Thus, like all the participants, I was born in the Soviet Union and went to a Russian school, we share common memories which make us culturally similar from the Soviet legacy perspective. Thus, my dual position of outsider and insider could have provoked some statements which were 'expected' to be said or restrained some quotes from being articulated for being deemed as disloyal to Kazakhstan. Such cautiousness was observed, as mentioned above, among the older generation, perhaps because of traumatic memories of

deportation and oppression experienced by their ancestors and somehow transferred to their offspring.

The current pandemic situation set some limits to my research. Thus, I was unable to visit any traditional cultural events and failed to approach more people, especially representatives of older generation. However, the open-mindedness of the participants and their sincere desire to fully contribute to my research resulted in the reach data that will be analyzed in detail in the following chapters.

Chapter 2. Diasporic Identity:

Between forgetting the past and negotiating the future

As discussed in the previous chapter, the concept of diaspora revolves around “dislocation from the ancestral homeland, enduring attachment to the originary source and a longing for return, whether actual, virtual or imagined.” (Brah 1996; Clifford 1994; Cohen & Fischer 2019; Safran 1991). Although not necessarily all the features defining a diaspora must be present to ‘qualify’, Agnew argues that “importance... lies in the shared history of displacement, suffering, adaptation, and resistance” (2013, p. 4). Some scholars lament that the term “diaspora” is being overused today to refer to any dislocated ethnic group regardless of its root cause (Cohen, 1997; Kenny, 2013; Ohliger & Münz, 2005; Safran 1991).

As for the Korean diaspora in Kazakhstan, it fully meets the definition requirements regarding its exilic origin. In fact, the history of the Koryo Saram is marked by two traumatic displacements. First, this diaspora was initially created in the Russian Far East due to famine and the Japanese occupation of their homeland (the Korean peninsula). Second, this diaspora was forcibly deported to Central Asia in 1937 as a “unreliable element” by Stalin (Gelb, 1995, p. 397). Both catastrophic migrations were accompanied by oppression or marginalization of the Korean community as a minority group in their new homelands in both the Russian Far East and Central Asia.

Koryo Saram or continental Koreans have undergone several steps of identity formation. First, they adapted rather quickly to the Russian culture while living in the Russian Far East. Then after the deportation to Central Asia, they adopted a larger Soviet identity. As Kokaisl rightly notices, “The deportation of Koreans caused a second wave of uprooting and a deeper acceptance of Soviet culture” (Kokaisl, 2018, p. 440). The Kazakh SSR became the center for Korean culture

and language in Central Asia. All Korean-language books, Korean pedagogical institute, a theater, and a newspaper were transferred and operated in the Kazakh Republic until the 1940s when a Russian-based curriculum was imposed on all minority institutions (Kim 2003a).

This chapter attempts to understand how the collective memory of deportation, loss of mother-tongue and limited ability to practice their culture shaped the diasporic identity of the Korean community of the modern Kazakhstan.

Memories of Deportation: from the Russian Far East to Central Asia

Since memories bridge our personal past with our collective past and together, they shape our present, “the issue of diasporisation is linked to the production of a memorial narrative of the origin of the group, its inter-generational transmission, and its territorialization” (Bruneau, 2009). This is especially true for diasporas whose collective memory is often associated with “displacement, flight, exile, and forced migration” (Agnew, 2005, p. 3). Therefore, while studying a diaspora it is essential to engage with memory studies and forced migration studies since these disciplines are interrelated and help in “better understanding of the complex political dynamics” that largely inform incentives for remembering or indeed forgetting a diaspora’s past (Lacroix & Fiddian-Qasmiyeh, 2013, p. 686).

The semi-structured in-depth interviews, employed within this research, covered, among others, such topics as family history, attitudes toward languages (Korean, Kazakh, and Russian), intermarriages, and Korean traditions. The interviews always started with the questions about respondents’ family history to understand how the experience of being a deported ethnicity was transferred to the next generations and how it affected the diasporic consciousness of today’s Korean community. Thus, I discovered that many informants were not familiar with the details of their great-grandparents’ deportation. The participants claimed that either their grandparents or

great-grandparents were themselves too young to remember it or unwilling to recall the turmoil of their forced displacement. In fact, only a few informants could narrate their family's exilic history. Some confessed they felt ashamed not knowing their family history, while some admitted that they were simply not interested in it.

At the same time, the participants demonstrated a better awareness of the causes of their ancestors' initial migration from the Korean peninsula to the Russian Far East including Japanese oppression and the resulting famine. Alexander (45) reported that: "Korea was a Japanese colony and to avoid the influence of Japan, some Koreans decided to migrate to the Russian Far East". A few respondents believed that their ancestors were deported to Central Asia because of their physical resemblance with the Japanese. Denis (21) explains it as follows: "You know why they were deported? The Soviet authorities were afraid that Japanese spies could easily pass for Koreans in the Russian Far East because they looked similar. That is why they decided to send them to Central Asia".

However, it was not the only reason the Soviet officials were convinced that ethnic displacement was necessary. Gelb argue that earlier relocations of up to a thousand Korean "kulaks" further from the Soviet border in 1930 and 1931 provoked Japan to remove Koreans from the North Korean border which contributed to the Soviet anxiety regarding its Korean residents (1995). Besides, according to Japanese law, all Koreans were considered as the emperor's subjects which "heightened Stalin, Molotov, and Ezhov's nervousness and pushed them toward the radical deportations of 1937" (Gelb, 1995, p. 398). These suspicions were strengthened by the following fact: "On 1 October 1936 at least 978 Soviet Koreans had registered at the Japanese consulate in Vladivostok" (Gelb, 1995, p. 398). This act was perceived by the Soviet government as the "evidence" of Korean loyalty to Japan.

Koreans were the first community deported based on their ethnicity alone. However, they were not the only ones deprived of their homeland within the USSR in the 1930s-1940s. “Ethnic cleansing” was the signature tool of Stalin’s regime in dealing with small nations which were previously celebrated by *korenisatsiia* (Gelb, 1995; Martin, 2001). Thus, during World War II after the Nazi Army invaded Ukraine, Crimean Tatars and some small nations of the North Caucasus were labeled as “punished peoples” and deported to Central Asia as well (Gelb, 1995, p. 389). Regardless of differences in the conceptualization of Koreans as “suspicious” and Crimean Tatars along with Chechens as “punished” ethnicities, all these ethnic groups were deported and placed in “special settlements” with limited mobility even within the region (Human Rights Watch, 1991).

Many informants mentioned that initially, the place their great-grandparents were left was a bare steppe (today’s Ushtobe in Taldykorgan oblast) and that they could survive only because the local population supported them. For instance, Darya’s grandparents lived on the same street with Kazakh families. Since Koreans didn’t possess much after the deportation, their children were often underfed. Thus, their Kazakh neighbors used to feed their children and treat them as part of their family. Today these children are old people themselves, but they keep in touch with each other and even their children consider each other as “named” (*nazvanny*) brothers and sisters. Tatyana supports the sentiment of gratitude their grandparents passed on to the next generations of Koryo Saram.

My grandparents used to say that they were very well accepted by locals who shared their last glass of milk with them. Even my father always emphasized that they were grateful to Kazakhs. Not every ethnicity would do that. This is how they survived and began to build dugouts.

In addition to the physical hardship the deported Koreans experienced back in 1937, they were also subjected to the stripping of identity through the imposition to adopt Russian names upon arrival to Kazakhstan. This act of forced assimilation is similar to the Japanese practice of imposing Japanese names on their Korean subjects (Breen, 2010). Thus, a few respondents informed us that their grandparents were given Russian first names while registering them in Ushtobe. Denis (21) believes it was explained by the lack of original documents proving the deportees' true names. While Alexander (45) viewed it as a dismissive attitude toward the newcomers. The narrative of Tatyana (28), whose family still resides in Ushtobe, is illuminating on how the stigma of a deported ethnicity could prevent one from fully accepting their identity till the end of their life:

My maternal grandmother told me all the details of the deportation that she remembered. During transportation, many died along the way because it was very cold, and they couldn't use the toilet. The dead were thrown out of the wagons along the way. There was no food or water on the territory of today's Ushtobe. They had to dig the main ditch for farming and participated in the construction of the railway. She vividly recalled all the torments although she was only seven years old. She had her Korean name, but we always called her by her Russian name. Even my parents didn't know her Korean name. She didn't tell anyone. We knew her Korean name only after she passed away in 2013. My grandfather who knew Korean writing wrote on a red cloth which, by tradition, we hang out when someone dies, the name of my grandmother in Korean...

Furthermore, Svetlana (28) shared her communication with her grandparents about the deportation of 1937 which is indicative of why the details of forced dislocation were not a cherished family memories but rather something to be forgotten:

In general, my grandmother and grandfather were willing to talk about their past but for some reason, they spoke: "fits and starts" (uryvkami) about deportation. That it was difficult. They initially lived in dugouts. And only later kolkhozes (Soviet villages with a centrally planned economy) started to appear. And I was always surprised why they were so positive about the Soviet Union. Especially my great-

grandmother. She always criticized Ezhov and Molotov but never Stalin. Once, my grandfather said something about his brother who was executed because he was an intellectual (*intellequent*) and I finally realized that they were simply scared to tell some stories and preferred to talk about household-related things.

According to the interviewees, not all their ancestors were deported from the Russian Far East and not all of them were descendants of early migrants to the Russian Far East. Marina (33) claims that her grandparents were not subjected to deportation at all.

My family is a settler from Northern Korea. I don't remember which year my grandfather and grandmother were relocated to Sakhalin. But they were born in North Korea. Initially, my grandparents didn't speak any Russian. They spoke purely Korean. They had lived in Primory'e for a long time. And then my grandfather learned Russian and started teaching. Then he started working as a professor/teacher in other Russian cities. They were not deported from the Russian Far East. I don't remember which discipline he was teaching but thanks to his job they traveled within Russia a lot and ended up moving to Taraz (former Dzhambul).

Svetlana (28) tells a story of her grandfather who somehow learned about the upcoming deportation and managed to escape to Yakutiya with his family where they worked at gold mines and went to the Russian school. He knew that his brothers were deported some to Uzbekistan and some to Kazakhstan. They kept in touch (which seems almost impossible for that time) and when things got settled in Uzbekistan, his brothers sent a message saying that it was safe to come. Alina (32) recalls that her great-grandparents moved to the territory of modern Kazakhstan before the deportation of 1937 thanks to their professional occupation. Although, she also admitted that she wasn't certain about it since her family's history was always "shrouded in mystery" and her grandmother avoided questions on their past. Oleg's (27) family was based in the Rostov Oblast (Russia) at the time of deportation and didn't experience the forced relocation. His great-grandfather was allocated a land plot in Rostov Oblast and since then their family has been

engaging in cultivating vegetables. Later during the late Soviet era and post-independent Kazakhstan, all these families reconnected in Kazakhstan.

Many grandparents who were willing to talk about the deportation, tended to avoid traumatizing their grandchildren, opting to generalize the hardship of the forced relocation with such statements as, “It was hard, people died along the way. But I was young and don’t remember everything well”. Or they would say that they were too young at the time of forced relocation to fully realize its hardship. However, some respondents recall that although it was never emphasized by their grandparents (who were subjected to deportations themselves), some of the deported grandparents chose to present a successful outcome of this experience as proof of their ethnicity’s strength and somewhat superior position among other ethnicities of Kazakhstan. Marina (33) recalls that her grandmother used to say: “We survived great hardship which proves we are stronger than many other ethnicities. We can survive nearly anything”.

These stories manifest the way Koreans adopted to memorialize and transmit their lived experiences related to deportation and post-deportation hardship. It seems that the deportees conserved the fear of punishment until the end of their lives, and it was only natural for them to protect their heirs from any potential harm that the knowledge about deportation could cause them.

According to Cohen, the collective memory of common past and place of origin serves to ground and legitimize diasporic consciousness (1997). It also can act as “a means of affecting an air of superiority, even in the teeth of dispossession and discrimination” (Cohen, 1997, p. 185). Though, the respondents’ narratives suggest that the fragmented way in which personal memories were transferred to the next generations, on the contrary, weakened the diasporic consciousness of Koryo saram, and only some of deported Koreans were able to translate their tragic past into their strength.

The political context of the Soviet regime dictated selective forgetting and memorialization of the Koreans' traumatic displacement. The political regime placed Koreans, as well as other deported ethnicities, in a vulnerable position where partial transmission or complete erasure of "exilic memories" was chosen as a survival mechanism. As a result, the fragmented way of "collective understanding of their common past", which is deemed to be one of the strongest "identity narratives", conditioned a weakened "sense of belonging" to their community, the Korean diaspora in Kazakhstan is experiencing today (Lacroix & Fiddian-Qasmiyeh, 2013, p. 685). The same fate was destined for Koryo mar, the language spoken by all the deportees upon arrival to Central Asia.

Koryo Mar as the language of Central Asian Koreans

Koryo mar is one of the Korean dialects that was the language of communication for Koryo Saram or Central Asian Koreans. Koryo Mar stems from two patois of the Northern Hamyoung dialect and considerably diverges from both the North and South dialects. Due to a prolonged period of isolation and the Russian language influence, Koryo Mar developed in a way that makes it virtually unintelligible for the speakers of standard Korean (Kim, 2009). Ahn's (2019) research on language policies and practices involving the third and fourth generation of Kazakhstani Koreans has shown that the majority of Koreans born after the 1980s possessed little to no command of neither Koryo mar nor South Korean dialect. Such erasure of the diaspora's language was caused by the shift to Russian as LOI at schools in the 1940s. The older generation, which at the time was already fluent in Russian, made the same language shift within their families. Thus, they limited the use of Koryo mar to "demarcate group boundaries" in the presence of children while talking about "adult things" or when talking to their peers (Ahn 2019, p. 229). This linguistic behavior can be explained by the socio-political context they lived in. During the Soviet era, one

was expected to speak Russian not only to succeed professionally but also not to be excluded socially. Thus, Korean parents encouraged their children to excel in Russian at the expense of their native language.

Ahn's (2019) study revealed another interesting detail about the attitude of Kazakhstani Koreans toward any variety of Korean. Most of the participants accepted the concept of language and ethnicity primordially. In other words, the participants thought that the knowledge of the Korean language will make them closer to their ethnicity and its cultural capital. However, all participants chose South Korean as their native language instead of Koryo mar justifying their choice for practical reasons.

In this regard, Kim (2003a) laments that the revival of their native language is a challenging project because Koryo mar didn't develop naturally but rather was replaced by Russian and other languages (loan words). Kim (2003a) asserts that Koryo Mar is a dying language that has little to no written form and media usage. The linguistic question aggravates with different regions and dialects used by the Koreans in the post-Soviet space (South Korean, North Korean, Seoul dialects).

The present research too proves that Koryo mar is no longer used by Koryo Saram. The older generation knows some phrases but has difficulties in constructing grammatically proper sentences. The interviews within this research covered questions regarding Koryo mar use and its future as viewed by the Korean diaspora. This section aims at nuancing the diasporic identity of Koryo Saram in Kazakhstan as the language is a core element interpreting its identity.

As the interviewees noted, language barriers were stated as one of the reasons why family histories were transferred to the third and fourth generations of Koreans in an incomplete way. A good number of the participants stated language limitations as the main obstacles to full

communication between themselves and their grandparents. Often, their parents had to serve as translators between the two generations. Since the deported Koreans in most cases didn't speak any Russian upon arrival to Central Asia, some of them encouraged their children to learn Russian with the aim to integrate into the mainstream culture more quickly and successfully which often happened at the expense of their native language. Thus, Denis (21) confessed,

We know just some words in "adapted" Korean (Koryo mar). Mainly food names. But we can't construct sentences in it. My mother's parents spoke Korean, but they didn't teach my mother. They believed she wouldn't need it.

Only one out of 16 respondents reported that their grandmother, who was seven at the time of deportation, is fluent in Koryo mar. In fact, this grandmother still speaks mainly Koryo mar and not Russian or Kazakh. This exceptional case could be possible only in the highly populated by Koreans area - Ushtobe. Her Russian didn't progress enough to replace her native language because she was surrounded by her friends who were fluent in Korean as well. Depending on the region of Kazakhstan and occupation, the second generation of Koreans reportedly demonstrated partial command of Koryo mar (i.e., some of them can understand the general meaning of what is being said). However, in most cases, they are unable to construct sentences themselves and possess a poor vocabulary. A similar observation has been recently narrated by another researcher, Michael Vince Kim:

If there were people who had survived deportation, they would generally remember some Koryo-mar, and I could understand it partly. Koryo-mar is very different from Korean, and South Koreans have a hard time understanding it because when languages start deteriorating, grammatical aspects of the language start changing. When that happens native speakers of a language have a hard time understanding semi-speakers (Eiferman, 2017).

The families that moved to Almaty, Aktau, Shymkent, Tselinograd (present Nur-Sultan), Atyrau, Zhezkazgan where they were surrounded by Russian or Kazakh-speaking people virtually

stopped using Koryo mar in the second generation. Those who remained in the Kyzyl-Orda oblast and especially those who continued agricultural business were more successful in preserving their language into the second generation (5 out of 16 informants reported that the second generation of deported Koreans was able to keep up a simple conversation in Koryo mar). In one case both grandmothers spoke in Koryo mar, and one even read Koryo Ilbo (a local newspaper that publishes in both Russian and Korean). This is how their granddaughter relates her experience with Koryo mar:

Unfortunately, no one speaks Koryo mar anymore. My paternal grandmother, when I lived with her, used to speak to me in Korean. Koryo mar is a very mixed dialect. When I came back to Kazakhstan after almost seven years spent in Russia, I completely forgot the language. My grandmother who was born in 1935 was really upset when I couldn't understand her in Korean. She was always eager to take me to churches or Korean centers where I could meet with teachers of Korean or communicate with native speakers. She also reads Koryo Ilbo but only the Russian part. The other grandmother who was a bit older also used to read Koryo Ilbo, including the articles written in Korean.

However, the third and fourth generations' knowledge of their native language is limited to a few everyday words, if any at all. Alexander (45) spoke of his family language situation, which is rather typical of all other accounts, as follows: "I understand some household-related words. My parents used to speak Korean to their parents but Russian to me". Olga (34) reports a similar situation with Koryo mar: "My father didn't speak any Korean. No one spoke Korean to him (his parents)". Some participants refer to Koryo mar as an "outdated", "old" language or a "mixed" dialect that their parents or grandparents use as a "secret" language that they speak in front of strangers or to hide something from their children.

Although most of the deported Koreans spoke to their children in Koryo mar, their vocabulary was limited to household and agricultural words. Further changes in education policies shortly after deportation contributed to the marginalization of the Koreans' native language: the

language of instruction in all schools was switched to Russian, which is deemed to be as “the most significant systemic contributor to Korean language loss” (Ahn, 2019, p. 226). Although Korean was taught as a second language at schools, these schools were often lacking textbooks and teachers (Kim, 2009). Thus, Olga (34) recalls that her grandfather was deported to Ushtobe and had to go to Russian school even though he didn’t speak any Russian.

Since the local population in the Kyzyl-Orda oblast spoke mainly Kazakh with Russian taught at school, their usage of Koryo Mar acquired words from Kazakh and Russian. This is what Oleg (27) says about their families’ language abilities and the future of Koryo Mar, which is rather unusual in terms of Koryo mar conservation:

My maternal grandparents spoke only Korean to us. They didn’t accept either Russian or Kazakh. They used to tell us: “Learn your language!”. They were also very strict about Korean with my parents. In our Kirov Rayon (Shymkent Oblast) there were a lot of Koreans and they used to teach Korean at school as a second language. I remember that even Kazakh kids learned Korean at school. I don’t remember which dialect they taught; however, their alphabet and the basis of the language are the same (North and South Korean dialects). It was at the end of the 1990s... So, my parents still speak some Korean (Koryo mar). They usually do it when they need to discuss something in front of strangers. I partly understand what they talk about and can guess the general meaning. But if we compare Koryo mar with the South Korean dialect, they drastically differ. These days nobody speaks Koryo Mar. I think it will disappear with time. It is unlikely that people will remember it.

It can be concluded that the third and the fourth generation of deported Koreans completely lost their native language, and its revival seems rather unlikely. The younger generation (20+) don’t see any practical use in learning or reviving it and choose to learn the South Korean dialect instead. Some respondents believe that one shouldn’t compare these two dialects, but rather perceive them as one language that has gone through different development paths. Thus, Koryo

Mar once abandoned in favor of Russian is now being neglected due to the lack of opportunities it can provide to its speakers.

“What, and indeed who, one chooses to remember (or to forget) derives from a political positioning towards the ‘others’ be they sending and receiving state authorities...” (Lacroix & Fiddian-Qasmiyeh, 2013, p. 689). Koreans were stigmatized as “suspicious ethnicity”, limited in mobility, and discouraged to transmit their language. These factors promoted the forgetting of one of the main components of diasporic identity, their native language.

Identity in Liminality

Being a minority group in multiethnic yet culturally homogenous society inevitably leads to “cultural osmosis”, with people meeting and absorbing—consciously or unconsciously—impulses from the commons, which is a pool of cultural markers being disseminated (Eriksen et al., 2019). It is also true that in many instances, majority produce cultural influences on minorities (Eriksen et al., 2019). Eriksen et al. (2019) suggest considering, among others, the following questions when studying diaspora identity: Do diasporans eventually get integrated into the mainstream population through marriages and acculturation? If not, what techniques do they use to keep themselves apart—kinship, religion, professional networks, or something else? (Eriksen et al., 2019). Therefore, in this section, we will look at ethnic intermarriages and cultural practices of Kazakhstani Koreans as presented by the participants.

Genealogical Tree

Koreans traditionally keep and pass on to the next generations a “family book” that records the genealogy of their families accompanied by the description of important events and pictures. According to the informants’ description, the book resembles the Kazakh shejire – a genealogical tree that records the paternal lineage of a family. The major distinction between the two books is

that the Kazakh shejire traces only paternal lineage and ignores the female line. Thus, in case a family has only daughters, their father's lineage will cease. In other words, his name will be the last in the lineage. The Korean family book, in its turn, considers both maternal and paternal lineages.

Although most participants were aware of such a book in their families, they also admitted that their families didn't possess or keep one anymore. Only one respondent reported that their grandparents still keep a genealogical book. All the reports could be united by Stanislav's striking remark: "It is of great value. Everyone talks about it, but no one has seen it". Indeed, all the informants stated that the book was either lost while moving, taken by a distant relative, or simply stolen. In some cases, such books were of historical value such as serving as proof of belonging to a noble family. Nevertheless, some fragments of family history deriving from these books were transmitted to the third and fourth generations of Koreans in Kazakhstan. For instance, Anya (21) learned from their genealogical book that her grandparents served in the Red Army.

As reported by a young Kazakhstani Korean, whether one possesses a family book or not, all Koreans must know their *poy* (the term used by Central Asia Korean for a "clan"). Korean *poys* forbid marriage within the same *poy*, a rather strict requirement that is not always observed these days by young Koreans in Kazakhstan.

Ethnic Inter-marriage

Sanctions against intermarriage, which would jeopardize the group's integrity, are significantly more common than restrictions on other people's cultural products (Eriksen et al., 2019). Conversely, the rate of marriages with other ethnicities has been overwhelmingly increasing among the third generation of Koryo Saram. Thus, most respondents reported that intermarriage in their families is a very common phenomenon. In fact, they asserted that it is harder to think of

a family where both partners are Koreans than of a mixed family. Nevertheless, all the interviewees were born in endogamous families and only the third generation of Koreans in Kazakhstan (born in the 1980s-1990s) demonstrated an upsurge in intermarriages.

According to the interviews, intermarriages among the second generation of Kazakhstani Koreans, while not widespread, typically occurred with Russians. Things changed with the third generation of Kazakhstani Koreans who predominantly chose to marry Kazakhs. Thus, 11 out of 16 respondents said that in their extended families almost all their cousins with minor exceptions were married to Kazakhs. The following statement is indicative of the increasing rates of exogamy with Kazakhs: “It is hard to tell who we have more in our family: Koreans or Kazakhs? Furthermore, their children (born in mixed families) also marry Kazakhs thus reducing “Korean blood” to 25%”. One respondent, who due to their professional activity often visits wedding parties, made an interesting observation: “I noticed that usually, the bride is Kazakh, and the groom is Korean”. Interestingly, other respondents mentioned that usually their male relatives choose to marry other ethnicities and only one respondent stated that their mother remarried a Kazakh man.

Another respondent who is married to a non-Korean asserted that if it was necessary to marry a Korean it would considerably limit their options at the expense of other qualities, given the limited number of Koreans residing in Kazakhstan and their geographical dispersal. This respondent also added that at every school their children attend, there are ethnically Korean students, but they all come from mixed families. Two interviewees noted that they are married to non-Koreans themselves. In general, all the interviewees viewed intermarriages in a positive way.

Thus, one respondent summarized it as follows:

Kazakhs are brotherly people for us. Besides, we all are Soviet people, and we have a similar mentality (*mentalitet*) which is more important than ethnicity. We have similar family values as Kazakhs do. Koreans in general are more open and assimilate

easier than other diasporas. Our boundaries are very blurry, that's why it is not of crucial importance for us to marry a Korean.

Interethnic marriages challenge boundaries between groups and just a few parents would be eager to accept a daughter-in-law or a son-in-law from another community (Eriksen et al, 2019). Some respondents too believed it is important to choose a partner from their own ethnic group. In many cases, ethnic endogamy is highly encouraged by the respondents' parents. Thus, one respondent noted: "Our older generation urges us to marry Koreans. They say Koreans will be "closer" to you, and I agree with it". Similar feelings were expressed by another respondent who confessed that he didn't support intermarriages: "Ethnicity is given to us for a reason. There must be a reason why people differ from each other. My mother would be happy if I married a Korean girl. However, it is not imposed on me". Another respondent said that they knew families in which marrying a Korean is a must, but it is the exception rather than the rule. This is how Oleg (27) presents his attitude toward intermarriages:

It is natural since you live in another country (Kazakhstan) and you are surrounded mostly by Kazakhs. In terms of character compatibility (*sovmestimost harakterov*) it is much easier for a Korean to marry a Kazakh girl. Our girls are a bit complicated (*tyazhely harakter*). That's why our men don't like marrying Korean girls these days. They say it is better to take a Kazakh girl. As for me, I am against intermarriages. I would marry a Korean girl. Otherwise, how will I transfer traditions to my children? Everything we learn from our parents will die with us. For example, if you marry a Kazakh, it means you will follow Kazakh and Korean traditions 50/50. You will most likely forget many traditions because you witnessed them but never practiced them yourself and your children will know even less. And why respect Korean traditions if they are surrounded by Kazakhs? I am not saying it is bad. Kazakhs are very friendly, and Kazakhstan is a multinational country. But you will eventually lose your "genetic code". On the other hand, if you marry a Korean, you both follow Korean traditions instead of Kazakh ones and together you can transfer your traditions to your children.

Based on the above responses, the following conclusions could be drawn: the third generation of Kazakhstani Koreans favor intermarriages much more than the second generation. The intermarriages often happen between Koreans and Kazakhs with Korean men marrying Kazakh women more often than vice versa. All participants acknowledge poor culture transfer among mixed families. The following statements were commonly expressed by all respondents: “intermarriages dissolve our culture”; “mixed families don’t follow our traditions” or “another culture overtakes our own”. However, all equally accept it as a normal practice given the predominantly Kazakh environment they live in, thus, pragmatically accepting their realities in Kazakhstan.

Furthermore, the respondents see intermarriages in a gendered way which is supported by such statements as: “My grandfathers used to say that Korean girls are sophisticated. You better not marry them”, “Korean men expect complete submission” or “Our women are complicated, but our men are also not easy to handle”. The respondents’ accounts demonstrate that “gender and ethnicity do not operate independently in shaping the lived experience of subjects. Rather, they interact in distinct ways to shape the everyday lives of each sub-group” (Hu, 2016, p. 56). Thus, depending on topics the informants tend to ethnicize gender or gender ethnicity.

Korean Traditions

Valery Khan, a leading scholar on Korean studies in Uzbekistan, argues that the need to adapt to new environments and political regimes is responsible for the multicultural identity that Central Asian Koreans have developed. This multi-layered identity that embraces Soviet, Russian, Korean, Central Asian, and some elements of Japanese cultures apply, depending on circumstances, “flexible models of plastic behavior” (Khan, 2018, p. 38). After the deportation of 1937, Central Asian Koreans embraced Soviet identity with subsequent generations more and

more detaching from their roots. Thus, the second generation of Koryo saram identified themselves with the USSR rather than Korea (Khan, 2018).

Mixed families along with a russified society during the Soviet time, with an emphasis on Kazakh culture in the post-independent Kazakhstan, created conditions for multiculturalism among Kazakhstani Koreans. As a minority group, Kazakhstani Koreans couldn't block themselves from absorbing majority's culture. As with Koryo Mar, successful preservation of traditions depended on the density of the Korean population in their region of residence. Thus, those who remained in Ushtobe till the third generation were more successful in conserving Korean traditions in their everyday lives. While those who chose to migrate to big cities adopted customs of the dominating culture at the expense of their own cultural heritage.

The three main events, mentioned by all interviewees as the most important in Korean culture, are the one-year-old party (*asandi*), the wedding party, and the 60th birthday (*hangabi*). The one-year-old party and 60th jubilee are deemed as the most important dates. Due to the high infant mortality rate in the past, a one-year-old mark is largely celebrated by all Korean parents. The 60th birthday, on the other hand, somehow summarizes one's life and achievements. Children must organize a big celebration during which they bow in gratitude and ask for their parents' blessings. All the respondents asserted that it is their first and foremost duty to organize a big celebration for their parents. However, some respondents from the northern part of Kazakhstan admitted that the current pandemic prevented them from organizing a big gathering which was accepted with understanding by their parents and extended family.

In the Korean culture, it is also important to "observe the tables" (*sobludeniye stolov*) which means that the celebration of these three events must occur in a sequence. Thus, one can't have a 60th birthday fete before their children create their own families. Again, all respondents except a

few admitted that this is rather a “rule of the past”. However, Marina (33), whose family resides in Taraz (former Zhambul), narrated how these traditions are observed in their family up to this day:

We strictly observe the “sequence of tables”. In our family, if one table is not observed you can’t have any other celebrations. For instance, if you married someone without all the necessary rituals such as bowing etc., then your children will not have a one-year-old celebration until you marry each other “properly”. This celebration is very important for any Korean family and the success depends largely on how many people will come to share your joy. If you decide to celebrate your child’s one-year-old birthday without approval, not only from your parents but from all your clan elders, people will ignore your invitation and you can become an outcast. The same is with the 60th birthday. You are only allowed to celebrate once all your children have created their own families. In my family, when one of my parents turned 60, I was married, but my sister wasn’t. We couldn’t celebrate. Later, my sister got married but I became a widow, and we were again prohibited from organizing a big fete.

Marina also admits that her family is unique in the way they observe all traditions. Indeed, many other informants believed that given the high dispersion of Koreans within Kazakhstan and such factors as urbanization, increased access to goods and services, these traditions inevitably undergo certain changes. For instance, rice beating used to be a conventional way of obtaining rice flour. This heavy manual work required a few men and usually occurred during big family gatherings when men were beating steamed rice and women were busy with preparation of salads. Since these days rice flour can be bought from any store, this tradition disappeared. As Roman (35) explained it even major events such as the 60th birthday need to be organized now in a way that would accommodate Korean and non-Korean guests equally. All the participants agreed that changes in practicing their culture are informed by the current socio-economic context and should be treated with understanding.

Another important event, underscored by all participants was “Parents’ Day”. On this day, also called “Chusok”, Koryo saram visit the graves of their relatives. Some families heavily

pressure their children to come from other cities to join them in remembering their ancestors. Koreans bring special food and drinks to “treat” their deceased relatives. The other important part of this tradition is to pay obeisance and bow in gratitude and respect.

According to the interviewees, the second and third generations of Kazakhstani Koreans gravitate toward softening some traditional Korean practices, especially regarding hierarchy within one’s family. In this regard, Alexander (41) shares his personal experience as a parent:

These days we don’t enforce traditions on our children. My daughter has studied in Russia for seven years. She has certainly a different mindset now, the one imposed by Russians. She doesn’t listen to anyone’s opinion and doesn’t show sufficient respect to older people. Our son, on the contrary, copies everything we do and listens to us.

Gendered attributes about their own ethnicity observed in the section on intermarriages could be explained by the Korean traditional Confucian philosophy, where a man is given a superior position due to “the succession of the eldest son to the position of family head” (Kim, 2017, p. 137). Women, on the other hand, were considered as “guests” who are to join other families (Kim, 2017, p. 137). However, today South Korea is experiencing what Kim (2017) calls “the decline of the son preference” (p. 137). These changes in traditional Korean families are conditioned by economic opportunities for women’s financial independence thus increasing their value as their parents’ caregivers. Besides, a daughter is believed to care for her parents “out of affection” while a daughter-in-law “out of a sense of duty” (Kim, 2017, p. 138). A similar shifting towards elevating women’s position in the Korean community in Kazakhstan is observed as well.

As Olesya (25) puts it:

It is good to have a daughter because she can take care of her parents. These days Koreans appreciate and pamper daughters more than before. Boys used to be valued more because they are successors of the family name.

Only a few informants said that the role of a father is still paramount in their families. For example, all the family members are to wait till their father starts eating his meal and no one leaves the table until it is allowed by their father. Similarly, if it happens that there is not enough food for everyone, the father is the one to be fed first. A father's authority is rarely questioned even by their adult children. Thus, one respondent confessed that their uncles would never dare to smoke or drink alcohol in front of their father. However, many admitted that these days women play a leading role in their families. One respondent stated that hierarchy in their family is so rigorous that when one of their elders got sick and couldn't join family gatherings anymore, she was served in her home. Interestingly, the guests weren't invited to start eating until this old lady started her meal.

Tatyana (27) who is both originally from Ushtobe (the place of Kazakhstani Koreans' deportation) and currently resides in South Korea could make a comparison between South Korean culture and that of Koryo Saram. As it can be expected, Koreans in Ushtobe, at least the second generation, succeeded in preserving their traditions. Thus, the "Korean New Year" also known as "Solnal", is still celebrated today by Ushtobe Koreans. Tatyana also underscores that South Korean cuisine and the meals cooked by her grandmother are very similar. This grandmother also celebrates her birthday according to the lunar calendar which is similar to what South Koreans practice too.

Olga's (34) observation is illuminating on the current processes their diasporic identity undergoes:

Koreans are very fast to assimilate. Koreans in Kazakhstan are like Kazakhs, Koreans in Russia are like Russians. I think every person is greatly influenced by the environment. Besides, Koreans and Kazakhs are similar in many ways. That's why they call Koreans the "Fourth Juzh" (as discussed in Chapter 3, Kazakhs historically divide themselves into three Zhuz). We are similar in appearance and how we honor our elders.

Marina (33) believes that Koreans have a beneficial position in Kazakhstan society. On the one hand, they look like Kazakhs, have many similar traditions such as strong family bonds and respect for elderly. On the other hand, they can get along with Slavic ethnicities residing in Kazakhstan. They share one religion and speak the same language with them. This position allows them to successfully play multiple roles in Kazakhstani society. Forgetting of some traditions such as keeping a family book or following the “observances of tables” by Korean families is conditioned by high rates of ethnic intermarriage and the fact that they are scattered across Kazakhstan.

Conclusion

In order for a diaspora to survive and pass on its identity from generation to generation, it needs to have as many places as possible for regular gatherings that have a religious, cultural or political nature. Such places allow a diaspora to consolidate their social networks through common ‘iconography’ – tangible symbols of a community which, if absent, will be replaced by the iconography of other communities (Bruneau, 2010). Such spaces, where diasporans could regularly meet and strengthen their communal ties, are poignantly absent in the lives of the Korean community of Kazakhstan.

Furthermore, selective transmission of collective memory and subsequent fragmentation of “collective understanding of their common past” deprived Koreans of one of the strongest “identity narratives” (Lacroix & Fiddian-Qasmiyeh, 2013, p. 685). Moreover, politically imposed forgetting of their native language, ever-increasing rate of intermarriage, and lack of diasporic spaces add more complexity to the diasporic consciousness of Koryo Saram in Kazakhstan. Each subsequent generation adds new layers to diasporic identity which as Chambers puts it “...assert hybridity as the process of cultural mixing where the diasporic arrivals adopt aspects of the host culture and

rework, reform and reconfigure this in production of a new hybrid culture or ‘hybrid identities’” (1996, p. 50). Thus, similarities between Korean and Kazakh cultures that many participants noted as well as ‘openness’ to Kazakh culture is the outcome of such “cultural osmosis”. These factors contributed to a weakened “sense of belonging” to their community and the development of a hybrid identity that the representatives of the Korean community have demonstrated within this research.

Chapter 3. Attitudes of Kazakhstan and South Korea towards the Korean community in Kazakhstan

This chapter will explore how the attitudes and claims of Kazakhstan and their ancestral homeland impact the diasporic stances of Kazakhstani Koreans. This chapter will also introduce another actor who plays a role of a middleman between the Korean community, Kazakhstan, and South Korea. This analysis will demonstrate that these three interconnected actors operate within a shared frame of assigning the Korean diaspora in Kazakhstan a role of ‘grateful guests’ on the one hand and ‘loyal co-ethnics’ on the other. This chapter will also integrate participants’ voices that are being silenced in the official narratives.

The role of Kazakhstan in placing Koreans as a diaspora

All Kazakhstani citizens enjoy equal rights as stated in the Constitution of the Republic of Kazakhstan. Thus, the article 14 of the Constitution reads: “No one may be subjected to any discrimination based on origin, social, official and property status, gender, race, nationality, language, attitude to religion, beliefs, place of residence or any other circumstances (Adilet.zan.kz, 1995)”. Similar statements are made in the Doctrine of National Unity published on the website of the Assembly of the People of Kazakhstan. Part II of the Doctrine titled “Different origins – equal opportunities” states that all the people of Kazakhstan are granted “equal opportunities regardless of ethnic or other origin, religion or social status.” It continues “None of us has an initial advantage over each other - this principle forms a solid foundation for the building of our unity (Doctrine of National Unity, n.d.)”. Furthermore, Article 6 of the Law on education of the Republic of Kazakhstan dated January 18, 1992, No. 11533-XII (no longer valid) states that all numerous ethnic minorities “compactly residing in the Republic of Kazakhstan” are to be provided with the means to operate pre-schools, secondary schools, and other educational institutions in their native

language. The small ethnic minorities “residing non-compactly” are allowed to create classes and electives, as well as Sunday schools in state general education schools with the aim to improve their native language (online.zakon.kz, 1992).

However, these efforts to build a ‘Kazakhstani nation’ undertaken in the first part of the 1990s, that would disregard ethnic markers while granting equal rights to all its citizens, didn’t meet sufficient support from its titular ethnicity (Burkhanov, 2019). Furthermore, the dichotomies between the 1995 constitution that refers to its population as to the “people of Kazakhstan” while calling its territory as the “primordial Kazakh land” suggest that the titular ethnicity here is the “host” while the others are the “guests” (Akiner, 2004, p. 22).

The dichotomies in the constitution can be somewhat explained by Dave’s (2007) vision of the socio-political structure of newly independent Kazakhstan as “adapting to the Soviet-bestowed institutions and practices of ethnic management, and in setting the parameters for defining the rights and representation of the non-titular groups” (Dave, 2007, p. 120). These Soviet continuities, Dave, concludes, prevent ethnic minorities from articulating their claims as well as participating in public life. Consequently, minorities that were lacking territorial autonomies within the Soviet State, “have gradually, albeit grudgingly come to accept the primacy of the titular ethnic group in the new state” (Dave, 2007, p. 122).

In this regard, it would be fair to note that Kazakhstan’s way of balancing the nation-state and civic-state building was initially conditioned by its historical colonization first by the Russian empire and then by the Soviet Union. During the Soviet period, Kazakhs themselves could be considered as an ethnic minority accounting for under 30 percent of the total population in 1959. The other two-thirds of the population consisted of Slavs unceasingly migrating to Kazakhstan under Khrushchev’s administration. It is only in 1975 when the first decline in Slavic migration to

Kazakhstan was marked (Dave, 2007). Therefore, policies aimed at compensating for the suppressed Kazakh identity would be inevitable in post-independence Kazakhstan.

Historically, as shown by the participants, the attitudes of the Kazakh people towards the Korean community in Kazakhstan were rather welcoming. Although the deported Koreans were initially accepted with suspicion, their further relationships with the local population of Kazakhstan were “generally considered excellent” (Kokaisl, 2017, p. 436). After political rehabilitation of the 1950s, the Koreans of Central Asia started pursuing higher education while encountering “little or no prejudice from the rest of the population” (Akiner, 2004, p. 48). Besides, Koreans were well respected by the local people for their agricultural expertise and high working standards. Though, their status started to decline after Kazakhstan became independent when all governmental positions tended to be allocated among the titular ethnicity (Kokaisl, 2017).

This shift in attitudes was conditioned by the appropriation of the ‘post-colonial’ discourse by the political elite. Thus, the political elite successfully used this discourse to “legitimize the regime” by ensuring the political spaces to become fully “national-patriotic or simply Kazakh nationalist” (Kudaibergenova, 2016, p. 933). After the dissolution of the USSR in 1991, Kazakhstan as a newly independent state seized the opportunity to revive the language and traditions of its titular ethnicity that were suppressed during most of the time of the Soviet Union existence. To fully apprehend the social situation in Kazakhstan today it is important to understand the origins of the formation of Kazakhs as a nation and their division into zhuz (clans), which is still partially relevant today (Seidikenova, 2020). In fact, it is still common for Kazakhs to talk in genealogical terms while negotiating their social networks.

Furthermore, the research carried out by Oka et al. (2002), revealed that the interviewed nationalist activists such as leaders of the National Party Alash, journalists, and others believed

that Kazakhstan must be a multiethnic state but with certain privileges for the Kazakh people. These activists expressed pessimism about civic nation-building due to the lack of a common ideology that would unite people. Besides, the lack of democratic institutions regulating inter-ethnic relations as well as Russia's safeguarding position vis-à-vis Kazakhstani Russians were named among other factors. Thus, these activists saw the development of Kazakhstan as a monoethnic state and believed the Kazakh language must be declared as the only state language. They didn't see the link between non-Kazak population outflow and nationalist sentiments among Kazakhs and believed that the overrepresentation of Kazakhs in government was fair and justifiable. These views were compared with those of Kazakh intellectuals. Their responses to the survey showed a variety of opinions with the majority advocating for Kazakhstan as a multiethnic country, all seeing no possibility in monoethnic state-building with 50 percent arguing that the state was barely playing a role in regulating a nationalities question (Oka et al., 2002).

The review of the media sources carried out within this research suggests that the nationalist sentiments, as reported by some participants, that have been strengthening recently, are informed by the official discourse of singling out Kazakhs among other ethnicities of Kazakhstan. While reporting that these attitudes are common for a younger generation of Kazakhs, the participants seem to be puzzled by the reasons for such sentiments. Potential gravitation towards a more nationalist society should be considered against the backdrop of the public discourse that emphasizes the necessity to be grateful to the Kazakh people for helping the deported ethnicities upon arrival in Kazakhstan.

Thus, the introduction of the 'Gratitude Day' – when non-Kazakhs deported to Kazakhstan by the Soviet Union are called to praise Kazakh hospitality – indicates the multiculturalist approach in defining Kazakhstani identity (Burkhanov, 2019). But more than that, the 'Gratitude

Day’ adopted in 2016 defines the position of the deported ethnicities as ‘indebted-guests’. Although officially the ‘Gratitude Day’ aims at expressing gratitude to each other (i.e., one ethnicity to another) for tolerance and hospitality in the face of historical events that these ethnicities have experienced together, it also highlights the need to thank the Kazakh people in particular. As an example, the website Nur.kz presents the ‘Gratitude Day’ on their website in this manner:

What is the purpose of the Gratitude Day? The holiday is intended to become an expression of friendship, mercy and harmony between the peoples of a multinational country. This is the day when the people of the country thank each other and the Kazakhs for tolerance and hospitality (Martsenyuk & Bozhenko, 2022, para #7).

From a similar angle, the international information agency Kazinform.kz presents the speech of Lidiya Celsdorf (an ethnic German). The title of the article itself informs the readers who they should be grateful to - *We Carry Gratitude to the Kazakh People Through all our Lives*.

On the first of March, Kazakhstan celebrates the Day of Gratitude - the day when the ethnic groups deported to Kazakhstan thank each other and the Kazakhs, who accepted the repressed with mercy. We carry gratitude to the Kazakh people through all our lives. Risking the lives of their own children, compassionate Kazakhs shared with the prisoners and the deportees the last food they had, kurt, flatbread, oatmeal, in order to support the hungry and poor deportees. Thanks to the people of Kazakhstan for mercy, kindness, warmth, hospitality, and love! Peace and prosperity to the people of Kazakhstan! (With Gratitude to the Kazakh People, 2021)

Another example is a 15-minutes documentary (See Picture 1) produced by the TV Channel Khabar (2018). Of significance here is that Khabar is a state-backed information agency: “The Khabar Agency begins its history in 1995, when the Khabar National Television Information Agency was created on the basis of the information service of the Kazakh TV” (Khabar, 2022). This documentary is dedicated to the history of the deportation of Koreans and other ethnicities to Kazakhstan. The first part of the documentary tells a story of tragic deportations to then Kazakh

SSR while demonstrating the black-and-white video recordings that illustrate the hardship of the early years upon deportation. The accompanying presenter's speech is abundant with grandiloquent words that serve to highlight the importance of the Kazakh people's role in the survival of the deportees: "Our land accepted into its arms the exhausted and deprived of their historical homeland settlers, and the hospitable people - the Kazakhs extended a generous helping hand to them. They sometimes deprived their children of the last piece of bread while prioritizing those who had the hardest time". Further, the presenter introduces the contrasting well-established lives of the Chechen and Korean families in Kazakhstan today. The older representatives of these families enthusiastically narrate their lives in peace and harmony with the Kazakh people and other ethnicities (TV Channel Khabar, 2018).

Picture 1. The title of the documentary reads "Documentary dedicated to 80 years from the deportation of Koreans to Almaty oblast. With gratitude to the Kazakh people."



The introduction of the ‘Gratitude Day’ has been followed by a series of monuments built in different cities of Kazakhstan that further perpetuate the discourse. However, the first monument was built in Ushtobe - the place of the Koreans’ initial residence, 75 years after the deportation in 2012. The composition’s title is “Қазақ халқына мың алғыс” or “A thousand thanks to the Kazakh people” (See picture 2). This is what Sergei Ogay, the Chairman of the Korean Associations in Kazakhstan says about the monument (Qazaquni.kz., 2019).

We will never forget what the Kazakhs did for us and will always be indebted to them... We have always overcome difficulties as a united people, rejoiced at successes, and today we look to the future together. Now the sixth generation of Koreans lives in Kazakhstan. Of course, time erases details, names, faces. But there are things that should not be forgotten - these are good deeds, human warmth, fraternal support of the indigenous population. From the very first generation of settlers, Koreans have always sought to express gratitude to the Kazakh people. But not just to express these deep, sincere feelings in words, but also to perpetuate the memory of those times when our parents fought shoulder to shoulder for survival, when the foundation of relationships between people in our country was laid, when the true values of our society were born. Therefore, in 2012, at the initiative of the Association of Koreans of Kazakhstan, a monument of gratitude to the Kazakh people from all deported ethnic groups was erected in Ushtobe.

Picture 2. The opening ceremony of the monument “A thousand thanks to the Kazakh people” build in Ushtobe in 2012 (A Thousand Thanks to the Kazakh People, 2019).



According to Vladimir Lee, the Chair of The Association of Koreans in Taldykorgan the construction of the monument was sponsored by the Assembly of the People of Kazakhstan, Akimat of Almaty Oblast, Karatal Rayon and the Embassy of the Republic of Korea in Kazakhstan (Mokey, 2020).

Similar monument with identical title was opened in Aktobe in 2020 (See picture 3). The monument symbolizes the gratitude to the Kazakh people from all the ethnicities deported to Kazakhstan. This time the monument was sponsored by the local entrepreneurs (VisitAktobe, 2020).

Picture 3. Stela “A thousand thanks to the Kazakh people” in Aktobe.



Another stela “A Thousand Thanks to the Kazakh People” was built in Taraz in 2020 as a symbolic sign of gratitude of the deported ethnicities to the Kazakh people. (TauNews.kz, 2020).

Picture 4. Stela “A thousand thanks to the Kazakh people” in Taraz.



In addition to the stela “A thousand thanks to the Kazakh people”, a sculptural composition titled “Gratitude to the Kazakh people from the Koreans of Aktobe region” was built in Aktobe in 2022 (Aqtobe TV Channel, 2022). The TV channel AqtobeTV presents the opening ceremony of this sculptural composition (see picture 5). The monument comprises of two female figures – one is Kazakh, and the other is Korean. The Kazakh woman stretches out her hands with a bowl with koumiss (fermented horse milk) to the Korean woman. The sculptural composition aims to represent the embodiment of the Kazakh hospitality that helped Koreans to survive after the deportation.

After the welcome address of all the officials, Roman Kim (the member of the Board of Trustees of the Association of Koreans (see picture 6) sincerely thanks ‘shyn zhurekten’ (code

switching from Russian to Kazakh serves to reinforce the sincerity of his words) all the Kazakhs for helping in the hardest years after deportation. This composition, Roman Kim continues, evidences the commitment of the Korean community to transfer to the younger generation their history. The event was attended by the high-ranked officials that underscore the significance of the monument and the message that it conveys. It is worth to highlight the main actors of this event: Akim of the region Ondasyn Urazalin, Deputy Chairman of the Assembly of the People of Kazakhstan Marat Azilkhanov, and finally the representative of the Koreans' historic homeland - Ambassador Extra ordinary and Plenipotentiary of the Republic of Korea Ku Hong-sok.

It is important to understand the role of the Assembly as a trustee body of the Associations of Koreans of Kazakhstan. “The Assembly today is a constitutional body headed by its Chairman - the President of the country, the guarantor of the Constitution.” (Assembly.kz, n.d.). The Assembly essentially oversees the work of all the Korean Associations as well as other ethnic associations.

Picture 5. Aktobe TV News. The gratitude to the Kazakh people from Koreans.



Picture 6. Roman Kim, the Board of Trustees Member, the Association of Koreans



Picture 7. The inscription of the plate reads: The gratitude to the Kazakh people from Koreans of Aktobe Oblast.



South Korea's stance vis-à-vis their Kazakhstani co-ethnics

This section will explore the literature and media coverage on the stances of South Korea vis-à-vis Kazakhstani Koreans.

As it was mentioned in the discussion of transnationalism in chapter 1, historic homeland can influence diasporic consciousness either by taking an active part in the lives of their co-ethnics or by distancing from them. Although original migration to the Russian Far East happened from the territory of today's North Korea, Kazakhstani Koreans develop and maintain relationships with South Korea only.

The 'erasure' of their original homeland was conditioned by many factors including external policies of North Korea, their passive financial engagement in the lives of Soviet Koreans, and a less attractive image of North Korea in the international arena. Besides, the fact that Seoul and Moscow were interested in becoming economic partners during the decline of the Soviet era played its role in marginalizing North Korea in these relationships. Furthermore, South Korea contributed to this alienation by discouraging Soviet Koreans from affiliating with North Korea. (Oka, 2006).

Although actively influencing Soviet Koreans' attitudes, South Korea didn't encourage the repatriation of their co-ethnics. For instance, the law on returning Koreans which was proposed by the South Korean Parliament in 1998 stipulated equal rights on repatriation for all Koreans residing outside the South Korean territory except for those from China and the former Soviet Union (Diener, 2009a). Although soon enough this law was declared 'unconstitutional' and revised to grant the same rights to all repatriates, Diener (2009a) believes, it demonstrated the unwillingness of the South Korean government to accept the Central Asian Koreans. Instead, South Korea

promoted the territorialization of Koryo Saram within Kazakhstan by occasionally offering sponsorship in cultural and linguistic affairs (Diener, 2009a).

The media sources reviewed within this study suggest that the South Korean government's attitudes haven't changed. According to the website of the Embassy of South Korea in Kazakhstan, South Korea Ambassadors still encourage Kazakhstani Koreans to stay in Kazakhstan underscoring that their 'mission' is to mediate the relationships between Kazakhstan and South Korea. This narrative can be traced on the South Korean Embassy's website. For instance, the section dedicated to the Ambassador's activity describes the Ambassador's meetings with the Korean Association representatives in different regions of Kazakhstan. Often, during these meetings the Ambassador would call the Korean community in Kazakhstan as 'people's diplomacy guides', 'connecting link', and 'bridge' between South Korea and Kazakhstan. Below are the extracts from the official website of the Embassy of the Republic of Korea in Kazakhstan describing the Ambassador's meeting with the Association of Koreans.

- 1) On February 24 this year, Ambassador Kim Desik met with the Deputy Chairman of the Pavlodar branch of the Association of Koreans, Ms. Afanasyeva R., the elderly, and the employees of the Association to get acquainted with the current activities of the Association. They highly appreciated the fact that the Korean people overcame difficulties and *are currently playing important role as a link between Korea and Kazakhstan*. They also discussed ways to strengthen and support Korean society (overseas.mofa.go.kr, 2020).

Picture 8. Meeting of the Ambassador Kim Desik with the Association of Koreans in Pavlodar.



Another meeting held in May 2017 with the Almaty Association of Koreans conveys a similar message (see picture 9). This is how the official website of the Embassy of the Republic of Korea in Kazakhstan describes it:

- 2) Mr. Ambassador highly appreciated the role of the Korean diaspora living in the Republic of Kazakhstan. He also noted that despite the difficult conditions, the Korean diaspora was able to become the most educated and successful diaspora and currently plays an important role among the 130 nationalities living in the Republic of Kazakhstan. Mr. Ambassador promised that he would make every effort to get more attention from the Government of the Republic of Korea, as *the Korean diaspora plays an important role in the development of relations between Korea and Kazakhstan* (overseas.mofa.go.kr, 2017).

Picture 9. Ambassador Kim Desik visiting the Korean theater in Almaty



Furthermore, in an interview with a Kazakhstani TV channel, Ambassador Kim Desik explicitly states that South Korea doesn't stipulate for a repatriation program for Kazakhstani Koreans like, for example, Germany does for Kazakhstani Germans. Instead, they offer work visas for ethnic Koreans of the post-Soviet states. Below is the translation of an extract from the interview that aired in the Russian language (inbusiness.kz, 2019). See the full transcript in Appendix 2.

- There is a big Korean diaspora in Kazakhstan. How many Koreans from Kazakhstan repatriated to their homeland?
- In Korea we don't have such a program like Germany does. You probably know that Germany have such program and they repatriate their compatriots from abroad, grant them citizenship, etc. In Korea we don't have such program that would repatriate our compatriots and will grant them citizenship. Currently in Kazakhstan reside over 100,000 Koreans and they serve as a 'bridge' between our countries. But since we share the same blood, we offer them special visa for ethnic Koreans. The statistics say that since 2017 we have issued over 13,000 special visas for ethnic Koreans. They can easily study, develop themselves and work based on these visas. But we don't have a system that would allow them to come to Korea and obtain a citizenship.

In the same interview, the Ambassador laments that the number of illegal workers in South Korea from Kazakhstan (over 11,000 migrants at the time of the interview) was steadily increasing. According to the Ambassador, some South Korean companies hire these people through the networks of Kazakhstanis working in South Korea. The Ambassador underscores that the agencies profiting from such illegal transborder movement of people are mainly located in Kazakhstan. Kim Desik summarized that a labor shortage that can't be addressed locally entails illegal migrants flow not only from Kazakhstan but also from Southeast Asia. Illegal labor migration is observed equally among Kazakhstani Koreans and other Kazakhstani nationalities, the Ambassador concludes (inbusiness.kz, 2019).

The reviewed sources imply that South Koreans are interested in their co-ethnics only in the Kazakhstani context or as a labor force. By imposing its role as a mediator, the South Korean Embassy implicitly encourages its co-ethnics to remain territorially bound to Kazakhstan. Thus, the current relations and increased interest of South Korea in Kazakhstan are not conditioned by 'ethnic dimension' but rather by "the quest for energy ..." that "opened new opportunities for engagement and for diversifying foreign policy ties" (Fumagalli, 2016, p. 40). It is also true that South Korea's diaspora politics are primarily focused on maximizing the economic potential of both expatriate Koreans and South Korean society, thus regulating the admittance or exclusion of their overseas co-ethnics depending on their economic productivity" (Pakhomov, 2018). As such, more often exclusion than admission will be elaborated on below in the section dedicated to transnational processes.

The Association as a mediator between South Korea and Kazakhstan

The Association of Koreans of Kazakhstan operates in 16 cities and state the revival of Korean identity as their main objective. The development concept as stated on the Association'

official webpage includes, among others, the expansion of scientific, educational, and professional ties with both Koreas. The Association also acknowledges that Korean labor migrants need more support in improving their status in South Korea. The other important mission of the Association is to preserve cultural heritage of Kazakhstani Koreans. Thus, the Association envisages the construction of ethno-village that would allow its visitors to familiarize with the history, culture, and traditions of Kazakhstani Koreans. Another project planned by the Association is the digitalization of history and culture of Koryo Saram (Koreans.kz, n.d.).

Based on the above, it could be assumed that the association serves as focal point uniting all Kazakhstani Koreans – a diasporic space that aims at stimulating diasporic consciousness and strengthen diasporic ties. However, most participants report that they don't engage with these associations. Some informants who are currently actively involved in the work of such association also report that the events organized by the associations fail to attract many Koreans of Kazakhstan. The other respondents, in turn, admit that they are not willing to engage with the associations explaining it by the lack of time. A few respondents underscore that their experience of working with Associations proved to be very demanding and highly politicized. This is how Victoria (35) shares her experience of working with one of such organizations:

I used to be a very active member of the association but eventually was deeply disappointed in it. In addition to the necessity to invest one's time and energy, the association also expects a full commitment to their political agenda. For example, there was one Korean businessman who ran for Majilis (the lower house of the bicameral Parliament of Kazakhstan) and we (young members of the association) had to support a campaign which meant attracting other young Koreans. The association leadership used to motivate us by such statements as: "We are diaspora! We are Koreans! We have to pursue one goal!" I felt a lot of pressure and quit the association as soon as I could. Today young Koreans don't want to accept the associations' "rules of the game", that's why they are not popular.

To understand the mission of the associations in the political context, it would be useful to look at their affiliations with other institutions such as the Assembly of People of Kazakhstan. The Assembly of People of Kazakhstan with the president of Kazakhstan acting as a chair of the institution aims at “implementation of the state national policy, ensuring socio-political stability in the country and improving the efficiency of cooperation between state institutions and civil society in the sphere of interethnic relations” (assembly.kz., n.d.). When translated into tangible actions, the state national policy as formulated by the president Nursultan Nazarbayev at the session of the Assembly in 2015, assumes “the development of all-Kazakhstani culture, strengthening the unity of the people on the basis of common spiritual and moral values, patriotic education of youth, further development of the state language and trilingual education, ensuring public control in a transparent state, preventing the politicization of interethnic relations, as well as strengthening cultural and humanitarian ties with partners in Eurasian Economic Union” (assembly.kz., n.d.).

The associations of Koreans in Kazakhstan work under the auspices of the Assembly of People of Kazakhstan and, thus, are being criticized for excessively politicizing their activities by some scholars (Laruelle, 2015) and the informants within this research. Positioned by South Korea as a ‘bridge’ uniting the two states and by Kazakhstan as ‘grateful guests’, the associations are forced to label their Kazakhstani co-ethnics and themselves accordingly.

The General Khon Bom Do as a mediator figure

The South Korean Embassy communicates with Kazakhstani Koreans via the Korean Associations. The same channel of communication was used when negotiating the repatriation of the remains of the legendary general Khon Bom Do. Below I review the article published in the newspaper “Koryo Ilbo” that describes the transfer of the general’s remains (Tin, 2021).

Khon Bom Do was leading the fight with Japanese oppressors in the Northern part of the Korean peninsula. After escaping from the Japanese prison, he migrated to the Russian Far East in 1913 and was subsequently deported to Kazakhstan in 1937. He died in Kyzyl-Orda in 1943. The article focuses on the ceremony of the transfer of the remains by Kazakhstani Koreans and the government officials to the general's ancestral homeland, its southern part, to be precise. The author emphasizes that this journey back to Korea is an important and necessary step in celebrating Khom Bon Do's contribution to the development of both Koreas. The article also underscores that the whole Korean diaspora have actively participated in negotiations on the exhumation and further reburial since Khom Bon Do didn't have a family to make such a sensitive decision. The transfer was planned for 14 August so the legendary general would arrive in South Korea on its independence day. The article mentions high-ranked officials representing Kazakhstan and South Korea. Besides, the news is quite long. It occupies two full pages. This signals that it should be deemed as a serious event by the Koryo Ilbo readers. The pictures featuring officials from South Korea, their solemn attire, postures, and gazes intensify the significance of this international event. Khon Bom Do had lived his last years in Qyzyl-Orda, worked as security at the Korean theater. The general lost his wife and son before the deportation and then died in 1943.

The author emphasized the role of Korean diaspora leaders in the decision-making process, thus reiterating the official rhetoric of the Korean diaspora's role as 'ambassadors of public diplomacy' for South Korea and Kazakhstan. North Korea which also claimed the remains and wider Korean diaspora are silenced in this discourse. The article also underscores that the decision of the remains transfer was made collectively by 'all Kazakhstani Korean' rather than exclusively by a group of activists. The interviews within this research, on the contrary, suggest that the

participants are not familiar with this heroic figure in the history of the Korean community. This newspaper article is of interest for this research because it demonstrates the contrasting attitudes of the South Korean government towards the remains of their national hero and the descendants of other deported Koreans in Kazakhstan. Khom Bon Do was repatriated posthumously while the Korean diaspora in Kazakhstan is encouraged to stay territorially bound to Kazakhstan. According to Saveliev (2004), five to ten percent of the Korean diaspora of the Russian Far East took part in the liberation movement. This fact suggests that the descendants of some unknown activists are being potentially overlooked by the current migration policies of South Korea.

The voices of diasporans that are silenced in the official discourse

This section attempts to incorporate attitudes of Kazakhstani Koreans regarding their ethnic community, the associations, Kazakhstan and South Korea. Thus, the narratives below unveil inconsistencies between the image of the diaspora as viewed through the lens of the associations and both states, and the actual perception of the participants of themselves.

It is important to note that the narrative of the ‘gratitude to the Kazakh people’, discussed in the previous section of this chapter, has been intensifying in the past decade with the opening of the monument “A thousand thanks to the Kazakh people” in Ushtobe in 2012, marking its onset. The traumatic memories of the deportation and the post-deportation hardship that the first generations of Koreans in Kazakhstan chose to forget are now being insistently showcased to their descendants by the national media agents, the Korean Embassy, and some Kazakhstani compatriots. Notwithstanding the political motivation behind the discourse that has been disseminating through the official statements and iconography, it potentially gave rise to occasional nationalist claims from the titular ethnicity as reported by the participants. Thus, Alina (32) shares her vision of the generational change in the inter-ethnic relations in Kazakhstan:

Lately, during the last five years, I've been hearing more and more about 'gratitude'. What is most interesting about this is that the older generation practically did not say: We helped you! Because everyone knew that they really helped. For some reason, recently I began to hear from the younger people: "Our ancestors helped you and now you owe us until the end of your lives!" My parents also say that in their time this was not the case.

Stanislav (41), too, believes that such attitudes have strengthened in the post-independence

Kazakhstan:

I feel less and less comfortable in Kazakhstan due to some nationalist statements. For instance, recently I was involved in a conflict situation and some people blamed my father and myself for coming to Kazakhstan (*ponaehali*) which is absolutely nonsense. I understand that this kind of accusation is common for uneducated people, yet they are very unpleasant to hear. Such statements were unthinkable in my childhood. Although Kazakh children could call me "Koreets" (Korean), the nationalist undertones were lacking back then.

Other respondents, however, present a more positive image of their position in Kazakhstan. Thus, all the respondents choose to avoid questioning their status and prefer to focus on their personal lives without delving into politics. The younger participants believe that globalization and digitalization of social life explains the distancing of Koreans from their ethnic community in Kazakhstan. Thus, Denis' (21) narrative illustrates how diasporic ties have weakened over the decades:

Unfortunately, we don't maintain the ties the way our parents did. For example, my father told me that in the past if they met a Korean, they would bring them home and become close friends. The point is Kazakhstan is multiethnic and friendly that's why there is no need to single out your ethnicity and call for unity. In addition to that, the internet replaced live communication and reduced the sense of belonging to your co-ethnics.

The participants believe that in addition to technological advancements, overall social environments relaxed diasporic ties too. For instance, one respondent explained it as follows: "In the past, there was a need to keep together. But today if we compare Koreans in Russia and

Uzbekistan, I can say that Koreans in Kazakhstan are in a much more comfortable position. That's why I believe that Koreans integrated the best in Kazakhstan among other post-Soviet states". While admitting weakened diasporic ties, many participants state that they prefer to see themselves as Kazakhstani Koreans rather than a diaspora.

In addition to loosening diasporic ties, some estrangement among the diaspora members was noted by many the participants. These are rather typical attitudes towards their Kazakhstani co-ethnics presented by Roman (35):

When I see a Korean, I start to analyze him, and he feels it because he does the same. We can salute each other and smile but we both feel some disaffection.

A similar opinion was expressed by Veronika (21)

I think that Korean ties are weakening. Perhaps, it happens because of the competitive spirit we feel when we see another Korean. You think: what if he/she is better than me? I need to work more... It also depends on a family. I know families that say: "Our Koreans (Svoyi rodnyie)!" And some families who don't really care when they see a Korean.

Arguably, such distancing of diasporans could be explained by their internalized feeling of being 'not good-enough Korean'. Thus, many Koreans believe that they don't 'qualify' to be a part of Korean diaspora. Moreover, many used the concept of 'diaspora' and the 'Korean associations' interchangeably. It could be assumed that shared ethnic background and collective memory are no longer the main factors determining belonging to the diaspora for Kazakhstani Koreans. Thus, at the beginning of the interviews, many informants preferred to 'warn' me that they are 'so-so' or not 'pure' Koreans and couldn't 'properly' contribute to the present research.

However, this distancing and devaluing doesn't necessarily imply a reluctance to be a part of their ethnic community. Rather, this could be explained by the idealized image of the Korean diaspora among ordinary Koreans. The informants generally believe that it is not enough to be an

ethnic Korean to consider oneself as part of the diaspora. According to the respondents' accounts, one is expected to practice Korean traditions, "keep the blood pure", learn Korean (regardless of dialects), and engage with the Korean Associations.

And finally, virtually all the participants reported rather low expectations from South Korea as their ancestral homeland. Thus, many see the South Korean government's stance vis-à-vis Kazakhstani Koreans as reasonable. This is how Roman (35) explains it:

No one owes us anything. It so happened that our ancestors were deported to Central Asia. However, they themselves decided to migrate to the Russian Far East. So, everything is fair. Why would they (South Korea) owe us?

Olesya (25) adds:

The Embassy's position towards Kazakhstani Koreans is neutral as it should be. They help only Koreans in the Russian Far East because they had been oppressed by Japan. Ours are considered to have decided looking for a better life and thus they have no help. If you want to work, then here is a work visa for you. But there is no such program to repatriate us.

Conclusion

Some scholars believe that Kazakhstani Koreans enjoy an elevated status among other ethnic minorities due to well-developed economic relations between Kazakhstan and South Korea (Laruelle, 2015; Oka, 2006). However, this chapter demonstrates that the origins of the Korean diaspora in Kazakhstan largely conditioned their status. The media sources discussed in this chapter illustrate that Kazakhstan seeks to eternalize the 'guest'-status of its ethnic minorities through revisiting historical events and building new iconic spaces while actively promoting the 'gratitude' discourse by the media. Although officially presented as full citizens, Koreans are not expected to ever belong to Kazakhstan fully. Due to such incomplete acceptance in Kazakhstan and difficulties in reconnecting with South Korea, Kazakhstani Koreans found themselves in the

situation where they are encouraged to be grateful to Kazakhstan and loyal to South Korea while remaining territorially bound to Kazakhstan. Both Kazakhstan and South Korea encourage Kazakhstani Koreans to remain in Kazakhstan while reminding them about their ‘indebted guest’ status.

Brubaker alerts from considering diaspora as a “bounded entity, but rather as an idiom, a stance, a claim” where a claim would be articulated by a small group of diasporans with a majority representing a stance (2005, p. 12). Kazakhstani Koreans also can be divided into a small portion of active diasporans and a less diasporic majority. Thus, weakened diasporic ties and low level of trust among Kazakhstani Koreans, that this chapter revealed, unearth a gap between active diasporans and the majority who do not support diasporic stances and not involved in diasporic projects (Brubaker, 2005). Moreover, this chapter demonstrated that the Associations of Koreans that represent only a small portion of the Korean community seems to be trapped between Kazakhstan and South Korea and is compelled to articulate the messages of their patrons, while the majority of diasporans distance themselves from their Kazakhstani co-ethnics.

And finally, this chapter proves that the definition of diaspora as viewed and presented by Kazakhstan and South Korea is not necessarily what diasporans believe it is. At least, they believe this definition has little to do with themselves.

Chapter 4

Territorialization and Transnational Practices of Kazakhstani Koreans

The previous chapters discussed the factors responsible for changes in the diasporic consciousness that is forgetting of their collective past and native language, cultural ‘osmoses’, the impact of economic development, and finally the postures of Kazakhstan and South Korea vis-à-vis the Korean community of Kazakhstan. As a result of the combination of these factors, the interviews within the current research demonstrate a gradual dissolution of diasporic ties and blurring of diasporic identity. However, to avoid rushing with assumptions, it is essential to understand other diasporic spaces. Therefore, this chapter will address the concept of homeland as presented by the participants. This chapter will also seek to understand why Kazakhstani Koreans chose to perceive South Korea as their historic homeland and what kind of transnational practices they engage in.

Homeland as a Territorializing Agent

As agreed by some scholars, longing for homeland is a strong determinant of diasporic identity (Brubaker, 2005; Clifford, 1994; Saffran, 1991). “Where is your homeland?” then would be a reasonable question to ask the Korean community in Kazakhstan. Is it North Korea from where their ancestors migrated to the Russian far East? Or the Russian Far East where their great-grand parents struggled to put down roots? Or, finally, Kazakhstan where they were born, work, study, and create families?

According to Diener’s survey (2006), most of the interviewed Kazakhstani Koreans perceived Kazakhstan as their homeland, which supports the “territorial citizenship” approach adopted by the latter. Diener (2006) compared Kazakhstani-Koreans with Kazakhstani Germans who showed a higher level of allegiance to their historical homeland (Koreans – 6,6 % vs Germans

– 14%). Besides, this survey revealed Kazakhstani Germans’ perception of themselves as stigmatized after World War II as enemy ethnicity. Koreans, in their turn, as legitimate participants of the war, associated themselves with the victory over Nazism which helped them to improve their status in Kazakhstan (Diener, 2006). According to Akiner (2007), the Koreans seemed to accept deportation as a “tragic malfunction of the system” and preferred to rather focus on establishing themselves in Kazakhstan (Akiner, 2007, p. 48).

The interviews within this research confirm the Korean community’s connection with Kazakhstan. Virtually all the respondents except the one born in Uzbekistan, believe that Kazakhstan is their homeland. Rather than generalizing the informants’ statements, it would be useful to present them in greater detail here.

- “Kazakhstan is the place where we were accepted, and I was born. I understand that we are ethnically different but mentally we are the same”, Olga, (34).
- “I never perceived Korea as my home, I feel at home in Kazakhstan. In fact, it is my home”, Oleg, (27):
- “My homeland is here. I’ve never encountered any pressure (from the titular ethnicity). Some narrow-minded people may express negative thoughts but still this is a home for many ethnicities. I think more pressure could be experienced regarding the Kazakh language, but I personally never encountered it”, Alexander, (45).
- “Kazakhstan is my homeland. I was born and grew up here. If I move somewhere (South Korea), I will certainly come back to visit”, Veronika, (21).
- “Homeland is where you feel like yourself and where is your family. I feel quite comfortable in Kazakhstan”, Denis (21).
- “If compared with my life in Europe during my undergraduate studies, I feel more secure economically and socially in Kazakhstan. My relatives and my home are here, and I can get emotional or financial assistance here”, Olesya, (25).

Victoria (35) explains how her understanding of what homeland is has transformed throughout the years:

“For me Kazakhstan is my homeland. I knew neither Korea nor the Russian Far East. When I was younger, I thought Korea was my homeland and the Korean language was my native language. However, the experience of living outside Kazakhstan (in Russia) proved that there is no better place than Kazakhstan for me”.

Similar feelings were expressed by Roman (35)

“I was born here, and everything suits me in Kazakhstan. I like our mentality (Kazakhstani) that can’t be replicated anywhere else. I have experience of living abroad for a few months. I felt longing for my homeland (Kazakhstan), especially I missed our way of communicating when you know how to negotiate things. Besides, I missed a lot our weather and food. In fact, we talk about it with my friends, and we collectively agree that there is not a better place than Kazakhstan. Some places have high taxes, some will exclude you because of your eye shape, some go through various crises...

Some respondents shared that they acknowledge that Kazakhstan is Kazakhs’ “primordial” (*iskonno*) land. In their understanding, Kazakhs have been living in this land long before the massive migration influx during the Soviet era, therefore, they “belong” to this land and somehow the land “belongs” to them. Therefore, the sense of being “othered”, which is occasionally relevant, perceived in many cases as a reasonable, if not fair, phenomenon. As Victoria (35) puts it: “I am not oppressed here but I also lack any privileges”. Similarly, Svetlana (28) confesses that with all positive relationships between Kazakhs and other ethnicities in Kazakhstan, they understand that their opportunities are limited when it comes to the highest ranks of power.

The Kazakh Language requirements as perceived by the participants

The emergence of the Kazakh language as a state language in the post-Soviet Kazakhstan added more complexity to the expectations from the Korean community by the host-state. Since most Koreans in Kazakhstan speak Russian as their first language, questions regarding their attitude towards and proficiency in the Kazakh language were asked to understand how comfortable the Korean community feels about the state language requirements. In general, the respondents’ attitudes toward the Kazakh language could be summarized as positive. Virtually all respondents believe it is fair to expect all Kazakhstani citizens to learn the Kazakh language even those who are not ethnically Kazakh. This stance is supported by a following statement which is

typical to other responses: “I must speak Kazakh, since I live in Kazakhstan”. Some respondents even state that if Kazakhstan tightens Kazakh language requirements, they will rather learn Kazakh than migrate.

Many respondents underscore the fluency in Kazakh as an asset for a successful career and a full access to social capital in Kazakhstan. In this regard, Stanislav (41) laments that an insufficient level of Kazakh would be a potential impediment for pursuing political ambitions for their children. However, most informants noted that one can easily survive without speaking Kazakh since the Russian language is still widespread in Kazakhstan. However, occasional pressure from the titular ethnicity were mentioned as a stressing aspect of their lives in Kazakhstan by a couple of interviewees. Thus, Olesya (25) describes it as follows:

Because of nationalism many Koreans move to the South of Russia. Many young people choose to study there. This is because there are some unpleasant cases that are happening here in Kazakhstan... For instance, recently one man asked me what time it was. I answered him in Russian. To which the man replied: “I asked you in Kazakh. You must answer me in Kazakh”. I am sure he didn’t realize I wasn’t Kazakh since I was wearing a mask. But I believe that there are people who want everyone (in Kazakhstan) to learn Kazakh regardless of their ethnicity. However, many Russians and Kazakhs themselves don’t speak Kazakh. Thus, I don’t consider it as a very discriminating factor for Koreans.

Similar impressions were expressed by Stanislav (41):

People don’t feel embarrassed to comment on one’s level of Kazakh. No matter if these comments are addressed to a Kazakh or Korean person. One can have a million reasons not to speak Kazakh very well. Besides, the educational system is not designed to increase the level of Kazakh among non-Kazakh speakers.

The following statements support these concerns: “It is harder to live in Kazakhstan for those who don’t speak any Kazakh. Nevertheless, most of participants claimed that they possess a sufficient level of the language to understand when someone addresses them in Kazakh and reply in simple phrases. A few respondents stated that the good knowledge of the Kazakh language due

to their Kazakh-speaking environment allows them to feel more comfortable in Kazakhstan and especially among older Kazakh-speaking people. This last statement represents the level of the Kazakh language as indexical to the loyalty to the titular ethnicity.

The younger respondents demonstrated more enthusiasm in learning the Kazakh language. A few respondents even asserted that if a Korean possesses a high level of Kazakh, it can open new opportunities since the expectations for non-Kazakhs regarding the language are lower and the benefits are higher. For example, Mikhail (20), who went to Kazakh pre-school, admits that this experience helped him not only to learn the language but also get along easily with Kazakhs. “When Kazakh people hear someone who is not ethnically Kazakh speaking their language, they look pleasantly surprised. This helps build better relations.”

Although all the participants acknowledge and admit the legitimacy of the state language requirements, none of them is currently investing in learning Kazakh as they do with the South Korean dialect. However, those participants who have no migration plans understand the necessity to learn the Kazakh language if not for themselves then at least for their children.

Transnational processes

Modern scholarly literature suggests studying a diaspora in the context of transnationalism (Clifford, 1997; Glick Schiller, et al., 1992). Therefore, we look at the concept of diaspora and transnationalism as two constantly reciprocating and influencing each other phenomena. It is equally important to study transnational processes from below which means based on the lived experiences of the diaspora representatives.

As it was mentioned in the previous section, the role of the sending state in promoting transnational spaces shouldn't be neglected. Thus, in the case of the Korean diaspora, their historical homeland that was divided into North and South Korea, posit itself differently vis-à-vis

their overseas co-ethnics too. As Olga (34) mentions, North Korea is an inaccessible state, which makes the reuniting with it impossible for Kazakhstani Koreans. South Korea, in turn, although stressing the role of Kazakhstani Koreans as the ‘bridge’ between the two states, offers limited repatriation opportunities through work visas. Respondents’ narratives suggest that this opportunity is currently largely seized by less educated Koreans seeking to improve their financial situation, a point that will be taken up later in this chapter. This tendency, however, is shifting toward permanent residency migration through educational migration. Thus, some respondents admit that they learn the Korean dialect and get higher education in Kazakhstan to continue their professional path in South Korea. Korean pop-culture, which is widespread among the youth of Kazakhstan, was named as one of the factors enhancing South Korea’s attractiveness not only to Kazakhstani Koreans but other ethnicities as well.

South Korean Dialect

The South Korean dialect for many reasons looks attractive to Kazakhstani Koreans, especially for the younger interviewees. Thus, 9 respondents out of 16 informs me that they are actively learning the South Korean dialect. Most of these respondents are in their early twenties. Unlike Koryo Mar that was viewed by some informants as an “outdated” language, the South Korean dialect is perceived as more authentic. As one informer puts it: “I learn *real* Korean. I hired a tutor and use online resources. I had plans to study in Korea which weren’t realized, but anyways it is useful to know Korean in case I want to work in South Korea one day.”

A few informants share that they decided to learn Korean to reconnect with their history and culture. For instance, when asked about the motivation to learn the South Korean dialect Denis (21) spoke of his duty as a Korean to learn his “native” language: “I am Korean. It is shame for a Korean not to know our original (*iznachalny*) language.” Olga (34) also shares her patriotic

feelings regarding the language: “It is our ‘native’ language, historically native that we must know because the language is part of our culture, like food. It is part of us. We need to know who we are”. Oleg (27) has similar beliefs about the connection between the language and identity:

I used to feel bad not knowing Korean. Because when I was asked: Why don’t you speak Kazakh? I used to answer: “Because I am Korean”. They would then say: “Do you speak Korean?”. “No.” ... “Who are you then?”. That’s why I decided to go to Korea and learn the language.

Even those who didn’t study the language felt a connection towards it. Thus, Mikhail (20) noted that if the Korean language was available at his university, he would choose to learn Korean (he chose to learn Chinese instead as an undergraduate student). Stanislav (41) who also has never learnt Korean himself admitted that he suggested his children to consider learning it for the opportunities South Korea can offer in the fields of education and employment.

As it was mentioned in the previous section, some younger Koreans prefer to frame Koryo Mar and the South Korean dialect as one whole language that has developed into different dialects. A few participants shared this view which are reflected in the following statements:

“I think there was no division between the South and North dialects prior to a political split between North and South Korea. Later under the US influence, South Koreans acquired loanwords from American English. Besides, we can’t learn North Korean dialect since North Korea is a closed state”.

In the same vein, Veronika states (21):

“I don’t’ consider myself as Korean from North Korea. I don’t divide Korean into South and North dialects. What is important is that I am Korean hence I must know the Korean language. It is the same as with the Kazakh language, South and West dialects are different, but people still understand each other”.

Regardless of differences in perception of Korean as a primordial link between their culture and themselves, all the participants unanimously recognized its pragmatic benefits. Thus, some interviewees associated the South Korean dialect with opportunities in their personal and

professional lives. These opportunities inform Kazakhstani Koreans' decisions on investing time, efforts, and money into learning the South Korean dialect. Some of the participants use online courses, some go to Korean centers, and some employ private tutors to learn the language. One respondent even established connections with South Korean peers through online educational platforms with the goal of improving her Korean.

Migration to South Korea: educational and circular labor migration

As we saw in chapter 3, the state of relations with home-countries North and South Korea contributed to the low repatriation rate of Soviet Koreans after Kazakhstan became independent in 1991. Another factor that influenced historically insignificant rates of return is lost connection with their ancestral homeland. For example, the fieldwork carried out by Chang (2016) proves that even the first generation of Central Asian Koreans didn't show commitment to their ancestral homeland explaining it by their families' voluntary decision to migrate to the Russian Far East. They also admitted that they had lost all connections with their extended families and saw their homes and future in Central Asia. Other scholars also agree that Kazakhstani Koreans tended to remain territorially, if not culturally, bound to Kazakhstan (Diener, 2006; Kim & King, 2001) whereas the above discussion on homeland confirms that Koreans are connected to Kazakhstan not only territorially but also culturally. Thus, the emigration of the Koryo saram abroad was insignificant; the majority of those who chose to leave Kazakhstan landed in the post-Soviet republics after the USSR disintegration (Kim & King, 2001).

Kim A. (2006) argues that the repatriation of Koryo Saram to the Russian Far East in the first 10-15 years after the USSR dissolution wasn't successful since the Central Asian Koreans considerably differed culturally from their fellow citizens, who moved back to the RFE in the 1950-1970s (when Soviet Koreans were allowed some internal mobility), were consistently

exposed to Soviet and Russian culture thus completely integrated to the local society. Among these Korean communities, the rate of inter-marriages was much higher and their diasporic ties were much weaker. They didn't associate themselves with any Korean community (local or foreign) but rather embraced the local mainstream culture. Central Asian Koreans, in turn, were perceived as strangers and outsiders which conditioned tensions between Central Asian and the RFE Koreans. Central Asian Koreans, therefore, continued to associate themselves with their ethnic communities in Central Asia which stimulated the strengthening of their diasporic boundaries. Difficulties in obtaining Russian citizenship contributed to the poor integration of Central Asian Koreans in the Russian Far East.

The Sakhalin Koreans, in their turn, due to language abilities and always present faith in returning to their kinstate, were able to reconnect with their relatives of the Korean Peninsula while Continental Koreans (Koryo Saram) being completely isolated in the Central Asian Republics lost these ties. This, according to Saveliev (2012), conditioned Koryo Saram's territorialized identification and determined the migration trends and relationships with their ancestral homeland.

Interviews within this research demonstrates that the attachment to Kazakhstan doesn't prevent Kazakhstani Koreans from migrating to South Korea for various reasons discussed below. As it was mentioned in chapter 3, ethnic Koreans are granted work visas and as reported by the interviewees even the fifth generation of Koreans can obtain such visa without taking the Korean language exam. As a result, today Kazakhstani Koreans enjoy the freedom of choosing between two homelands: Kazakhstan and South Korea. This autonomy promotes mobility among the Korean community which can be divided into two categories labor migration and educational migration. In fact, as reported by the informants, labor migration to South Korea is a widespread phenomenon among Kazakhstani Koreans.

Most of the respondents confirmed that their relatives and friends either have worked or currently reside in South Korea. Virtually all these migrants are involved in 3D jobs. Given high salaries paid for these types of work and additional benefits provided by their employers such as accommodation and food, many people choose to save their earnings while avoiding socialization outside these industrial plants. This prevents Kazakhstani Koreans from integrating into the mainstream society. Thus, Svetlana (28) depicts social exclusion of her relatives who live and work in South Korea:

They must work long days. And even children born in these ‘3-D’ families can’t integrate since they don’t speak Korean as well as their parents. Their schools are not designed to include non-speakers. Korea is still a very homogenous country and those 5% coming from other places are usually marginalized just because they are different.

There are some cases of tied migration; however, according to the participants’ accounts, more often Kazakhstani Koreans go to work in South Korea individually. In some cases, families that had to separate due to labor migration, plan to reconnect in their historic homeland. One such case was narrated by Anya (21):

I have plans on moving to South Korea because my parents live there. They migrated there almost five years ago, and I plan to join them. I was a high-school student when they went to South Korea. So, I stayed with my grandparents. After high school, I couldn’t attend South Korean university and I got enrolled into a local university. I have graduated from it as a translator from English into Russian and now I am eligible to apply for work visa.

Some scholars suggest that poor integration in their historic homeland has been mainly conditioned by the negative attitudes of their South Korean co-ethnics (Kim, 2003b; Kokaisl, 2018; Oka, 2006). Although being initially highly interested in becoming closer after a long separation, South and Soviet Koreans found themselves culturally alienated (Kim, 2003b; Kokaisl, 2018; Oka, 2006). In this regard, Oka (2006) explains that Kazakhstani Koreans have realized that

they are not welcome in South Korea and are perceived by their co-ethnics as ‘imperfect Koreans’ (p. 376). Kim and King (2001) add that after initial excitement to reconnect with their compatriots, many South Korean institutions and individuals demonstrated signs of "arrogance and cultural imperialism" (p. 15). Many participants, too, admit that South Koreans perceive them as ‘impure Koreans’ and don’t differentiate them from other labor migrants coming, for example, from the Philippines or Pakistan.

While admitting cultural differences, the respondent interviewed within this research also add that the attitudes of South Koreans toward post-Soviet Koreans is the least factor discouraging them from repatriating to their ancestral homeland. In fact, a few respondents, on the contrary believe that South Koreans perceive Kazakhstani Koreans with understanding due to their tragic fate in the Soviet Union. However, Denis’ (21) narrative demonstrate that there are still those Koreans who feel intimidated by potentially unfriendly attitudes of their South Koreans co-ethnics:

My aunts and uncles went to South Korea to work 4 years ago. Usually, they go alone and leave their families in Kazakhstan. Many people return because they don’t like food and weather there. Also, they don’t like Koreans there. They have different mindsets. My uncle who has been working in South Korea for three years still doesn’t speak Korean. We often argue with my parents, and I almost convinced my mother, but my father is still confident that Koreans identify us as traitors.

Korean labor migrants socialize only with their Kazakhstani co-ethnics and usually have no personal contacts with South Koreans. Therefore, initially expected bonding on purely ethnic marker proved to be invalid in South Korea. This caused Kazakhstani Koreans to become disillusioned with the myth of their historical homeland and primordial ethnic connection. As a result of cultural exclusion, these labor migrants emotionally remain connected to their multicultural communities in Kazakhstan. They perceive South Korea as an estranged land where they look like locals yet have unbridgeable cultural differences. Like Brazilian Japanese

repatriating to Japan described by Tsuda's (2003) research, Kazakhstani Koreans tend to idealize Kazakhstan after they move to South Korea.

The increasing flow of labor migrants from Central Asia and Russia because not addressed accordingly, result in the 'Russian neighborhoods' that are deemed to be troublesome to the local government. This is the narrative of Oleg (27) who has spent three years in South Korea:

The attitudes of South Koreans to repatriating 'Russian' Koreans were much better at the beginning of 2000. But we managed to ruin our reputation ourselves. Although South Koreans are very friendly and open, they try to keep away from our people (*nashyh*). There are even special 'Russian' districts and I have to say they are really dirty. I call them 'Ghetto'. Usually they 'enjoy' the reinforced police patrol. That's why I preferred to rent an apartment in other districts. There are also a lot of illegal migrants among our Koreans. Why? For example, if Koreans lose their work visas because of drunk driving and they don't want to be deported, they stay illegally in South Korea.

Tatyana (27), who resides in Seoul, shares similar perception of her Kazakhstani co-ethnics in South Korea:

Unfortunately, our compatriots have not a very good reputation. 'Russian' neighborhoods are deemed to be unsafe. These neighborhoods mainly feature restaurants and grocery stores. Local Koreans and I don't feel comfortable there.

Although being financially attractive, labor migration to South Korea also proved to be a mentally and physically demanding endeavor due to the nature of 3-D jobs (dangerous, dirty, and difficult), low level of education and language limitations. An isolated lifestyle which is conditioned by the factories' provided dwelling, physically demanding jobs, language barrier, lack of state-sponsored programs, and differences in business ethics (stricter hierarchy and higher expectations of loyalty) were named as the main obstacles of successful integration in South Korea.

Furthermore, since work or student visa is the only way to move to South Korea and upgrading this type of visa to a permanent residency and further to citizenship is complicated, most

Kazakhstani Koreans tend to return to Kazakhstan. Anya (21) explains why obtaining permanent residency is not an option for many:

Citizenship is a little more difficult to do, since in addition to work visa you must know Korean very well. As a minimum, you need to have level 5 out of 6 which is almost like native speaker's level. There have been cases when citizenship is given if you are a descendant of some renowned general. I saw some Russian bloggers obtained visa like that. Most of my relatives went there to work.

Tatyana (27) provides us with more details on permanent residency options:

Most of the people who come to work at the plants come alone and then bring their families. There are the Russian schools in their neighborhoods. However, many prefer to leave their families in Kazakhstan and send the money back home. I have not met people who work at the factory who would like to change their citizenship and stay in Korea. How easy is it to get citizenship? Not easy. To get a residency you need to prepare a permit package and find a person who will write you a recommendation. And it can't be an ordinary South Korean. This person must work for some big company like, for example, Samsung. And this is only the first step in obtaining a residence permit. In addition, you must have an income of approximately 3500 thousand dollars a month. This option is available only for Koryo Saram.

Those Kazakhstani Koreans who come back to Kazakhstan usually launch small businesses or invest in real estate. However, since they can't find highly paid jobs in Kazakhstan, these Koreans return once again to South Korea, thus contributing to the circular labor migration flow.

The narrative of Victoria (35) is illuminating on what conditions such circular labor migration:

Labor migrants usually go without their families with the main goal to quickly earn a lot of money. Couple of years of their lives will be literally 'buried' there but this money will allow them to invest in something big in Kazakhstan. Sometimes, this becomes obsession. For example, the mother of my colleague managed to save enough money to buy an apartment upon her return from South Korea. Then after some time she decided to go back to South Korea. Her daughter tried to talk her out, but her mother said "What else can I do? We need to "move further" and earn the money for another apartment. However, some people come back to Kazakhstan and with the money saved they launch a small business and try to stay in Kazakhstan and work in a less 'harassing' manner.

Furthermore, the interviews within this research present a more nuanced perception of the South Korean government's stances vis-à-vis their Kazakhstani compatriots residing in South Korea. Many participants believe that South Korea is not interested in 'Soviet' Koreans as their compatriots, but rather view them as labor force necessary for the development of their economy. If such co-ethnics are competitive and can contribute to the pool of professionals, they can try to integrate but they will have to do it on their own since there is little to non-existent programs helping these repatriating Koreans to integrate. Thus, Oleg (27 years) believes that the recent loosening of work visa requirements was dictated by the pandemic restriction on the import of labor force to South Korea rather than by the awakened patriotic sentiments of the South Korean's government.

They (South Korea) need labor force and accept labor migrants from different countries. They need labor migrants and think: "Why not take 'our' *koreins* (*koreiny*)". But they don't treat us as equal Koreans. They call us 'koreins' when they call themselves 'hangoon' which means a resident of Korea and this term has nothing to do with us. As for work visa, they loosened visa requirements during the pandemic and started offering visa even to the fifth generation of Kazakhstani Koreans while omitting language requirements. Why? Because of Corona virus many migrants were deported, and new ones were not allowed into the country. Many factories stopped operating because of the labor shortage. Their migration police stopped raiding activities. They used to deport full planes of migrants before the pandemic. Recently, I heard there were only a few deportees on the planes back home. Visa requirements are always mutating and when they don't need labor migrants anymore, they can just cancel these visas... With work visa you can work for 30 years.

However, the interviews also demonstrate that the younger participants choose to disregard the negative feedbacks and prefer to focus on the opportunities to improve their living standards that South Korea can offer them. Thus, Anya (21) states "I think, the fact that we are granted work visa based on our ethnicity is a privilege." Being aware of potential challenges, they tend to prepare themselves for their future move to South Korea. Such preparation includes not only learning

South Korean dialect but also connecting with South Koreans peers through education platforms and visits to South Korea. Thus, Veronika (21) felt slightly vexed by poor integration of Kazakhstani Koreans in South Korea.

I have friends who went to South Korea to work at a factory. I believe it is hard not to learn the language if you live there for three years. I understand that they have difficult lives and so on. But I also believe that if you go there, you should do your best to learn the language. Even if you come back to Kazakhstan, you can teach Korean here. I think that it is not worth going there just to earn some money and come back. My sister learnt Korean there and decided to stay. It means it *is* possible to work and learn the language if you are motivated.

All the respondents who are 20 to 30 years old admitted that they envisage their migration to South Korea in the near future. Some of them actively prepare for the migration through language courses and visits to South Korea. Those participants who are 30 years and over, in turn, see more hardship than benefits in changing their place of residence. This group of Koreans claim that South Korea is a highly competitive and expensive place which makes integration there virtually impossible. The experiences of the informants' relatives and friends convince many that physically demanding jobs and downward social mobility are not worth leaving their well-established lives in Kazakhstan.

Conclusion

This chapter illustrates two parallel (de)-territorialization trends with one being the territorialization of some Koreans in Kazakhstan and the other representing a growing flow of labor and educational migration to South Korea. These trends are mainly conditioned by such factors as the age, education, and financial position of Koreans in Kazakhstan. Thus, the respondents over 30 years old with well-established lives show more commitment to remain territorially bound to Kazakhstan. This commitment is informed, among other factors, by their

emotional connection to Kazakhstan. This “people-place bond” debunks the concept of homeland as being “an amorphous concept capable of reconfiguring” (Diener, 2009b, p. 21), or of a myth about their imagined homeland.

At the same time, Koreans who find it difficult to achieve a desirable level of financial independence in Kazakhstan choose to seize their ethnic ‘privilege’ to work in South Korea while ignoring the associated downward social mobility. However, due to harsh working conditions and limited opportunities to improve their status, this labor migration often leads to circular labor migration when Kazakhstani Koreans go to South Korea for a few years and then return to Kazakhstan, with some repeating this cycle depending on their financial needs.

The younger generation in their twenties show more commitment and have plans on migrating to their historic homeland than those in their thirties. This group of people choose to migrate to South Korea through educational migration with the goal to eventually obtain residency and citizenship. These young people are often aware of the challenges that their Kazakhstani co-ethnics’ encounter in South Korea. Such awareness usually doesn’t discourage them from migrating to South Korea but rather motivates them to adapt with greater success as compared to Kazakhstani labor migrants.

This chapter also revealed issues in handling labor migrants by the South Korean government. Thus, arguably, visa requirements imposed on Kazakhstani Koreans are shaped by economic needs of South Korea rather than by ethnic solidarity. For example, when it is needed for the South Korean economy, the work visa neglects language requirements, whereas, when granting permanent residency, Kazakhstani Koreans are expected to demonstrated high language abilities. Such a selective approach prevents Kazakhstani Koreans from improving their social and economic status in South Korea while ensuring the uninterrupted work force inflow.

Chapter 5. Conclusion

Over 80 years have passed since the second uprooting of the Korean community from the Russian Far East. With over 100,000 Koreans residing in Kazakhstan, this community has maintained its diasporic ties and boundaries for a long time. However, the findings of this research project indicate that the third and fourth generations of Koreans no longer maintain diasporic ties the way their parents and grandparents did and have developed a complex hybrid identity. This ethnic group does not demonstrate strong attributes of a diaspora, such as longing for ancestral homeland, high level of reciprocity and a strong awareness of their diasporic identity. On the contrary, this community clearly demonstrates distancing from each other and little commitment to maintain their diasporic boundaries.

The main factors that played a role in shaping a ‘hybrid’ diasporic identity among Kazakhstani Koreans are fragmented transmission of collective memory, eradication of the native language, and the thinning of ethnic and cultural background due to the upsurge in intermarriage. The other factors that contributed to such dissolution of boundaries and blurring of diasporic identity are the lack of diasporic spaces and places as well as heterogeneity in religious beliefs and professional occupations. Hybrid identity that diasporans apply depending on social context leads not only to the weakening of a ‘sense of belonging’ to their ethnic community but also at times provokes diasporic estrangement. Thus, a few interviewees confessed that they feel more comfortable when there are no Koreans in their environment and that they view fellow Koreans first as potential competitors and only then as fellow co-ethnics.

Besides, the findings suggest that the ‘gratitude’ narrative that has been circulating in the media and a “mediator” label imposed by the governments of Kazakhstan and South Korea aggravate identity struggle that Korean community experience as citizens of Kazakhstan and

conditional residents of South Korea. Expectations of gratitude imposed by Kazakhstan and social exclusion in South Korea condition Koreans in Kazakhstan to re-negotiate their place and identity in the often-changing political settings. Nevertheless, the participants challenge the validity of the 'gratitude' narrative and the imposition of loyalty based on the historic events that occurred beyond their control. While attempting to position themselves as first Kazakhstani citizens and then Koreans, the diasporans also question that they would be ever perceived as such.

Moreover, the findings suggest that this community and especially their younger generation, have more motivation to engage in transnational practices with South Korea than to maintain diasporic ties with Kazakhstani Koreans. These transnational practices include labor migration and educational migration. South Korea, on the other hand, encourages the territorialization of Koreans in Kazakhstan while symbolically offering them work visas. Nevertheless, the orientation towards and commitment to their historic homeland is contested by the participants. As interviews demonstrated, the Korean community perceives Kazakhstan as their homeland. Connection to Kazakhstan is expressed at the emotional and physical level which proves one of the strongest attributes of a diasporic identity that is commitment to their historic homeland to be insolvent. Transnational ties with South Korea, in turn, prove to be more of a pragmatic than patriotic nature.

Thus, this community is now exploring its economic, social, and cultural ties to South Korea through educational exchange and labor migration. Kazakhstani Koreans migrating to South Korea might consider themselves to be part of a global Korean diaspora and wish to consider South Korea a 'homeland'; in reality, they face forms of social and economic exclusion, and instead find more commonality with other post-Soviet migrants, regardless of ethnicity. This economic rather

than ethnic migration often results in poor integration in South Korea and leads to circular migration with labor migrants wandering between their two homelands for years.

Kazakhstani Koreans who chose to go to South Korea as labor migrants mainly reside in the industrial cities such as Incheon, Ansan, and Gimhae. These low-skilled labor migrants live and work at factories with little to no socialization due to long working hours and language barrier. Children of such labor migrants, too, find it difficult to integrate because local schools don't accommodate non-speakers. This, in turn, forces 'Soviet' Koreans to open Russian schools in their neighborhoods. These neighborhoods are deemed to be unsafe and are labeled as 'Russian' suggesting that the immigrants from the former USSR reside there. As a result of social exclusion and residential segregation, Kazakhstani migrants now re-unite as 'Soviet' Koreans in South Korea. 'Russian' districts, Associations of Koryo Saram, Russian schools, transnational agents – these are all new diasporic and transnational spaces that are growing and expanding in South Korea. Regardless of the tendency to distance themselves from their Kazakhstani co-ethnics and especially from Koreans of other Central Asian states, social and economic exclusion forced Korean labor migrants to reunite in South Korea. The weakened diasporic boundaries in Kazakhstan are now strengthening in their ancestral homeland as they once did in Central Asia back in the 1930s.

It should be noted that while the participants provided this thesis with rich data, there are some limitations to the study. Thus, this research would benefit from participants from the older generation who could shed more light on the reasons for the weakening of diasporic ties. Furthermore, due to the language barrier I couldn't use the official sources of South Korea published in Korean. Thus, the sources used in this thesis are limited to the media coverage published in the Russian, English or Kazakh languages.

In conclusion, I would like to draw scholars' attention to problematizing of theoretical framework that limits research in the field of diaspora to at times not-relevant criteria. This thesis demonstrated that modern diasporas do not always fit in this framework and Brubaker's (2005) classification of a diaspora as a community that "maintains its boundaries and oriented to their historic homeland" is not necessarily applicable to the Korean community in Kazakhstan and potentially other modern diasporic communities.

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Appendix 1. The Interview Guide

Topics	Questions
Korean identity and culture	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • How are you doing? Do you feel comfortable to answer my questions? Where are you from? How long have you been living there? • How many languages do you speak? What is your first language? What is your second language? What language do you speak more often? • Which language is “native” for you? Why? • Do you speak the Korean language? Do you learn it? If yes, where and how? • Do you have family members or friends who belong to different ethnic groups? What do think of intermarriages? Do you know the origins of your family? Do you know the history of your family name? Does your family keep your genealogy book? • Can you tell a few words about Korean culture (Kazakhstani Korean or South Korean)? What are the three most important events in your opinion that represent best your culture? Why?
Diasporic identity	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • What is Korean diaspora in your understanding? Do you consider yourself a member of the Korean diaspora? • What does it mean for you to be a Korean in Kazakhstan? • Do you know about Korean Association?

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Do you participate in the events organized by the Association? • What are social norms in the Korean community regarding age and gender that do not exist in Kazakhstani society? • Do you know anything about social norms in South Korea? How different they are from Korean norms in Kazakhstan? What do you think about these differences? • Do you define Korean community as a hierarchical community? Are there hierarchical patterns in Korean community between your colleagues, older people or your family members? • What do you think about men's and women's rights in your local community and South Korea?
<p>Relations with ancestral homeland</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • What do you know about South Korea? • Have you ever had any contacts with the South Korean Embassy in Kazakhstan? • Do you have (had) any business, family, cultural or political ties with South Korea? • Have you ever visited South Korea? • Would you like to know more about your ancestral homeland? Visit it, meet people or learn Korean?
<p>Relations with Kazakhstan</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • What do you understand by the term “homeland”? • What is a homeland for you? How economically and socially do you feel “at home” in Kazakhstan?

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • What is your attitude toward the Kazakh language? Do you speak Kazakh?
<p>Mobility trends</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • What do you think about people migrating? • Do you have plans to migrate? Do your children have such plans? • Which countries you consider the most favorable for migration and why? Do you have relatives or friends who migrated to South Korea or other countries? • Do you wish for your children to move to another country in the future? And, if yes, to where? What are your plans for work/study? • Do you have friends or family in other countries apart from South Korea?

Appendix 2. The transcript of the interview with Kim Desik

The Interview Transcript

"Atameken Business": >↑Ранее ↑озвучивали ↓что< в Южной (.) Корее нелегально работают <↑десять ↑тысяч (0,2) ↓казахстанцев>. (.) ↑Какой статистикой на сегодня располагаете ↑Вы?

Ким Дэ Сик: ~ <Да, (.) вы все верно сказали. (.)> По статистике (.) до сентября 2019 года (.) количество казахстанцев, (.) ↑нелегально находящихся в нашей ↓стране (.) составляло чуть более одиннадцати ↓тысяч ↓человек.

"Atameken Business": >Ну ↑вот (.) согласно источникам отечественных ↑СМИ<, (.)агентствам по ↑трудоустройству ↑выгодно работать с ↓нелегалами: (.) ~ потому что для них не нужен ↑соцпакет, (.)они не платят страховку = налоги (.)↑Вы как-то отслеживаете деятельность ↓этих ↓агентств?

Ким Дэ Сик: ~ <Да, (.) вы все верно сказали. (.) Правительство Кореи постоянно держит этот вопрос на контроле,= контролирует данные ↓агентства. Работодатели, которые нанимают сотрудников, (.)которые нелегально находятся на территории Республики ↑Корея, получается, ↑они (.) через своих ↓родственников, = ↓знакомых находят таких ↓нелегальных ↓работников. Все эти ↑агентства, которые направляют ↑нелегальных сотрудников в ↑Корею, (.) в основном находятся в ↑Казахстане. Насколько мне известно, через ↑Казахстанские ↑СМИ (.) правительство вашей ↑Республики (.) ↑постоянно держит этот вопрос на контроле и контролирует такие ↓агентства.

"Atameken Business": А несут ↑ли (.) >вот эти корейские агентства какое-то потом ↑наказание<?=>

Ким Дэ Сик: = ((nodded sharply)) Да, (.) в Корее ↑тоже нельзя нанимать нелегально находящихся граждан (.) на работу официально, (.), ↑поэтому их действия караются ↓законом, (.) и есть для таких работодателей ↓определенное (.) ↓ наказание.

"Atameken Business": >Подскажите пожалуйста какой средний уровень< заработнойной ↑платы в Корее?

Ким Дэ Сик: Зависит от работы. (.) Именно в сфере тяжелого ↑физического ↑труда, (.) где в основном трудятся все ↓нелегалы, (.) средняя заработная плата составляет <три с половиной тысячи долларов в месяц>.

"Atameken Business":((raised her eyebrows in surprise)) ↑три ↑тысячи (.) пятьсот (.)↑долларов?(0.8)((looked closely)) Аха (.)Надо сказать неплохо. (.) Я теперь ↑понимаю почему наши Казахстанцы едут к вам на ↓заработки (.) ↑Но (.) ↑неужели (.)в вашей стране не хватает рабочей ↑силы (.) и корейцы не заинтересованы (.) в такой оплате ↑труда?

Ким Дэ Сик: К сожалению, у нас в Корее стремительно идет процесс ↓старения ↓населения, (.) ↑молодежи с каждым годом становится ↓все ↓меньше. (.) >К большому сожалению<, ↑сейчас (.) корейская молодежь не заинтересована в тяжелой физической ↓работе, и, (.) соответственно, (.) у нас не хватает рабочих ↓рук.(.) У нас очень много нелегальных рабочих <не только из ↑Казахстана>, (.) но и из Юго-Восточной ↑Азии. В особенности из ↑тех ↑стран, (.) где уровень жизни населения (.) ↓очень ↓низкий.

Now I am going to analyze the part of the conversation concerning the health tourism and Korean diaspora in Kazakhstan (8:00).

A: >Скажите пожалуйста< в чем секрет такого высокого ↑уровня здравоохранения в вашей ↑стране?

К: ((laughed)) <В первую очередь я думаю это хорошо налаженное законодательство ↓республики>.=Во-вторых (.) когда наше государство развивалось (.) мы отправляли очень много людей ↑обучаться в зарубежные страны (.) и люди с хорошими знаниями приехали ↓обратно (.) и начали развивать именно ↑медицинскую ↑сферу (.)и стоит отметить (.) что заработная плата ↑медицинских ↑сотрудников в нашей ↑стране одна из самых высоких в ↑мире (.) поэтому наверное (.) эти факторы способствовали развитию именно ↑медицинского ↑туризма и ↑медицины в целом в нашей ↓стране.=

А: =>В ↑Казахстане проживает< большая корейская ↓диаспора. (.) ↑Сколько корейцев из ↑Казахстана вернулись к себе на ↓историческую ↓родину?

К: ((lowered his gaze and raised his eyebrows)) (Um, hum)(.). В Корее нет такой системы как в ↑Германии (.) ↑наверняка вы знаете (.) что в Германии есть такая программа (.)чтобы возвращать своих соотечественников ↓из-за рубежа , (.) давать им ↑гражданство >и так далее< , (.) то есть у нас в Корее такой системы нет (.) чтобы ↑полностью возвращать своих соотечественников и давать им ↓гражданство (.) В Казахстане сейчас проживают более ↑ста ↑тысяч ↑корейцев (.) они являются мостом между нашими ↑странами (.) и так как мы разделяем одну ↑кровь (.) у нас есть специальные визы для этнических ↓корейцев (.) Если смотреть на статистику (0.2) то (.) с 2017 года (.) было выдано больше тринадцати тысяч специальных виз для ↓этнических ↓корейцев (.) по которым они могут спокойно в Корею ↑учиться (.) ↑развиваться ↑работать и так ↓далее (.) но нет такой ↑системы по ↑которой (.) они могли бы приехать в Корею (.) и получить корейское ↓гражданство.