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Homeland Reemerged: Exploring Changes in Uzbek's Engagement with Kin State Politics and Host State Loyalty in Sairam

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Abstract

Being cut off from Uzbekistan due to a lack of welcoming attitude and restrictive policies that overlooked the question of co-ethnics outside its borders, Uzbeks in Sairam district evolved and developed its identity separately from it during the first decades of independence. This relationship dynamic was stable until the election of the second president of Uzbekistan, Mirziyoyev, who drastically changed the state's approach to dealing with co-ethnics abroad. Decisive steps in this direction involved the introduction of the Decree on Compatriots, the first decree defining Uzbekistan's position towards co-ethnics abroad. This decree aimed to foster ties with Uzbeks living abroad, it redefined Uzbekistan's political boundaries in a more flexible and inclusive definition of it, including co-ethnics living abroad. This re-emergence of national homeland and its effect on the stance of Uzbeks in Sairam is explored through Brubaker's (1995) theoretical framework of triadic nexus which emphasized the dynamic nature of this triangular relationship between kin state, host state, and minority ethnic group. Analyzing the recent changes in Uzbekistan's stance towards co-ethnics through this model in the context of the re-emergence of ethnic homeland after the straining of ties, it was revealed that activists in the community noticed the positive changes that resulted from the adoption of this decree. However, these changes are not part of the discussion among Uzbeks of this community, who are largely unaware of this decree and Uzbekistan's change of stance. Instead, since the introduction of the decree went hand in hand with tightening cooperation between Uzbekistan and Kazakhstan, the changes were largely seen as the outcome of this friendly relationship between the two states. Therefore, this community's participation in joining cultural activities and intensified cooperation were perceived not as part of building ties with the kin state, but as supporting the host state's endeavors in establishing a friendlier relationship with a neighboring state. Therefore, the re-

emergence of the national homeland did not affect the existing model of interaction between Uzbek's in Kazakhstan and Kazakhstan's government.

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Chapter 1: Contextualizing Uzbek Identity: A Historical Overview in Kazakhstan

1.1 Introduction

Kazakhstan is home to over 130 different ethnicities, Uzbeks being the third largest ethnic group following Kazakhs and Russians ("Sarty, uzbeki i yediny narod Kazakhstana," n.d). This ethnic group accounts for 3,3% and is one of the ethnic groups that has seen an incredible increase of 34% in its population size in Kazakhstan from 2009 to 2021 (Kazakhstan Statistical Office, 2023). Unlike many other ethnic groups whose history in Kazakhstan can be explained by migration, the Uzbek ethnic group's emergence in Kazakhstan resulted from the 'national delimitation' campaign carried out by the Soviet leaders in 1924 (Hirsch 2000, p.213). This process involved drawing national borders with one titular or 'core' ethnic group within each state. This led to a mismatch between the political and cultural boundaries of some ethnic groups where representatives of one group were left on the other side of the border, and vice versa. Uzbeks in Kazakhstan, who predominantly live in the southern part of Kazakhstan, in regions bordering Uzbekistan, was one of them.

These changes did not immediately impact the Uzbeks residing in the contemporary territory of Kazakhstan. As described by Fumagalli (2007, p. 571-572), during the Soviet period the borders were nominal and the lives of Uzbeks in Kazakhstan were tightly connected with Uzbek SSR. They consumed its cultural products, and got higher education in Uzbek universities, a certain proportion of the population remaining there after the completion of their universities. This situation, however, changed significantly after the dissolution of the Soviet Union. Stranded between the nationalizing policies of Kazakhstan and the lack of diaspora

policies of Uzbekistan for Uzbeks residing in neighboring countries, this community had to face their minority status which involved marginalization and co-optation of this group (Oka 2011, p. 3-5).

This dynamic has started shifting since the second president of Uzbekistan, Shavkat Mirziyoyev, came to power. Unlike the first decades after the collapse of the Soviet Union when Uzbekistan's authority did not have special policies targeting co-ethnics in neighboring countries, co-ethnics outside Uzbekistan being largely absent from Uzbekistan's political stage and discussion, Mirziyoyev's politics featured by reforms affected their relationship to co-ethnics as well. He developed a series of laws and plans to strengthen ties with Uzbeks outside Uzbekistan and introduced and defined terms like compatriots which started being used to talk about Uzbeks living and working outside Uzbeks. These changes in Uzbekistan's approach to its coethnics in neighboring countries started being implemented and felt by co-ethnics in bordering countries, being reflected in the conducting of conferences, meetings, and cultural events with participation and cooperation of Uzbek ethnocultural centers of Central Asian states, provision of Uzbek books to these communities (Yuldashev, 2022, p. 147).

This paper aims to explore the way this community changed in this period in response to the changing homeland. The role Uzbek people in Sairam play within this changing dynamics of relationships, and how this affects their stance towards their kin state and host state will be explored through Brubaker's triadic nexus (1995). This paper aims to understand if the relationship of these three parties was affected by it, how and within which context those policies are being implemented, and how they are perceived by Uzbek's in Sairam district. The main actors that I will be looking at are Kazakhstan's authority, Uzbekistan's policies and politics targeting co-ethnics in neighboring countries, and the Uzbek community in Kazakhstan itself.

Analysis of how these three parties affected each other, can provide insight into the complex identity-negotiation process and reveal how the interplay of the actions and politics of these factors resulted in Uzbek's identity in Kazakhstan.

This is one of the pioneering research papers in the field of studies of ethnic minorities in Kazakhstan, Uzbeks in particular, looking closely at their lived experiences and how their past and current-day political and social factors affected them. Although there were some research papers on Uzbeks in Kazakhstan by Oka (2011), and Savin (2012), their scope was limited as they don't capture the significant changes that have been taking place in recent years. Recent developments in Kazakhstani Uzbek's relationship with the Uzbek state, its effects, and reception by the Uzbeks and Kazakhstani government require new research to analyze these shifts and their implications for their relationship. The study of this relationship makes a significant contribution to the understanding of this group, how their lives shifted after the collapse of the Soviet Union, and how a combination of different factors affected their perception of themselves. Also, their approach to studying Uzbeks in Kazakhstan was etic and they did not directly interact and engage in this community's life or activities. As an insider to this community, I was able to observe different everyday activities and identity negotiation patterns which otherwise would be difficult to do.

Regarding the contribution of this research paper to the identity study of minority ethnic groups in nationalizing states, it shows different dimensions of bilateral relations. Since I will be studying Uzbek's case through the framework provided by Rogers Brubaker, the triadic nexus, my study can further the understanding of the shifting relationship between the newly nationalizing states in which they live, kin-states and minorities (Brubaker 1996, p.4). By looking at Uzbeks in Kazakhstan's case, I will add a new perspective to the ongoing scholarly

discussion on identity negotiation patterns of non-titular ethnic groups within nationalizing states and Brubaker's triadic model. Since the majority of previous discussions revolved around Eastern European countries' development model following the collapse of the Soviet Union, the application of this framework has been limited. By extending the discussion to Central Asia and showing how this framework can explain certain aspects of the Uzbek people's identity and location within Kazakhstan, I can both show the strengths and weaknesses of this model in explaining this specific case. This is significant both for the identity studies of non-titular ethnic groups in general, and the study of Central Asian studies.

1.2 Methodology description

My research mainly relies on ethnography, involving interaction with people living in the Sairam district, interviewing people in this area, and analyzing the environment and materials that may be relevant to my study. This research fieldwork took place from May of 2023 to July of 2023 in Sairam district and Sairam city (part of current-day Shymkent). The choice of location is purposive as in this district lives the largest proportion of the Uzbek population in Kazakhstan and it can more accurately portray the experiences of these people and overall identity negotiation patterns.

Regarding the interviews, I conducted 13 in-depth interviews and 7 semi-structured interviews. The sampling method for my interview was purposive. This sampling method was used to get interviews from specific people, active members of this region, including the Deputy Chairman of the Uzbek ethno-cultural association of Turkestan region, writers of books on Uzbeks in Kazakhstan, and chief editors of Uzbek newspapers. Since I am interested in learning the public concerns of this community, not only private ones, these people were selected. They

satisfy this criteria as these people are actively involved in shaping the Uzbek community in Kazakhstan, their reflections and ideas were key in understanding Uzbek's everyday experiences and identity negotiation processes. Also, there were interviews conducted with people whom I met during my fieldwork while visiting some sites or interacting with people. These people were historians and museum workers of the Sairam Museum located in Shymkent, the workers of Shymkent Uzbek Drama Theater. The idea behind the selection of people whom I met at the sites was to understand how the people who work in these places which serve as a cultural hub for this community and are directly involved in interacting and reflecting topics that resonate with the public, their views and perceptions are valuable for understanding this community. Furthermore, these sites are some of the spaces of identity negotiation as these institutions directly interact not only with the local population but also with the government. Since the government directly affects the frameworks within which these institutions can function, analyzing how these policies are understood and applied also are relevant to my research. The interviews in these cases were semi-structured, with a certain set of questions being prepared in advance and some arising during the interview. While making sure that some important questions are asked and giving structure to the interview, this interviewing method left some room for flexibility which is important to gain comprehensive knowledge on the topic.

The last group of people were selected based on their age, gender, and place of residence. This was done to give representation to different parts of the population, including people from different parts of the Sairam district (Sairam, Kolkent, Karabulak, Aksukent, Mankent, and Karamurt). This was done to compare the experiences of people from different parts of the district and the factors contributing to it. Also, people from different generations were selected to understand whether the different socio-cultural environment in which they were socialized

affected their perceptions of themselves in Kazakhstan. Since older generations are bearers of Soviet memories and were raised under different value systems while younger people were born to independent state, their experiences may be distinct. Selecting people of distinct age groups can reflect those differences.

In addition to semi-structured in-depth interviews with my sample, I employed the participant observation method in my research, immersing myself in this environment as a researcher. Visiting such sites as an ethnocultural association, the monuments, and schools showed how some of the policies and changes are affecting the people and their environment. These sites were selected to investigate to understand how identity politics are understood and transmitted by members of this community. Also, interacting with the people in everyday life and attending their family ceremonies enabled me to trace some patterns of behavior and attitudes towards their identity, and their relation to state policies in place of non-titular ethnic groups within Kazakhstan. Sometimes the contrast between some participants' comments on different situations, and jokes, and their much more serious and politically correct responses themselves were reflective of the process of negotiating identity and position within the larger society.

Other research methods include analyzing statistical data, government laws, and policies. The websites used for it include the Bureau of National Statistics (https://stat.gov.kz/en/) for statistics and the Legal information system of Regulatory Legal Acts of the Republic of Kazakhstan (https://adilet.zan.kz/eng) for checking legal documents. These were used to analyze Kazakhstan's political and ideological stance, the changes in the population size, and changes in the number of different institutions (e.g. schools). Furthermore, qualitative analysis of books, social media pages, and websites of my target population, seeing their reflections on this topic, or

overall discussion of Uzbeks in Kazakhstan were also significant for my research. These were selected to understand how this group positions itself within Kazakhstan and what narratives and resources they make use of to support their claims. Since these sources discuss the history of Uzbeks in this region, their place in today's society, and overall analysis of their lives, these sources also reflect this group's understanding and interpretation of the government's position regarding the questions of minority ethnic groups and nation-building process in Kazakhstan. These showed how this group was using different means to practice their culture, and traditions while remaining within the frame provided by the government. In addition to serving as a platform for celebrating the achievements of this community and discussing the traditions of people, these books and media pages were detected to be important sites of identity negotiation.

My approach to studying this community will be emic since I am an insider to the community in which I studied. This position in conducting this research was both an advantage and a drawback. Talking of the benefits of the emic approach, since I was seen and treated as a member of the community, there was no distrust or suspicion while discussing some sensitive topics with participants in my research. As an insider to this culture, I participated in the daily activities of people in Sairam and did not cause any interruption or questions among local people as my appearance in those places was normal. This enabled some members of the community to open up about their experiences and share some information that otherwise would be very difficult to get. The fact that I am a member of this culture also enabled me to notice differences in my participants' behavior, and how they presented themselves in and outside the interview and interacted with people of different groups. These hugely contributed to the understanding of this group, as I was exposed to these different situations without causing the feeling of threat or suspicion which may exist if outsiders to the community get involved. Another advantage of

being an insider to this community was knowledge of key figures including ethnocultural center leaders, authors of books on Uzbeks in Kazakhstan, and active members of the community, which made contacting and interacting with them easier and more efficient.

In addition, it is important to note that my training at Nazarbayev University was essential for a successful data collection process because it equipped me with the necessary skills and knowledge to take a step back at different moments. This was what enabled me to trace recurring topics and stay curious about the research findings as I distanced myself from the role of insider where needed to avoid making assumptions for the community. One potential drawback of my positionality, however, maybe the fact that I may have been excluded from some other contexts and information.

Moving on to the analysis of the data, the semi-structured were analyzed by applying the thematic analysis method. This method involves first getting the interview and then transcribing it. To do this, I used the Transkriptor app which is designed to assist transcribing interviews. Once the interviews were transcribed, I went over its content and started generating initial codes. This involves generating tags or labels to capture the main idea of different sections of the interview. Then, the codes were analyzed to see the recurring patterns or themes, and these themes and sub-themes revealed some recurring patterns that were meaningful in addressing my research questions and achieving research goals. These retrieved themes were then named, categorized, and analyzed. When it comes to the analysis of brochures, books, and other written materials collected on the topic during my fieldwork, qualitative analysis method was employed. By using this approach to study this question, I was able to trace some tendencies and positions of my participants on the topic under question and support or give different dimensions or depth to the themes traced in other sources.

Once all these data were collected and analyzed, the next step involved analyzing them together, contextualizing the data, and interpreting it within a given theoretical framework.

1.3 Limitations

However, there were some noticeable drawbacks of being an insider to this community. Although at first, I thought that being from the same community will help the participants be more transparent with their experiences, on some it had the opposite effect. It was hard to get them to share their real experiences as they gave politically correct information and were more cautious with their answers. Although they were informed that the information they shared would be confidential, most of their responses were polished and included Kazakhstan's authorities' words and statements, and felt very careful. Although this situation itself is reflective of some processes about this community, it prevented me from being able to fully understand and accurately portray the situation. The other limitations of this approach involve a certain level of bias in both the data collection process and interpretation process due to familiarity with the community in which I am studying. This may have prevented me from noticing some processes or paying closer attention to other ones. Although there were preparations and attempts to be conscious of my feelings and thoughts as a researcher, a certain level of bias may exist coming from my background.

1.4 Theoretical Framework

To study the Uzbek's identity and position within Kazakhstan, I am going to employ the triadic model framework introduced by Rogers Brubaker in his book *Nationalism Reframed.* This theoretical model was developed to understand nationalism, the dynamic relationship between the state where the minority ethnic group lives, the minority ethnic group and their kin

state in states where nationalism resulted from redrawing of political boundaries. According to Brubaker (1996, p. 5), the key characteristics of the "nationalizing" nationalism of the newly independent state involve claims that there is a "core nation" which is defined in the ethnocultural term. This core nation is portrayed to be in a weak cultural, economic, or demographic state due to long discrimination or the structure of the previous regime. This question is given urgency and projects and actions are undertaken to remedy or promote the interests of this core nation (Brubaker 1995, p.5).

The second nationalism in this triadic nexus is homeland nationalism, which involves the kin state of ethnic minorities within those nationalizing states. Homeland nationalism monitors the conditions of their ethnonational kin in other countries, protects their interests, or abandons them when a geopolitical situation requires it (Brubaker 1995, p.5-6). As the author describes it, this form of nationalism arises in direct opposition to and in dynamic interaction with nationalizing nationalisms. Depending on the actions taking place in the state where those national minorities live and the nature of nationalizing policies of the core nation, the interaction and involvement can be different for "home" states. Brubaker notes that "homeland" in this context is not an ethnographic category; instead, it is a political category and a state becomes an external national "homeland" when the political elites position co-ethnic in other states as their fellow members despite different citizenship. Coming from this position they may claim that it obliges them to take responsibility for them as they are members of this single transborder nation (1996, p.6).

The third form of nationalism of this triadic nexus is national minorities who are caught between two mutually antagonistic nationalisms. Brubaker explains that minority nationalists are characterized by self-understanding in "national" terms and they assert their cultural or political

rights based on their nationality (1996, p.6). This group seeks an acknowledgment from the state of their distinct ethnocultural nationality and their assertions may range from modest requests including education in the minority language or administration to stronger claims going as far as demand for territorial and political autonomy verging on full independence (Brubaker 1996, p.6). According to Brubaker (1996, p. 60), within this context, a national minority is not a mere "group" that is formed by ethnic demography, but a dynamic political position, or a family of related yet competing positions.

The relationship between these three, national minorities, nationalizing states, and external national homelands, is dynamic and mutually interdependent. Based on different sets of factors these can change, affecting one another (Brubaker 1996, p. 58). Applying this framework which analyzes the three political fields and their relationship to the study of Uzbeks in Kazakhstan can reveal a combination of complex factors that resulted in the identification pattern of Uzbeks in Sairam. Exploring these changes in the context of re-emergence of national homeland can help us to understand how shift in stance of one affects the triangular relationship and understand the implications of it to the parties involved.

1.5 Historical Overview

To understand the Uzbek people's identity in the Sairam district, it is necessary to look at their roots and understand their presence in the territory that is now part of Kazakhstan. Uzbeks of this region perceive themselves as indigenous to this place and they have lived in compact groups in the towns and villages on the territory of southern Kazakhstan, intermingled with Kazakhs (Akiner p. 30; Oka 2011; Yuldashev 2022). According to Oka (2011, p.2), this region of contemporary Kazakhstan was a rich oasis zone sandwiched between two rivers, the Amu and

Syr, which was part of Mā warā' al-nahr (Transoxiana). This area was an important oasis between the sedentary population and nomads, and commerce and other interactions took place in this region. This area came under the authority of the Turkestan General Governorship under the Russian Empire and, on the basis of this, was established Turkestan Autonomous Soviet Socialist Republic following the October Revolution. This region included a significant part of the present-day territory of Uzbekistan, and only after the national-state delimitation 1924–1925, this area became part of Kazakhstan (Oka 2011, p. 2-3; Hirsch 2000).

The Soviet nation-building process affected the identification patterns of people, reshaping their perception of themselves. As noted by Hirsch (2000, p.213-214), before the advent of Soviet power and the creation of "official" nationalities, most inhabitants of former Turkestan, Bukhara, and Khiva did not define themselves in national terms; instead, most of the inhabitants of these regions had at once several identities as linguistic, religious, clan, ethnic, and economic divisions often did not coincide. This, however, changed after the enforcement of a comprehensive program of social and political reconstruction, 'national delimination' in 1924. As described by Matteo Fumagalli (2007, p. 110), this all-encompassing and extensive process involved border-making, creation, and codification of languages, census, construction of 'national cultures', and promotion of titular cadres. In other words, this process was not merely re-organizing the territory, but building full-fledged nations and national identities based on ethnicity. In this process, the people went through "double assimilation", which involved the assimilation of diverse people into nationality categories, followed by nationally categorized groups' assimilation into the Soviet state (Hirsch 2000, p.213). This was true about the Uzbeks of South Kazakhstan (known as the Turkestan region currently), whose self-consciousness at the

moment of national-state delimitation 1924–1925 was not distinct, interspersed with other forms of tribal, class (Sarts), and territorial self-consciousness (Savin 2012, p. 133).

Despite being introduced only in the 1920s, the nationality categories quickly took root after national-territorial delimitation. Hirsch (2000, p. 216) notes that these led to violent nation-building "from below," involving discrimination of non-titular ethnic groups, and members of titular groups undertook actions like using coercion and deception to manipulate and overrepresent their groups' official numbers in the census-taking process in 1926. This was done to consolidate their new national territories and secure a monopoly on land and resources, causing inequalities and discrimination of new national minorities through land loss and forced assimilation (Hirsch 2000, p. 216). This caused many representatives of minority ethnic groups to send collective letters and petitions to administrative organs and Soviet leaders to redraw their borders by adding their territory to the territory of their ethnic group. This, however, was not the case in Uzbeks from the Turkestan Region. Proximity to Uzbek SSR and the fact that the borders were nominal enabled them to keep close contact with their co-ethnics in the neighboring state and not face their minority status (Akiner p.30; Oka 2011).

The Kazakhstani Uzbek's non-titularity affected the course of their development during the Soviet Union, being largely left out of Soviet modernization policies. As described by Savin (2012, p. 141), having centuries-old traditions of economic and cultural specifics in this region, Uzbeks found themselves away from the main pressure of modernization trends caused by Soviet transformations. Having remained marginalized in political and cultural life, they secured strong positions in the structure of local economies on the basis of self-sufficient agriculture, which was maintained by some self-isolation and archaization of social life with emphasized loyalty to the authorities at all levels. The lack of ethnic institutions and intelligentsia to represent their

interests and function as key political actors in ethnic movements during the perestroika era hindered Uzbek's ability to mobilize (Fumagalli 2007, p. 571-572). This was explained by the fact that many Uzbeks from Kazakhstan pursued their education in Uzbekistan, and those who aimed to become scholars and researchers chose to remain there. In addition to showing the impact of pursuing ambitions in the Uzbek SSR and not trying to make political claims in Kazakhstan, this also shows how Uzbeks in Kazakhstan were tightly connected with the Uzbek SSR. They consumed its cultural products, and got higher education in Uzbek universities, a certain proportion of the population remaining there after the completion of their universities. This situation, however, changed significantly after the dissolution of the Soviet Union.

Chapter 2: Literature Review

In this section of my thesis, I will focus on the analysis of existing literature on Uzbeks in Kazakhstan and identify the gap in their approaches to the study of this community directly or indirectly. Since I am examining Uzbek's stance in Kazakhstan in the context of changing homeland nationalism and the ways it may have affected their interaction with the host state, Kazakhstan, I will analyze the existing literature touching on these three topics - home state, ethnic homeland, and national minorities. Therefore, I closely analyze research papers touching Uzbekistan's diaspora politics towards co-ethnics in neighboring countries, research on Kazakhstan's nation-building policies targeting non-titular ethnic groups, including Uzbeks, and papers touching Uzbek's position and relationship with two other parties of the triadic model. Since I am researching these in the context of re-emergence of active homeland nationalism stance, looking at existing literature can reveal the context and background to the way how this interaction evolved. Also, looking at the existing literature is essential to identify the gap in the literature and reflect on how I can contribute to bridging the gap in understanding of this topic.

2. 1 Uzbekistan's Diaspora Politics: Forgotten Diaspora?

Looking at Uzbekistan's policies targeting Uzbeks in neighboring countries, it can be noticed that Uzbekistan largely lacked diaspora policies until recent years. Unlike some post-Soviet Central Asian states that offered repatriation programs for their co-ethnics abroad, Uzbek communities in Kazakhstan and other states were largely absent from the government agenda and were not part of the nation-building process in the first decades after independence. To understand the lack of interaction and incentive to maintain ties with co-ethnics abroad, it is important to look at the history and the circumstances leading up to it. According to Ferrando (2013, p. 245-246), in the early years of independence, Uzbekistan, similar to neighboring post-

Soviet states, developed a structured approach to interact with its diaspora initial stage of which involved the establishment of a pan-ethnic congress in the early 1990s. The main aim of this congress was to promote cross-border links between the kin states and their co-ethnics residing outside their ethnic homeland (Ferrando 2013, p. 246). With this purpose, in 1991 Uzbekistan held its first *kurultai* where the World Association of Uzbeks in Tashkent was created, and representatives of Uzbek communities from the Middle East, Central Asian states, China, Afghanistan, Russia, Ukraine, and some Western countries participated. In addition, the free movement within the Commonwealth of Independent States (CIS) thanks to the regional agreement signed by Central Asian states in 1992 in Bishkek granted to the citizens of these states enabled them to move without restriction across their interstate borders and interact with people in neighboring states (Ferrando 2013, p. 249). However, this situation drastically changed after the series of bombings carried out in Tashkent in 1999 which shifted the direction of Uzbekistan's politics and its interaction with co-ethnics in neighboring countries. Since these bombings were officially attributed to transnational Islamic movements, Uzbekistan tightened its borders repudiating the Bishkek agreement, and the idea of maintaining relations with the diaspora faded (Ferrando 2013, p. 250; Urpekova, 2022, p. 46). Strengthening border control involved the introduction of a strict visa regime without which citizens of neighboring states could not enter Uzbekistan. This left Uzbeks living in neighboring countries cut off from their ethnic homeland and restricted their movement and interaction with their relatives (Ferrando 2013, p. 250).

These situations also informed Uzbekistan's position and framing of the situation inside the state and outside its borders and identity politics. According to (Fumagalli, 2007, p.112), outside threats and instability were central to Uzbekistan's political discourse and ideology, and

preserving stability inside implied safeguarding against spillover from neighboring countries. The Uzbek minority communities residing outside Uzbekistan were also perceived through this perspective and therefore were seen as a source of threat and instability (Fumagalli, 2007, p 112). For this reason, Uzbekistan's government has placed more importance on notions of territoriality over direct emphasis on ethnicity and aimed to establish an Uzbek state where ethnic and political boundaries would correspond to each other (Fumagalli 2007, p.119). Therefore, Uzbeks in neighboring countries were largely absent from the political discourse, and Uzbekistan did not have an official stance on this topic (Fumagalli 2007, p.115). This political stance was desirable for the Uzbek authorities as it corresponded both with their politics driven by hard security concerns within the state and its relationship with neighboring states.

Aside from security concerns, Uzbekistan's lack of interaction with co-ethnics in neighboring countries was explained by the prioritization of interstate bilateral relationships. According to Fumagalli (2007, p. 116), the apparent disinterest on the part of Uzbekistan appears to be a component of tacit agreements among Central Asian states, wherein they refrain from interfering with each other's minority populations. This was done to avoid threats to territorial integrity that may arise from ethnic communities residing outside their kin-state (Fumagalli 2007, p.119). This view is also supported by Ferrando (2013, p. 256), who explains that the intertwined ethnic makeup of Central Asia meant that most countries have their co-ethnics living in a neighboring state, and extending diaspora policies to them would mean interfering with the internal affairs of that state. Since such actions can trigger the reaction of the other state and could prompt it to also take a more active position towards its co-ethnics in a neighboring state, they don't pursue overt policy or extend the diaspora policies to neighboring states (Ferrando, 2013, p. 256). This shows the precedence of economic and political concerns over co-ethnic

communities living on the other side of the border (Ferrando, 2013, p. 257; Fumagalli 2007, p.115).

The situation significantly changed in 2016-2017 years with the change of authority in Uzbekistan. Uzbekistan's new president recognized the diaspora's potential significance in economic, social, political, and cultural aspects and the importance of diaspora policy (Urpekova, 2022, p. 46). This understanding and Uzbekistan's new policy of liberalization, openness, and closer ties with the diaspora led to noticeable advancements in diaspora engagement policies (Urpekova, 2022, p. 46). These policies aimed at establishing ties and increased engagement with co-ethnics abroad were reflected in the state's 2018 resolutions which included two important documents: The Concept on cooperation with compatriots working and living abroad, and the Program on further developing cooperation with compatriots living abroad (Urpekova, 2022, p. 46). These President's resolutions emphasized the need to protect and support compatriots abroad, enable better communication and interaction between them and Uzbekistan, and facilitate the flow of social, economic, and financial resources (Urpekova, 2022, p.52). These show Uzbekistan's interest in creating and maintaining ties with Uzbek communities abroad and they started creating a network of institutions to execute diaspora policy.

This changing dynamic also triggered more interest among scholars to research lives of Uzbek people living outside Uzbekistan. This can be seen by looking at a doctoral dissertation written by Yuldashev (2022) who looked at Uzbek's lives in Central Asian countries from 1991 to 2000, analyzing their lifestyle, level of preservation of cultural and linguistic traditions, and how their lives changed in the period in question. He also discussed the recent changes in Uzbekistan's relation to its co-ethnics, highlighting a series of laws and measures taken to

strengthen the ties with Uzbeks abroad including diplomatic events, distribution of books and textbooks, and closer interaction with Uzbek ethnocultural centers in neighboring countries . This, once more, points to heightened interest in this topic and highlights the need to pay closer attention to changes taking place.

2.2 Kazakhstan's Identity Politics

As for Kazakhstan's identity politics and its treatment of Uzbeks living within its territory, the policies pursued by the government strongly favored titular ethnic groups. Although civic understanding of citizenship was employed after the independence of Kazakhstan, granting citizenship to all residents residing within the borders of Kazakhstan, the other practices point to an ethnic conception of citizenship. This can be seen in nationalizing policies enforced by Kazakhstan's authority, characteristics of which included the idea that the state contains a 'core nation' defined in ethnocultural terms this state is of and for this core nation (Brubaker, 2014, p. 1786). The other motifs included the idea that the core nation is weak and vulnerable and that action must be taken to fortify its position in society by promoting its language, restoring authentic culture and traditions, and maintaining political and economic dominance (Brubaker, 2014, p. 1786). These are reflected in different aspects of the Kazakhstani population's life and position within the society including value systems, political representation, and economic and cultural sphere.

In political and economic domains, nationalizing (Kazakhization) involved a substantial overrepresentation of Kazakhs in government positions through informal recruitment and promotion and marginalization of minorities, framing their claim for voice and participation in decision-making as a threat to the stability and integrity of Kazakhstan (Brubaker 2014, p. 1803).

This can be seen in the case of Uzbeks as well which despite accounting for 20% of the population of the South Kazakhstan region (currently renamed as Turkestan region), living compactly in several districts of the South Kazakhstan region, and making up the majority in one of them, do not have a single head of the district or regional level; only two deputies of the regional council and one deputy of parliament were elected by their votes according to the quota of the Assembly of People of Kazakhstan (Savin, 2012, p. 141). According to Karin and Chebotarev (2002), although on an official level, Kazakhstan is positioned as a multiethnic state where all ethnic groups are given rights and freedoms to develop their national cultures and traditions, the character of these statements is a formal, declarative, and does not represent the real situation. The ethnocultural centers and establishment of the Assembly of Peoples of Kazakhstan, a constitutional body that serves as a consultative body to facilitate potential conflicts among different ethnic groups, were called to be nominal as they don't have real authority (Karin and Chebotarev, 2002). In other words, the development starting from the early 1990s favored ethnic Kazakhs, excluding minority ethnic groups from resource allocation and decision-making processes.

In demographic and linguistic usage terms, Kazakhs living abroad were repatriated through repatriation programs to secure the demographic majority of the Kazakh ethnic group, and the role of the Kazakh language was strengthened by opening more Kazakh language schools, introducing language tests and making the knowledge of this language part of the requirement for government grants and positions (Brubaker 2014, p. 1787-1788; Werner, Emmelhainz & Barcus, 2017). This extended to value systems and cultural and spiritual spheres. According to Karin and Chebotarev (2002), there are attempts at all different levels of state organs to incorporate the Kazakh symbols, ideas into the mass consciousness of the population

while beliefs of non-titular ethnic groups are ignored. Also, they point out the fact that Kazakh authorities fund large-scale celebrations and activities aimed at raising the popularity of prominent Kazakh figures while there was a lack of support for similar events related to ethnic issues of Kazakhstan's many people also serve as evidence of discrimination and of non-titular ethnic groups in these spheres authority (Karin and Chebotarev, 2002). Although these forms of discrimination persisted, the cultural and linguistic needs of Uzbeks were not fully ignored by the Kazakhstani government.

There was some consideration of Uzbek's cultural and linguistic needs in Kazakhstan. This can be seen in the provision of primary education and media outlets in their mother tongue, Uzbek language (Oka, 2011, p. 8). According to statistical data provided by Yuldashev (2020, p. 81), Uzbek students are in third place after Kazakhs and Russians in terms of the number of students, many attending either Uzbek-language schools or mixed schools. In the 2009-2010 school year, 101,400 Uzbek students studied in secondary schools in Kazakhstan, 74% of them studied in Uzbek, their mother tongue, and 26% in Russian and Kazakh. These schools were provided with textbooks by Uzbekistan's Ministry of Education until 1998, before it was abandoned and Kazakhstan's government started printing textbooks for Uzbek-medium schools (Oka, 2011, p. 9). This also led to differences in alphabets and school curriculum between Uzbeks in the Sairam district and Uzbekistan as the latter had adopted the Latin alphabet in 1993 while the former returned to the Cyrillic alphabet by a decision was made by the Kazakhstani authorities. These made the option of receiving education in Uzbekistan in their native language difficult (Oka, 2011, p. 9). The prospects of receiving higher education in Kazakhstan, although available, were also complicated. This is because in 2004 the government of Kazakhstan introduced a unified national examination for university entrance which could be taken only in

Kazakh or Russian languages (Oka, 2011, p. 8). This meant that Uzbeks receiving education in their native were disadvantaged in the competition for higher education both in Kazakhstan and Uzbekistan

In addition to Uzbek medium schools, the state's concern for the Uzbek minority was shown through the revival and inheritance of some ethnic institutions from the Soviet Union (Oka, 2011, p. 8). As described by Oka, soon after the breakdown of the Soviet Union, the state-owned Uzbek language regional newspaper Janubiy Qozoghiston (Southern Kazakhstan) was revived. This newspaper was first established in the Soviet Union and closed in 1936. A similar situation took place in the case of Oblast Uzbek Drama Theater (currently known as Shymkent City Uzbek Drama Theater), which was established in 1934 and operated until World War II. In 2003 it was re-opened, the ceremony dedicated to its opening being attended by the first president of Kazakhstan, Nazarbayev, himself (2011, p. 8). Oka mentions that this event was used as a display of the state's attention to the Uzbek people (2011, p. 8).

2.3 Uzbeks in Kazakhstan

Moving on to the lives and positions of Uzbek people residing in Kazakhstan, their position in Kazakhstan was characterized by loyalty to the Kazakh government and the regime. Although in the early years of independence, some Uzbeks in Kazakhstan moved to Uzbekistan as the living conditions were better compared to rural areas of Kazakhstan, this trend was short-lived and eventually reversed (Oka, 2011, p. 7). According to Oka, this happened due to two major reasons including a lack of "repatriation" programs or policies and improvement of Kazakhstan's economic situation. The unwelcoming attitude from the side of Uzbekistan's government toward Uzbeks in neighboring states and the increasing economic gap between the

two states in favor of Kazakhstan led to decreasing incentives for Kazakhstani Uzbeks to move to Uzbekistan (Oka, 2011, p. 7). Some other reasons that made Uzbekistan less attractive to Uzbeks residing in South Kazakhstan province (Turkestan region) were Uzbekistan's authority's security measures which were perceived to be on the extreme side. This could be understood from the words of an activist from the Uzbek Cultural Center who contrasted the situation in Kazakhstan and Uzbekistan. He compared how he was stuck in a trolley bus for twenty minutes while President Karimov went through while President Nazarbayev danced with them during his visit to their region, pointing out how fortunate they are with their president (Oka, 2011, p. 7-8).

This antipathy was further strengthened by border closure and more intrusive border checks. Uzbeks in Kazakhstan and other neighboring states shared their traumatic experience of being treated with suspicion or being turned away by their co-ethnics (Oka, 2011, p. 6). This led to a certain level of exclusion of Uzbeks in neighboring states as due to those strict border control measures many of them could not attend family ceremonies or funeral ceremonies organized in Uzbekistan (Oka, 2011, p. 7). This led to a significant decrease in a number of visits to Uzbekistan and distanced Uzbeks in Kazakhstan from Uzbekistan.

In terms of Uzbek's participation in the political sphere, there were some attempts to raise issues related to some ethnic groups. According to Oka, although the Uzbek movement did not enjoy nationwide significance due to the small proportion of Uzbeks in Kazakhstan, its concentrated localization could be a source of mobilization to make ethnic demands (2011, p. 10). For this reason, local and central authorities were watchful and cautious of an independent movement of Uzbeks, and they suppressed the attempts of Uzbek activists to gain their community's support through elections (Oka, 2011, p. 14). Examples of those can be clearly seen in the case of the 2004 September-October Mazhilis election, where two Uzbek candidates from

Electoral District 63, mainly comprising Sairam district, were deregistered on the grounds that they instigated ethnic hatred in their election program and slogan (Oka, 2011, p.12). The fact that their programs were not radical or extreme, and the same concerns were later raised by Rozakul Khalmuradov, a high-ranking official of South Kazakhstan Oblast, without any problem suggests that issues related to specific ethnic groups were not taboo. Instead, it was desirable and productive for those questions to be raised by officially sanctioned ethnic leaders, and not in the context of elections (Oka, 2011, p.13).

Following these events, it became obvious that it was more favorable for Uzbeks to have someone with ties to the president than co-ethnic candidates with little political influence. Since under this regime, they needed people with ties to local and central authorities to appeal to them when needed and or receive financial support, most Uzbek leaders chose to become part of pro-president parties and support candidates who are selected from "above" (Oka, 2011, p.14). Most of the leaders of the Uzbek community were co-opted by the Nazarbayev administration by offering them posts or positions, turning them into supporters of the regime (Oka, 2011, p.14-15). Oka points out that these factors led to the position of Uzbeks where they chose to remain loyal to the government of Kazakhstan as it was the only and most desirable option available to them based on the combination of factors mentioned above.

2.4 Gaps in the Literature

Analyzing these bodies of literature reflecting the dynamic relationship between Kazakhstan and its policies, the Uzbek minority, and Uzbekistan's diaspora politics, I can see two major gaps in the study of this topic. The first and major gap that can be seen looking at the literature concerning Uzbek's position in Kazakhstan is that there are very limited sources

covering this topic and they don't reflect the changes in this group's position this interaction which may have resulted from more active homeland nationalism stance observed in recent years. For example, two of the few sources written on Uzbek's position within Kazakhstan by Oka (2011) and Savin (2012), describe the situation in 1990 and early 2000s only and they don't encompass recent changes. Since there were observed significant changes in Uzbekistan's stance in relation to Uzbeks outside Uzbekistan since 2016, it is important to investigate the position of Uzbeks in Kazakhstan to understand whether or how this change is affecting their position within this triadic relationship. Researching this can help to better understand Uzbek's perception and attitudes toward identity politics in their home state and kin state, how they maneuver through the policies and their state's regime, and upon which ideas or ideologies their identity is built. The second gap is the lack of relevant resources capturing the changing interaction between Uzbekistan, Uzbeks in Kazakhstan, and Kazakhstan. One of the sources above, Urpekova (2022), highlighted the change in the approach of Uzbekistan's government to their co-ethnics living in other countries. However, its effects and reception by Uzbeks, its effect on the triadic relationship, and identification patterns of Uzbeks have not been studied. Unlike Urkepova (2022) and Yuldashev (2022), who focused on the policies of Uzbekistan towards co-ethnics abroad, my study focuses on the dynamic relationship between three important actors: Kazakhstan's authority, and Uzbekistan and its politics toward co-ethnics in the neighboring state, and particularly on the Uzbeks in Kazakhstan whose reactions I ethnographically describe. Considering the fact that Uzbekistan's policies targeting co-ethnics abroad changed from an absent to a more active stance, it is important to understand how this affects the triadic relationship, and the context within which it is taking place. Studying these through the prism of the triadic nexus can not only deepen our understanding of the situation taking place but also can

contribute theoretically, challenging or expanding the understanding of the relationship between those three.

Chapter 3: Nationalizing Nationalism and its Implications for Uzbeks

Before looking at changes in the interaction between the minority ethnic group and the kin state in recent years and its effects on the relationship of this group with both the host state and the kin state, we need to understand the host state's stance. Host state, or home state, is one of the stances within the triadic nexus and refers to the state where the ethnic minority lives. According to Brubaker, the stance of the home state can be described as nationalizing nationalism whose characteristics, in general, involve the policies and practices motivated by the idea that the state is "unrealized" to a sufficient degree due to previous experience of being oppressed and action needs to be taken to redress it by promoting the language, culture, demographic position, economic flourishing, or political hegemony of the nominally state-bearing nation (p.5). A common term used to refer to this process specifically in Kazakhstan's case is Kazakhization. As Karin and Chebotarev (2002. p.1) point out, this process involves state policies touching all different spheres of public life and is directed at "the revival, the strengthening, development, representation, and domination of basic socio-cultural, ethnodemographic, economic, political, and legal values as well as resources of the Kazakhs" (Karin and Chebotarev 2002. p.1). Since these terms refer to the same phenomenon in Kazakhstan's context, these terms are used interchangeably in the chapter.

Observing the field and participants' reflections, it can be seen that nationalizing policies led by Kazakhstan are touching different aspects of their lives. One of the things that caught my attention when I visited the Shymkent city Uzbek Drama Theater and Uzbek schools in the village of Karabulak was the language used in posters. Since from one of these schools I graduated myself and knew the situation several years before, I was surprised by the changes. While in the past there were posters and materials both in Kazakh and in Uzbek, the posters

throughout the school in June-July of 2023 were all in Kazakh. Only on one part of the school, there was 1 poster in Uzbek and it turned out that it was also to be replaced based on a new law and it was there by accident as they have not managed to take it off yet. Similarly, in the Uzbek theater in Sairam, all the names of plays, and all the posters were in Kazakh language. This linguistic nationalization touched the documentation parts of these schools and cultural institutions. While interviewing one of the school teachers, he mentioned that documents concerning internal matters of the school could be led in Uzbek, but all other documentation about other schools, or external documents were to be led in Kazakh. Kazakhization of the linguistic sphere could be noticed by looking at schools and kindergartens as well.

Most of the Uzbek language schools in the Sairam district were turned into mixed schools in the past decade. Kazakh and Russian language classes were introduced to Uzbek schools where the whole school program is taught in these languages. It is taking place at a significant rate as there are more and more classes being opened with Kazakh and Russian language instruction compared to just a decade ago. For example, people living in Karabulak village used to send their children to the nearby village Aksukent, which is the administrative center of the district, if they wanted their children to gain a school-level education in Russian or Kazakh languages. However, the majority of the Uzbek schools in this village offer classes with Russian and Kazakh language instruction. Furthermore, the participants of my interviews noted that they send their children to Kazakh language and Russian language kindergartens. When asked about the reason behind it, most of them responded that it was not a conscious decision. Instead, since these were the only available options, they resorted to one of them. However, there is a portion of parents among surveyed people who deliberately sent their children to Kazakh or Russian classes and kindergartens as well.

Some parents of this community deliberately send their children to Kazakh or Russian schools to improve their language skills and prospects of employment and prestigious education. Since the United National Examination in Kazakhstan can be taken only in these two languages, some parents are concerned about the potential difficulties of their children adopting Kazakh and Russian language education. This makes these schools more attractive for those parents as it eases the process of university admission exams and further prospects of receiving higher education in Kazakhstan's universities. Some of the parents who send their kids to these schools explained that they are not concerned about their Uzbek language knowledge because they interact in daily life with family and friends only in Uzbek. They argue that educating them in Russian or Kazakh classes can help improve their language skills, which will further help them interact with others and receive higher education. These linguistic nationalization policies are affecting youth's language proficiency, use, and identity to a certain extent. If the fact that there are only Kazakh and Russian language kindergartens in the Sairam district are policies directly affecting the language use of Uzbek children, promoting the official languages of Kazakhstan, and setting the language of Unified National Tests college admissions these official languages further influencing parents' decision of the school to which to send their children. This has resulted in the decision of some parents to choose Kazakh and Russian language schools over Uzbek schools due to the prospects of getting a higher education and later employment in official languages. These show how policies, directly and indirectly, promote official languages and contribute to nationalizing policies led by the state.

The effects of attending kindergarten and schools in Russian and Kazakh languages can be observed in their language proficiency level and the kinds of content they consume. These children and youth usually exhibit good conversational skills in everyday subjects in the Uzbek

language. However, when it comes to receiving education, understanding literary sources, or dealing with more formal vocabulary, their understanding and use remain constrained. Furthermore, unlike students who mainly receive education in Uzbek, there is less engagement with Uzbek language content and limited knowledge of Uzbek literature and famous figures. Unlike the older generations who listen to Uzbek music, and know the names of actors and popular films, the younger generation both those who attended and did not attend Uzbek schools seem to interact significantly less with Uzbekistan's media. The effects of linguistic nationalism could also be seen in the language of people employed at schools or other public institutions like ethnocultural centers could be observed. While on most of the topics during the interview the respondent used the Uzbek language when the topic touched not daily matters but discussion of certain political stances or topics, I noticed the use of specific Kazakh words. Since certain discussions are carried out in the Kazakh language more often, it affects their knowledge and use of vocabulary as well. While embracing the knowledge of many languages including Kazakh, Russian, English, and Chinese, and emphasizing its importance in the modern day, many members of the community who participated in the interviews felt that receiving school-level education should be received in Uzbek.

Some participants noted that receiving a school education in the Uzbek language is essential for preserving their values and culture. Some of the participants noted that sending kids to Russian language schools negatively affected the behavior of their children as they were becoming more Russified. They shared that the environment affected their children and they were losing their Uzbekness. These parents noted that changing their kids to Uzbek schools had a positive effect on their behavior and being around other Uzbeks developed in them some Uzbek

values. For similar reasons, many participants highlighted the importance of the acquisition of school-level education.

The effects of Kazakhstan's nationalizing policies could be seen in the promotion of prominent Kazakh figures and their thought and ideas in the Sairam district. This could be noticed in several places, starting from theater performances in the Uzbek theater to quotation boards on the sides of the roads. In the Shymkent city Uzbek Drama theater, for example, there was a picture of the play based on Mukhtar Auezov's "Abay" tragedy. Furthermore, when interviewing one of the active members of Karabulak, Pobedakhon Abdazimova, she mentioned that she was awarded a recognition certificate for translating a book by Abai Qunanbaiuly from the Kazakh language to Uzbek. When asked about the intention behind those translation projects, she noted that the authorities wanted to better familiarize Uzbeks with prominent Kazakh figures and their works and ideas. To achieve this, they translated some of his works and published Uzbek versions to get Uzbek readers. Furthermore, on the sides of the roads from where the villages Karabulak and Aksukent start, two of the major villages in the Sairam district, there were roadboards with proverbs or old sayings about the unity of people. These roadboards also contained only Kazakh authors' words and ideas. Through these, we can see the government's active promotion of prominent historical figures of Kazakh ethnicity by disseminating their ideas and ensuring their dissemination not only among the titular ethnic group but also among Uzbeks living in Kazakhstan. This practice of selecting prominent historical figures and turning them into national symbols is common in nationalizing states. In the neighboring country Uzbekistan, for example, a similar situation can be observed. As described by Kurzman (1999, p. 81-81), national heroes Amir Timur (1336-1405, known in the West as Tamerlane) and Ulugh Bek (1394- 1449) were selected since independence to represent the great tradition of

Uzbekistani independence. Similar to Abai in Kazakhstan's case, these "national heroes" are featured prominently in school textbooks, and appear in quickly rendered statues around the country, replacing heroes of the Soviet regime Marx and Lenin. This process fits under what Karin and Chebotarev (2002, p. 1) describe as the insertion of ethnic Kazakh ways of thinking into the republic's socio-cultural sphere. By this, they referred to this process of promoting prominent figures from Kazakh history by sponsoring events dedicated to celebrating the anniversaries of these figures (Karin and Chebotarev 2002, p. 1). They pointed out that it was one of the layers of the multi-layered Kazakhization process, and argued that this was done to promote the Kazakh ethnic value system.

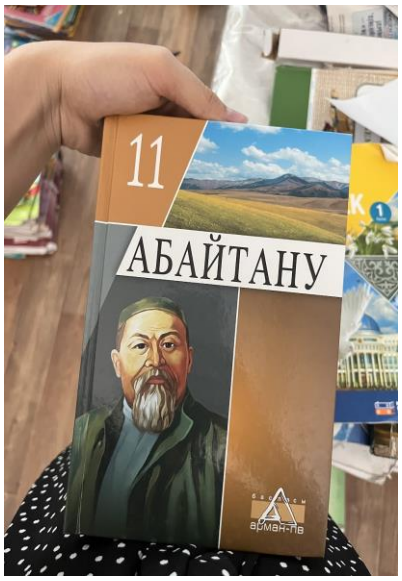

Figure 1. Book for the school class dedicated to learning about Abai Qunanbaiuly, one of the prominent Kazakh historical figures. The book is used in Uzbek schools, in classes with Kazakh language of instruction (August, 2023).

The nationalizing policies of Kazakhstan also shaped the school curriculum and the content of subjects. This is especially evident in the history of Kazakhstan books which predominantly consider and trace Kazakh's history. As a person who graduated from Uzbek schools in Karabulak, I can't recall reading anything about Uzbek's history in Kazakhstan. There

was little, if anything at all, mentioned about Uzbeks in southern Kazakhstan. One of the participants of the interview said the following while addressing her concerns about the future of Uzbeks in Kazakhstan:

> One of the negative sides is that Uzbek's history is not taught. We learn Kazakh's story. For example, I don't know Uzbek's history well, but I know Kazakhstan's history well. When you don't know the history well, you can feel your Uzbekness. When I went to Samarqand, I wore traditional Uzbek clothes and started feeling more like an Uzbek. However, we are forgetting who we are from day to day. Our parents, for example, learned Uzbek history, not Kazakh history, and they have preserved their Uzbekness better compared to our generation. Under Kazakhstan's system, I think, I can't of course tell the future, but I think they are slowly implementing some changes, opening Kazakh classes in Uzbek schools, and teaching the Kazakh alphabet and history, even some Uzbek kids don't know the Uzbek alphabet and slowly we will forget our language, history. We will have only the name Uzbeks, but we will not know anything about ourselves. (July, 2023)

In this response, we can see how nationalizing policies are perceived to be affecting Uzbeks in Kazakhstan by one of the participants in my interview. She expressed frustration about learning only Kazakh's history in the lessons of the History of Kazakhstan. Although she attended Uzbek school in Karabulak, she felt like less of an Uzbek due to her lack of knowledge of Uzbek history and felt that it could be one of the contributing factors to the loss of Uzbekness among Uzbeks living in Kazakhstan. Similar information was confirmed by a couple of senior-year students at school who shared that very little was mentioned about Uzbeks in the History classes and only mentioned in the context of the emergence of groups/tribes called Uzbeks and Kazakhs. These

once again point to the characteristics of nationalizing states mentioned by Brubaker which include the idea that the country is of and for the core nation (Brubaker, p.83). This explains why Kazakhstan's history is understood as Kazakh's story and other non-titular ethnicities' histories are overlooked and are not included in the history textbooks.

3.1 Kazakhstan for and of Kazakhs?

The other common characteristics of the nationalizing nationalism stance discussed by Brubaker involved the idea that there is a "core nation" or nationality, which is distinguished from citizenry or permanent resident of the state and is defined in ethnocultural terms (Brubaker 1996, p.83). Other elements of the nationalization process are the idea that the core nation is not flourishing or that their specific interests have not been realized fully and, thus, some action needed to be taken to accomplish their goals and address those issues (Brubaker 1996, p.83). These actions can be taken in different spheres and these may include the promotion of culture, languages, demographic predominance, economic welfare, and political hegemony of the core nation. Furthermore, these measures are portrayed as remedial or compensatory for previous discrimination this core nation has experienced and these ideas inform the formal and informal policies adopted by state and non-state organizations (Brubaker 1996, p.84). These common characteristics of nationalizing nationalism and formal and informal policies and practices informed by them could be observed in the responses of participants from Sairam as well.

The idea that Kazakhstan is for and of Kazakhs or policies informed by this idea repeatedly appeared in the responses of the participants. When they were asked to evaluate the position of Uzbeks in Kazakhstan and explain if they perceived themselves to be as fully-fledged Kazakhstani citizens, the participants shared the following views:

P1: I think it depends on every Uzbek person himself. For example, if you don't act confidently, as people say there are bad people, but not bad nationalities. For example, the girl with whom I lived in the dorm used to discriminate based on ethnicity and would in different ways show her enmity in different ways. However, some other people treat you just like other people and don't care whether you are Uzbek or Kazakh. But, among Kazakhs, since you are Uzbek, you cannot apply to certain positions. For example, you won't be given higher-ranking positions as you are Uzbek, and they can squeeze out (*siqib tashlash*) Uzbek people.

P2: I don't think that the status of Uzbeks in Kazakhstan is very good. This is because in government apparatus if there is any at all, there is only one deputy. There aren't more representatives, and from women also none. I want more representatives from Uzbeks because we make up quite a big percentage of the population, our villagers, and are in leading positions in the production of meat and agricultural products. Maybe it is done by the government. However, I think this does not reach us. From the side of the government, everything is legal, and all policies are created, but I think they don't fully work and reach the population. For example, in certain places, in certain jobs, they don't employ Uzbeks or other people. They do it through ways, maybe through corruption, they squeeze out Uzbek people. There are such places.

P3: I am not talking badly of them, but, in higher administration, there are very few Uzbek people. For example, deputies. There are more than 300000 Uzbeks in our region, in administration as hakims or deputies. The first person, *hokim* can be a Kazakh, but the

others can be Uzbeks, if they mix it would be better. The people talk about it. In this way Uzbeks also should be placed in those positions, they should be attracted to those government jobs, higher positions. Most places are taken over by Kazakhs, very few Uzbeks. This part is not right. They are also citizens of Kazakhstan, have equal rights, are well-educated, for example, hardworking, and talented cadres, they should be taken to higher positions. They should be elected as deputies. We have one or two, no more. All Kazakhs are being elected.

P4: If I talk as an Uzbek, then in many places Kazakhs don't give way to Uzbeks. In many places, Kazakhs say: "go to your Uzbekistan, it is our state" and in many places hold them back. However, this is our homeland, where our ancestors lived. This is the land of our real ancestors. No one has the right to tell us to go somewhere. People who can't control their mouths are saying these words. In fact, Nazarbayev called and brought them (Kazakhs) from all over the world, to increase the number of Kazakhs. They created good conditions for them. They find it difficult to create good conditions for Uzbeks. They say: "They will work by themselves, they make wealth by themselves" and don't pay much attention to us.

In these responses, some of the above-mentioned characteristics of the Kazakhization process. First of all, the idea that there is a core nation defined in ethnocultural terms and this core nation owns the state and this state is of and for them can be seen in responses of participants 3 and 4. In P3's response, we can see that he argues that while the highest position (*hokim*) can be taken by Kazakhs, at least to lower positions, Uzbeks should be appointed. This

respondent's position seems to mirror those existing ideas that Kazakhstan is of and for Kazakhs, as his idea of higher representation of Uzbeks in government apparatus is not an equal opportunity to get to those positions. Instead, he accepts it as a fact and suggests higher representation on lower levels.

A similar perception was reflected in the behavior of some Kazakhs as mentioned in P7's response. This participant recalled some moments when Uzbeks were seen as less legitimate members of Kazakhstan due to their ethnicity and that some Kazakhs felt that they "owned" the state, telling members of minority ethnic groups to go to their homes. This "home" is defined in ethnocultural terms and reflects the deeply embedded ideas that defined many aspects of societal order and legitimized preferential treatment of titular ethnic groups over members of other ethnic groups. These show the ideas prevailing in nationalizing states which affect not only the relationship between titular and non-titular ethnic groups but also have significant political implications.

Furthermore, in the responses of participants, we can also see how the underlying ideas of these beliefs informed the formal and informal policies pursued by the authority. Several participants pointed out that in many government positions and prestigious positions, Uzbeks are not appointed. Although legally no obstacles prevent them from participating in these domains, they are marginalized and given little opportunity to pursue their career in government apparatus or other prestigious positions. This shows how the ideas about the core nation's ownership of the state and their ways of advancing their interest touch political and economic decisions, where the members of the core nation are given preference while other ethnic groups are squeezed out of those places due to their non-titularity. Participant's reference to Kazakhstan's repatriation policy which involved creating opportunities and moving Kazakhs from other countries also fits

the characteristics of nationalizing states mentioned by Brubaker, as it is an attempt to achieve demographic predominance of the core nation. These show how the ideas mentioned above inform politics and the decision-making process and Uzbeks in the field are influenced and to a certain extent are aware of them.

These discrepancies between official stances and reality were also mentioned by Gulirano Rasulova, vice-deputy of the Turkestan Regional Ethnocultural Association. When discussing if Uzbek youth in Kazakhstan feel like full-fledged citizens, she described the situation as follows:

> In my opinion, nowadays our people, youth I think don't feel like full-fledged citizens of Kazakhstan. Or this understanding/idea doesn't come to their minds at all because in many places the representatives of our ethnic group are looked at as people of secondary importance. I always say on this topic that If we want to be equal or higher than other ethnic groups, we have to try harder and be one level above them. This does not mean go, hit, or be involved in the conflict; instead, with our knowledge and with our work we should try harder. However, this is not being told enough times to youth. In my opinion, even in those Uzbek schools, teachers are working with the principle of "You don't bother me, I don't bother you." They just fulfill their functions within the required program and that's it. Of course, there are some exceptions, 1-2-3 enthusiastic people concerned about our ethnic group, but since there are hundreds of teachers who make up the overwhelming majority, their influence is not felt. Those who are determined can try to do something; however, many break in this process and come to the conclusion that they just have to do their job get their salary, and not be bothered. There isn't an ideology that says to youth. Yes, there are some occasions where youth are being told that they are full members of Kazakhstan. However, in real life, the opposite is happening. And many

> of our people using this excuse to stop trying. Yes, there are some people like you and me who say that they will reach their goals despite some obstacles; however, for most people, this became an excuse to stop and just quit. Therefore, I think that our youth don't believe they are equal to the students of Kazakh schools (June 2023, Shymkent).

This once again reinforces the idea that there are inconsistencies between official stances that embrace all ethnic groups living in Kazakhstan and the lived experiences of people. Due to their non-titularity, Uzbek youth are looked down upon and to compete for the same positions and opportunities, they have to work harder. These all point to predominantly nationalizing policies and practices which favor Kazakhs over other ethnic groups. These policies promote the interests of the titular ethnic group, and discriminate against minority ethnic communities residing in Kazakhstan, leading to feelings of not fully belonging to Kazakhstan.

Figure 2. Photo of a mixed school (Uzbek, Kazakh, Russian) with predominantly Uzbek classes, Karabulak village, 2023

Figure 3. Posters of plays in Shymkent City Uzbek Drama Theater (May 2023)

3.2 Unity of Nations with a Kazakh Face?

Despite predominantly nationalizing policies, the state's stance on identity politics is not limited to ethnic conception of identity. Another dominant paradigm of state identity is multi-nationality which emphasizes the multi-national character of the state and the harmonious coexistence of more than 130 ethnic groups residing in Kazakhstan (Laurelle, 2014, p.7). These notions could be encountered in different places starting from the first President Nazarbayev's speeches to the textbooks and newspapers where the importance of unity and preservation of peace and inter-ethnic harmony was emphasized. This rhetoric made a distinction between one's ethnic identification and citizenship and this rhetoric was largely directed towards non-titular ethnic groups, making them feel embraced and offering a normatively appealing discourse

(Laurelle, 2014, p.7; Schatz, 2000, p.491). Unlike Kazakhness which had an ethnic element in it, Kazakhstaniness offered a uniting state ideology for all ethnic groups in Kazakhstan based on common citizenship and the rhetoric of multi-nationality and friendship of different ethnic groups residing within the borders of the state.

This model resembled the Soviet nationalities policies and how it dealt with multi-ethnic population. As described by Burkhanov and Sharipova (2014, p.22), during the Khrushchev and Brezhnev era the concept of "Soviet People" was created which focused on the integration of a diverse multiethnic population with one solid supranational group. This went hand in hand with the development of local institutionalized nationalities (Burkhanov & Sharipova, 2014, p.22). Within this arrangement, the Russian people were positioned as an "older brother" who was leading the group. We can see this model being replicated in Kazakhstan's context with the difference being that the older brother role is being taken over by the Kazakhs. Burkhanov and Sharipova argue that the government resorted to this position as it was a safe choice that would avoid abrupt changes which could result in conflicts (2014, p.26). This rhetoric of multi-nationality and the way the state institutionalized it and engaged with non-titular ethnic groups was one of the recurring themes that were observed both during the field research and in the responses of participants.

The prevalence and appeal of this notion of friendship of nations living harmoniously within one state was one of the recurring themes observed in my fieldwork findings. While in the primary school textbooks in Uzbek schools, this rhetoric was fostered through texts about the friendship of the nation and the multi-national character of the state, local activists employed it to legitimate their position within the state while emphasizing the loyalty to Kazakhstan's authority. In the book *The Old and the New in Qorabuloq* by Zumrad Akhmedova, Chairman of the

Women's Council of the Sairam district at the Uzbek ethnocultural center, for example, was placed the picture of the first president of Kazakhstan sitting in front of a young group of people wearing traditional costumes of different ethnic groups living in Kazakhstan. Under the picture was the first president's quote: "We are all citizens of Kazakhstan with the same destiny and the same future. We are a multinational in the country and we are achieving success by following the model of mutual agreement and stability." (2017, p. 4). Because it was mentioned in the book by Uzbeks in Karabulak about their lives and history, the use of this picture and quotes can be understood as an effective rhetoric that gave the members of different ethnic groups a uniting common identity which made them feel as part of the state. Furthermore, quoting the president's words about the country being a home of different ethnic groups is also a way of establishing their legitimacy as Kazakhstani citizens as someone with authority (in this case Nazarbayev himself) notes that they all are Kazakhstanis.

Furthermore, the idea of a multinational state where each group has to contribute to reach a common goal helped to develop a sense of belonging. Since within this rhetoric each ethnic group, regardless of how big or little, has a role in preserving inter-ethnic harmony and helping to reach the envisioned goals of the authority, it created a space for them to feel as part of the society and assert their legitimacy as full-fledged citizens of Kazakhstan through their contribution to their achievement. An example of this can be seen in the case of Zumrad Akhmedove's book *The Old and the New in Qorabuloq* about the lives of Uzbeks living in Karabulak village. In the preface section of the book, the author writes the following:

> "We live in independent Kazakhstan. This land is equal for all. More than 130 nationalities and peoples, like the children of one parent, contribute to the prosperity of

this homeland, working together as one soul and body. This sacred land is our independent and free, flourishing Kazakhstan."

"During this period, we decided to write this book in order to highlight the service of people who sacrificed their lives to establish the 'Public Service Society' mentioned by our President, to strengthen our economy and statehood." (Akhmedova, 2017, p. 5).

In these lines, we can see how the rhetoric of the multinational character of the state where each has a role created a sense of civic belonging and space for them to contribute to the common aim. This contribution, in turn, created a space to assert their status as full-fledged citizens.

Figure 4. One of the first pages of the book by Zumrad Akhmedove *The Old and the New in Qorabuloq*

The institutionalized embodiment of Kazakhstan as a multi-national state is the Assembly of the People of Kazakhstan. Having the status of a consultative body to mediate potential conflicts among different ethnic groups and representing all minority cultural groups

(Burkhanov and Sharipova 2014, p. 24; Laurelle, 2014, p.8). This national political body oversees the work of ethnocultural associations which represents about 50 ethnic groups, sponsors newspapers and theatres, and schools that function in minority languages (Laurelle, 2014, p.8). Uzbek community in Kazakhstan are also beneficiaries of these organizations and the institutions which support their language and culture. These institutions and organizations include 139 Uzbek schools, 2 national theaters, textbooks, newspapers, and magazines published in the Uzbek language ("Uzbeki," n.d.). Many of the interviewed participants pointed to these opportunities as examples of recognition of their position within society and their rights as fully-fledged citizens of Kazakhstan by the Kazakhstani government. Zumrad Akhmedova was one of these people, who pointed to the constitutional rights given to Uzbeks to publish books, to appear on TV, to get an education, and to preserve and pass on values from generation to generation as things which point to recognition of Uzbek's rights as Kazakhstani citizens within Kazakhstan. In this context, we can see how this recognition of Uzbek's cultural needs and giving them the freedom to preserve and practice it is seen as recognition of the fact that they are full-fledged citizens of this state.

This freedom granted in the cultural sphere is also one of the Soviet legacies. According to Slezkine (2014, p. 425), Stalin viewed Russian chauvinism as "the main danger" to the Soviet system, and and solution for this was seen as a greater representation of other ethnic groups (Slezkine, 2014, p. 425). Therefore, while Stalin's "autonomization plan" called for greater centralization in some essential areas, matters like "language" and "culture," which were seen as nonessential were left to the internal autonomy of the republics (Slezkine, 2014, p. 425). This model of interaction between the authority and the population was inherited in the way of dealing with multinationality in Kazakhstan. This also explains why the freedom to develop a

cultural sphere was seen as a recognition of the rights of Uzbeks as equal citizens. Since this sphere was left to the communities themselves from the Soviet period, it was perceived as a recognition of each republic's ethnic groups' position, their significance, and equality.

While the cultural needs of minority ethnic groups are recognized and satisfied to a certain extent, the political power of these organizations is limited. As described by Laurelle (2014, p.8), debates on politicized issues including minority representation in political life and higher echelons of the economy are absent from the preoccupations of the Assembly. Instead, they are occupied by issues related to folkloric activities devoted to the language and culture of those ethnic groups (Laurelle 2014, p.8). Since these ethnocultural associations and minority ethnic institutions are supported by the state in exchange for their loyalty to the authority, these spaces became places that largely disseminate the state's ideologies and where the representatives of minority ethnic groups demonstrate their support and loyalty to the government and the politics it pursues. This was evident while surveying the social media pages of activists of ethnocultural associations and members of the Assembly of People of Kazakhstan. This loyalty and support was expressed through pictures supporting the ruling party Amanat, quotes of the President's words on different topics, and displaying support for the ruling party with pictures of community members during elections.

This familiarity with the way multi-nationality and identity politics work in Kazakhstan affected the experience of Uzbeks in the Sairam district and their perception of their place within the society. One area where this could be seen was the way participants described how their lives changed after the collapse of the Soviet Union. The responses of the participants could be seen as a direct or indirect way of describing this change from the Soviet system to an independent nation-state as moving from one regime to another. In other words, the transition was felt not

necessarily getting "independence" for Uzbeks. Instead, the collapse of the Soviet system seemed to mark the end of Russian authority and the beginning of Kazakh leadership. This was especially evident in the responses and interactions of the older generation (40-50+) who experienced both systems. This attitude was felt both by the side participants and their experience of interacting with the state which to a certain extent replicated this model.

The interaction between the state and the Uzbek community members is one area where the Soviet inherited model of interaction can be observed. This was evident in the case of Pobedakhon Abdazimova who worked as brigadier of sovkhoz (state farm) during the Soviet period and was active in village, district, and regional deputy and is an active member of the Sairam Uzbek community. When interviewing her and seeing her different recognition papers and medals, I could not help but notice the similarities in the way the state interacted with the local community. If during the Soviet period, her contributions to the Soviet goals or exceptional performance of sovkhoz led by her were recognized with medals and certificates of honor (*pochetnaya gramota*), then after the collapse of the Soviet Union these were replaced with Thank you letters (*alg'ys khat*). The only changes were the replacement of Soviet motifs like Lenin's picture with a red background to Kazakhstan's ones involving Kazakhstan's flags, and emblem. Other differences that can be noticed are the language of those letters and the authoritative body sending them. While Soviet time certificates were in the Russian language and sent by The Central Committee of the Communist Party of the Soviet Union, The Council of Ministers of the Union of Soviet Socialist Republics, and The All-Union Central Council of Trade Unions, the certificates sent after the Soviet dissolution were in Kazakh and Uzbek and were issued by Turkestan Region Ethnocultural Association, Akim of Sayram district or Karabulak village. While the form changed, the essence remained the same. This interaction both

resembles the Soviet inherited model of interaction and reinforces the idea of a change of Big Brother from Russians to Kazakhs.

Conclusion

Kazakhstan's identity politics following the collapse of the Soviet Union involved seemingly contradictory stances. On the one hand, the Soviet-style notion of a multi-ethnic state where representatives of different ethnic groups live harmoniously together was employed to develop a common national identity based on citizenship. On the other hand, the policies and formal and informal practices of appointing people to different positions point to the nationalization process. Within this context, Uzbeks in Sairam were given cultural rights including a school in their native language, newspapers, and a theater. These rights were interpreted as recognition of their rights within Kazakhstan and respect and consideration of their ethnic needs. However, in the political sphere, Uzbeks were marginalized with a lack of representation in decision-making positions in political and economic spheres. Due to the lack of ethnic institutions during the Soviet period in this region, and the development of only cultural identity, and not political one, this group remained marginalized in political, ethnic, and economic spheres. Furthermore, the resemblance of Soviet-style identity patterns in Kazakhstan made the transition be perceived not necessarily as independence, but to a certain extent as a movement from one regime to another. One distinction of this change, however, was a change of Big Brother from Russians to Kazakhs.

Chapter 4: Shift in Kin State Politics Targeting Co-ethnics Abroad

4.1 Terminology

The *homeland* is defined as a piece of territory having a fundamental symbolic connection with the identity of a given ethnic group. As described by Brubaker (1995, p.110), this concept in relation to an external state or its territory is more of a political construct than an ethnographic designation. This is constructed and shaped, not given, when political or cultural elites define ethnonational kin in other states as members of the same nation. The homeland claims that this group "belong," in some sense, to them, and therefore their condition must be monitored and their interests protected and promoted by the state (Brubaker, 1995, p.110). Often, homelands are coterminous with what we term a kin-state, that is, an internationally recognized state (or distinct political unit within a larger recognized state) that can be perceived as having a special political interest in the affairs of ethnic communities abroad that are linked by history, culture, or tradition with the kin-state (King, 2018, p. 12). The states where these communities live permanently are termed host states. A diasporic state, in turn, can be understood as a state as a kin-state whose identity in some sense rests on its self-conception as the homeland of a territorially dispersed ethnic group, and which to some degree perceives itself as the defender of the interests of "its" co-ethnic communities abroad (King, 2018, p. 12). Some other terms used to describe this involve “external kin” and the “national homeland.”

Furthermore, the term diaspora can be used to refer to the analysis of communities of ethnic minorities living outside their kin-states. Application of this term can cause confusion or objections by ethnic minorities due to the traditional understanding of this term which is associated with forced migration or relocation and those communities are seen to have longing

for their homeland and memories of migration as elements of their identities. Therefore, the ethnic communities who ended up on different sides of the border due to changes in borders may object to the application of this term to them as they don't fit the archetypal definition of the term where ethnic minorities are labeled as "guests" in the state which considers itself as "host" (King, 2018, p. 12). The use of this term to define people who have been living in a particular territory for centuries and see that place as an area of traditional (and legitimate) ethnic settlement can be objected to as being labeled as diaspora can be seen as undermining or questioning of this. Communities lacking a strong connection to a supposed ethnic homeland may also resist being linked by "kinship" to another state (King, 2018, p. 12). Despite these imperfections, the use of these terms to analyze the relationship between trans-border ethnic communities and state policies can serve a purpose.

Diaspora politics, in turn, refers to the dynamic interaction through which states acting in the international arena, construct a notion of a co-ethnic community extending beyond the boundaries of the state itself- a process that is called diasporization (King, 2018, p. 12). It also encompasses the process by which bounded, self-conscious, ethnic communities abroad relate to the domestic politics and foreign policy of a state or other political entity conceived as coterminous with or representative of an ethnic homeland (King, 2018, p. 12). Other terms used to describe this process of kin-state building and maintaining ties with co-ethnics abroad include kin-state nationalism or kin-state activism (Liebich, 2019, p.666).

4.2 Uzbekistan's Diaspora Politics: From Problem to Asset

The diaspora politics of kin states may vary depending on their goals and priorities. This can range from support of cultural and educational institutions or granting citizenship privileges

to members of its diaspora to more extreme stances of making irridentist claims on the territory of other states. This stance, however, is not static and can change based on different factors. As explained by Brubaker (1995, p. 66), an external national homeland stands for a dynamic political stance or a group of related yet competing stances and is not a distinct thing or a static condition. This dynamic nature of homeland politics can also be observed in Uzbekistan's case, which did not seek to establish contacts with its coethnics in neighboring countries in the first decades after independence. The participants in the field interview described this as follows:

> P1: In the years following the independence of states, there was observed distancing between Uzbeks in Uzbekistan and Uzbeks in Kazakhstan. But this was not because of population, it has more to do with the geopolitical situation. There were political reasons, I think. The borders were closed, and people could not cross the borders (June 2023, Shymkent).

> P: In the early years of independence there was a coldness in the relationship between the two parties (implying Kazakhstan and Uzbekistan's leaders), and the ties were cut off. There was no move from either party to improve relationships, to get closer. The situation was like this for approximately 25-30 years (June 2023, Karabulak).

From these responses, it is clear that Uzbeks in the Sairam district felt a certain level of distancing between the two states in the first decades of independence. While some thought it was due to conflict or some possible disagreement between the leaders of the state, others pointed to the closure of borders and difficulties crossing them as the main reason why the number of people traveling there for different reasons drastically dropped. If the early years of border crossing were described in terms of problems of closure of borders and inability to cross

without identity cards which they did not have, then later periods were associated with interrogations of people, checking of mobile phones, and suspicions of being associated with extremist groups. One of the participants shared that they used to delete any religious prayers or pictures that they had on their phones before crossing the border as in case their phones were checked, it could result in imprisonment due to heightened suspicions of being related to terrorist groups. Since instances of such interrogations and imprisonments were observed, other people crossing the border also felt heightened anxiety, and for security purposes used to delete all religious material which could potentially raise questions of customs officers. These correspond to Fumagalli's findings which point to the perceived threat posed by co-ethnics residing outside Uzbekistan and suspicion of their involvement in militant activities as one of the possible explanations for Uzbekistan's reluctance to deal with Uzbeks abroad (2007, p. 118). Due to this real or imagined threat in the form of Islamic radicalism or terrorism, Uzbekistan focused on building a nation within the territory of Uzbekistan, and Uzbeks outside its borders were depicted largely as a source of instability and largely being ignored and absent from the political agenda (Fumagalli 2007, p. 118).

Another reason for less contact between populations of the two states brought up in the responses of some of the participants was the problems with recognition of education received in the neighboring country. Several respondents of the age group 50-70 noted that one of the main reasons people went to Tashkent during the Soviet period was to get higher education and Tashkent was a popular destination for people living in Southern regions of the country. Lack of opportunities to receive higher education there, problems with recognition of this education in Kazakhstan, and closure of borders resulted in significant estrangement between Uzbeks in Uzbekistan and Uzbeks in Sairam district. However, the past years have been perceived as a

turning point in Uzbekistan's approach to dealing with the co-ethnics in neighboring states and abroad.

Uzbekistan's approach to dealing with Uzbeks in neighboring countries and abroad took a different turn in recent years with the change of the President and his politics there. Shavkat Mirziyoyev, who came to power after the death of the first president of Uzbekistan in 2016 promised decisive reforms aimed at democratization of the state and improving interstate relations and dialogue (Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Uzbekistan, 2017). These drastic changes in Uzbekistan's domestic policy and foreign policy in Central Asia have also shown positive effects on the lives of the countries of the region, leading to openness, transparency, renewal, and change in cooperation between neighboring countries. These reforms of openness and better relations touched Uzbeks in neighboring countries as well, who, for the first time after a prolonged period of being overlooked and absent from the political agenda, received attention and measures targeted at improving their interaction. A systematic approach to achieving this goal can be seen in the Resolution on Measures to further improve the state policy of the Republic of Uzbekistan in the field of cooperation with compatriots living abroad first introduced and adopted by the decision of the President on October 25, 2018. This document, which became Article 23 of the Constitution of Uzbekistan adopted by Universal vote in a referendum held on April 30, 2023, defined important terms in discussing co-ethnics abroad and determined the future trajectory of the development of relationships with them (Embassy of the Republic of Uzbekistan in Malaysia, 2023).

Talking of the definitions, these policies aimed at co-ethnics living outside Uzbekistan touched multiple groups. According to the decision of the President of the Republic of

Uzbekistan, the concept of *Vatandoshlar* (compatriots) living abroad includes the following groups of people:

> Citizens of the Republic of Uzbekistan who are permanent residents outside the territory of Uzbekistan or who have been traveling abroad temporarily due to education, involvement in labor activities, family reasons, and other conditions; persons and their descendants who went abroad and received foreign citizenship, felt belonging to their homeland from a spiritual and cultural point of view and left Uzbekistan trying to develop cultural-humanitarian, socio-economic and other ties with the Republic of Uzbekistan; foreign citizens and stateless persons residing abroad who have identified themselves as Uzbeks or Karakalpaks from an ethnic, linguistic and cultural-historical point of view and want to have comprehensive contact with Uzbekistan ("Decree of the President of the Republic of Uzbekistan dated 25.10.2018 No. PP-3982", 2018).

In other words, the term compatriots refer to citizens of Uzbekistan who permanently or temporarily reside outside Uzbekistan, and people of other countries' citizenship who identify themselves as Uzbeks or Karakalpaks from an ethnic, linguistic, and cultural-historical point of view. It seems that the main target of these policies is Uzbeks who moved from Uzbekistan to other countries for work or study reasons for a long term or permanently. The importance given to fostering closer ties with these groups of compatriots by the Mirziyoyev can be understood by looking at the significance they play in the socio-economic life of the country. This is because a large number of people in Uzbekistan rely on the personal remittances of those migrant workers (both skilled and low-skilled). According to the World Bank dataset, for example, 20.8% of

Uzbekistan's GDP is made up of personal remittances, making it one of the substantial parts of its economy (World Bank, n.d.). Furthermore, we can see that this term also includes Uzbeks and Karakalpaks who live outside Uzbekistan and may be citizens of other countries. However, the law is careful not to claim that all people of these ethnic groups are compatriots, highlighting that not only identification but also a desire to build ties with Uzbekistan is a criterion in defining compatriots.

Here we see a clear process of redefining the nation and its boundaries. As mentioned earlier, during the rule of Karimov, Uzbekistan's government placed more importance on notions of territoriality over direct emphasis on ethnicity and aimed to establish an Uzbek state where ethnicity and political boundaries were coterminous (Fumagalli 2007, p.119). However, the introduction of the resolution of compatriots shows a movement from the standard notion of the political community as the nation-state to the one that transcends the boundaries of the state, including co-ethnics living abroad. Furthermore, the first lines of the resolution highlight works done in recent years to strengthen ties with the compatriots and encourage this group's participation in the reforms being carried out in Uzbekistan ("Decree of the President of the Republic of Uzbekistan dated 25.10.2018 No. PP-3982", 2018). These changes in the position and belonging of Uzbeks and Karakalpaks abroad caused by the change of authority, the type of leadership they pursue, and the perceived role of diaspora communities within this situation align with Smith's argument on this topic. He states that the sending state's redefinition of its relationship with its diaspora may be associated with changes in domestic policies, resulting in the way how they interact with the global system and its diasporas (Smith, 2003, p.726). He explains that evolution in the regime affects the government's stance towards its migrants abroad resulting in the reconfiguration of bounds of the political community, which includes migrants in

a more flexible notion of the sending country's "nation" if they are seen as strategically important in them (Smith 2003, p.728). Furthermore, such reconfiguration helps the creation and institutionalization of a diasporic public sphere and strengthens the political membership of migrants (Smith 2003, p.728). From this we can see that embracing its diasporas was strategic, their potential contribution to the socio-economic reforms taking place within Uzbekistan being perceived as important.

Moving on to the other rationales behind the introduction of the law, this resolution emphasized the need to tighten the relationship with compatriots to achieve a number of goals. These goals involved protecting the rights and freedoms of compatriots abroad, supporting their activities aimed at preserving and developing the Uzbek language, culture, and traditions in their countries of residence, expanding their opportunities for education in Uzbekistan, and strengthening relations with compatriots and their organizations for socio-economic development in Uzbekistan and friendly ties abroad ("Decree of the President of the Republic of Uzbekistan dated 25.10.2018 No. PP-3982", 2018). Furthermore, this law highlighted the goals of creating favorable legal, social, and economic conditions for compatriots to carry out professional, including entrepreneurial, investment, scientific, educational and cultural activities on the territory of Uzbekistan and attracting the potential of compatriots to support the large-scale socio-economic and socio-political reforms being carried out in Uzbekistan ("Decree of the President of the Republic of Uzbekistan dated 25.10.2018 No. PP-3982", 2018). Analyzing these motives, we can see how the rise of diaspora politics in Uzbekistan can be explained to a great extent by one of the prominent perspectives which is tapping resources. In other words, the diaspora institutions facilitate the “tapping” of resources from the diasporas to the origin states (Gamlen, Cummings, & Vaaler, 2021, p.187). These resources can be in multiple forms:

remittances, investments, philanthropic donations, and tourism dollars from and through diasporas or professional and scientific networks to transfer new technologies and ideas back home (Gamlen, Cummings, & Vaaler, 2021, p.187). A similar case could be seen in India which actively pursued investment of non-resident Indians (NRI), creating favorable conditions for them (Lessinger, 1992, p. 57). This is because investment from its diaspora was seen as more manageable and less disruptive and threatening than investment from wholly foreign investors and firms due to the cultural nationalist overtones involved in this engagement (Lessinger, 1992, p. 57). The Indian government not only sought money which NRIs might invest in India, but also "NRI technical and managerial expertise garnered abroad, and NRI social networks within the scientific, business and financial worlds of the West" (Lessinger, 1992, p. 57).

To ensure the implementation of these goals, public fund *Compatriots* was established by the decision of the president of Uzbekistan on August 11, 2021 (Embassy of the Republic of Uzbekistan in Malaysia, 2023; Vatandoshlar, n.d.). Based on the directions of spheres of engagement identified in the resolution, the fund engages with compatriots living abroad. The organization's engagement with co-ethnics in Kazakhstan and other neighboring states is mainly in the cultural sphere. This is done through cooperation with public associations created by compatriots. The foundation highlights some of the main activities they carry out as encouraging the activities of public associations created by compatriots, providing them with practical assistance in creating Uzbek national cultural centers abroad, supporting and developing the Uzbek language, culture, and traditions abroad in cooperation with associations of compatriots (Vatandoshlar, n.d.).

The initial decisive steps toward achieving these goals taken to achieve these goals have been observed in recent years. According to Yuldashev (2022, p. 145), 128 high-level visits to

foreign policy and economic activity took place between Uzbekistan and neighboring countries during the period 2016-2020 (Yuldashev, 2022, p. 145). In addition, Tashkent has hosted more than 210 different meetings, video conferences, round tables, and other events with the participation of scientists, art, cultural and religious figures, businessmen, youth, tourism, sports, public associations, and NGOs. These meetings were attended by representatives of the Ethnocultural Center in the republics of Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, and Tajikistan, journalists of the Uzbek-language Uzbek press, entrepreneurs and businessmen, literary critics, figures of science, artists, and masters of sports (Yuldashev, 2022, p. 145).

The level of cooperation and development of relations between Uzbekistan and *Do'stlik* ethnocultural associations in neighboring states reached a new level after 2016. This can be seen clearly in the rise of meetings, events, and exchange of resources between Uzbekistan and *Do'stlik* communities in neighboring states. Being carried out by the Committee of Interethnic and Friendship Relations with Foreign Countries established in 2017, some of the events held by them involved scientific-practical seminars, round tables, exhibitions, musical-artistic evenings, concerts in cooperation with *Do'stlik* communities (Embassy of the Republic of Uzbekistan in Malaysia, 2023). One example of these events is the concert called *Precious Woman* organized in Shymkent in cooperation with *Do'stlik* ethnocultural associations on March 8, International Women's Day (Yuldashev, 2022, p. 147). According to Yuldashev, at the concert, dialogues in the field of cultural relations were organized between the Masters of Uzbek art, Uzbek representatives from Uzbekistan, and Uzbeks from Kazakhstan (2022, p. 147).

Aside from cultural activities, the cooperation with Uzbek ethnocultural centers in neighboring countries was directed at supporting the compatriots in preserving and developing the Uzbek language, culture, and traditions in the countries of residence during the past period.

According to the information presented on the website of the Embassy of the Republic of Uzbekistan in Malaysia, with the initiative of the Committee on Interethnic Relations and Friendship Relations with Foreign Countries, about 30,000 literature books, textbooks, and magazines in Uzbek were presented to compatriots (2023). It was noted that works are being carried out to provide educational textbooks and Uzbek-language literary books to embassies of the Republic of Uzbekistan in foreign countries, consular institutions, Uzbek national cultural centers, and general secondary education schools where education is conducted in kindred languages. In particular, in 2022, more than 15,000 pieces of Uzbek-language literary books and about 100 National Instruments were supplied to compatriots living in Kazakhstan alone (Uzbek Embassy Malaysia, 2023).

These actions and changes were felt by the activists of the Uzbek ethnocultural center in the Sairam district. One of the active members of this ethnocultural center, Zumrad Akhmedova, described the situation as follows:

> Uzbeks always come and participate in any event we organize, and give us their help and advice where they can. For example, we will celebrate the day of the Uzbek language, culture, and traditions at the national level. Of course, guests and delegations will come from there (meaning Uzbekistan), spend with us, spend with us, and come to our other events.
>
> And now something has been opened in Shymkent, shall we say consul? One part of the embassy has been opened in Shymkent. Uzbekistan opened it to strengthen the relationship between us. Their representatives are coming here (Kazakhstan) and calling us there (implying Uzbekistan). Good communication now (June 2023, Karabulak).

Figure 5. Here can be seen a certificate of gratitude issued by the public fund *Vatandoshlar (Campriots)* to the activist from Sairam district (Akhmedova, Z., March 1, 2024)

While people who are more actively involved in the life of the community and follow the policies and changes being adopted noticed the closer engagement of two sides, ordinary people seemed to notice some practical parts of these changes. They noted the opening of borders and the ease with which they can cross it these days. They shared that going to Tashkent became very easy and common and visits for cultural programs and business activities became more frequent. The people with whom I shared the taxi which takes people from the border of Uzbekistan to the Sairam district were people of different ages, mainly middle-aged people and elders, some of

whom mentioned they were coming from medical check-ups conducted in Tashkent. They asked the reason I went to Tashkent and when I shared that I attended a concert, some of the people noted that they went to a concert of Yulduz Usmonova (popular Uzbek singer) and shared how easy it became to travel to Tashkent these days. Similar responses were repeated by some other people with whom I interacted in the field who said that nowadays more people are going to Tashkent as it has become easy and they noted that they travel there more often as tourists to enjoy visiting sacred places, eat food, or visit cultural events. Even though many of those people were not aware of government-level decisions and changes in the interaction of the two states and did not follow these events, they also felt some of the changes that were byproducts of these policies and cooperations. This can be explained by the Soviet legacy of the development of cultural identity, rather than a political form of identity (Kudairbergenova 2020, p. 34). Since during the Soviet Union, ethnicity was simultaneously institutionalized and depoliticized, a mobilized form of identity was not shaped among Uzbeks in the Sairam district.

4.3 Diaspora Engagement Threat to Host State?

The policies introduced after 2016 targeting co-ethnics abroad and actions undertaken to advance them point to closer interaction between Uzbeks in Kazakhstan and Uzbekistan. This intensification of interaction between kin state and co-ethnics abroad is usually associated with the potential threat to the sovereignty of the host state, thereby straining the relationship between both countries and the host state and the minority ethnic group in question. Some scholars raising those concerns were Brubaker (1995) and Liebich (2019, p. 666), who highlight the role of a higher level of engagement of external kin with its diaspora in destabilizing the region and

leading to conflicts. However, in the case of interaction between Uzbeks in the Sairam district and Uzbekistan, this is not the case. A number of things in the nature of their interaction point to a more stabilizing form of interaction, including the framework within which the relationship is developing, the position of Uzbeks, the host state, and the kin state within it.

One of the important factors contributing to the stabilizing form of engagement between these Uzbeks in Kazakhstan and Uzbekistan is the positive changes in the relationship between the two states. Mirziyoyev's leadership marked the improvement of relationships between these two countries and this can be felt and seen in several spheres. One of these gestures emphasizing the significance of the relationship between these neighboring countries was the diplomatic visit of Mirziyoyev to Kazakhstan, which was one of the first diplomatic trips to another country. This symbolized the importance of the relationships between these neighboring countries. The same situation was observed in the case of the second president of Kazakhstan, Kasym Jomart-Jomart Tokayev, whose one of the first diplomatic visits after his election was to Uzbekistan. Another significant marker of this tightening of these relationships was the declaration of 2018 as the *Year of Uzbekistan in Kazakhstan*. As described on the official website of the President of Kazakhstan, Nazarbayev noted the special significance of the event not only as a symbol of Kazakh-Uzbek friendship and good neighborliness but also event that would become a significant contribution to the great partnership and cultural and civilizational rapprochement throughout the region (Akorda, 2018). More symbolic gestures demonstrating the cultural and spiritual closeness of the two peoples, and the strength of good neighborly and friendly ties could be observed in November 2022, when the Days of Culture of Uzbekistan were successfully held in Astana (Ministry of Investment, n.d.). Similarly, on December 19, 2022, on the eve of the visit, the exhibition “Abai. Heritage of fraternal peoples”, dedicated to the life and work of the

Kazakh writer and thinker Abai Kunanbayev, who preserved the humanistic traditions of the great thinker Alisher Navoi (Ministry of Investment, n.d.).

The trajectories of development and partnership between those states were determined in a series of discussions and visits between the leaders of these two countries. As a result of these visits, over 20 intergovernmental and interdepartmental documents were signed, as well as packages of agreements (Official Website of President of Uzbekistan, 2021). These include agreements in the customs sphere, in the field of prevention and response to emergencies, exploration and use of outer space for peaceful purposes, the creation of the International Center for Industrial Cooperation "Central Asia", as well as documents on further expansion of cooperation in the fields of trade, investment, energy, transport communications, forensic activities, defense, employment, science (Official Website of President of Uzbekistan, 2021). The effects of these agreements can already be seen. For example, thanks to these agreements on trade and partnership, the share of Central Asian countries in the total foreign trade turnover of Uzbekistan increased from 12.4 percent in 2019 to 13.6 percent in 2020, in which the share of Kazakhstan was 61 percent, Kyrgyzstan 18.2 percent, Turkmenistan 10.6 percent, and Tajikistan 10.2 percent (Yuldashev, 2022, p. 146). Furthermore, following the state visit of President Shavkat Mirziyoyev to Kazakhstan in 2021, a Practical Action Plan was signed to bring trade turnover between the two countries to $10 billion in the next five years (Ministry of Investment, n.d). This shows that the neighboring countries plan on more than doubling the trade turnover from 4.2 billion US dollars, the figure for the period January-November 2022 (Ministry of Investment, n.d.). These show the determination of both sides further to strengthen the relationship and partnership between the neighboring state.

Considering the importance these two states give to their bilateral relationships, Uzbekistan is less likely to engage in distributive and destabilizing forms of engagement with its co-ethnics in Kazakhstan. Even during Karimov's regime one of the possible explanations for Uzbekistan's lack of interaction with co-ethnics in neighboring states was the prioritization of interstate bilateral relationships (Fumagalli, p.118). The changes in the political and economic engagement of these two states have shown further intensification of ties since then, making it even less probable that the interests of co-ethnics residing in Kazakhstan will come above the state's interests. This view is also supported by King and Melvin (2000, p. 116), who point out that despite the fairy language of nation-builders, the reason why they reach out to its diasporas is more pedestrian than one could think. They explain that other political considerations including domestic interest groups, resource scarcity, and competing policy priorities matter more in determining when and how governments engage with co-ethnics in other states (King and Melvin 2000, p. 116). Therefore, they argue that the idea that engagement with the diaspora abroad is a conflict waiting to happen is a misconception (King and Melvin 2000, p. 115).

The context within which the discussion of co-ethnics living in neighboring countries appeared in the discussion of these two states also reinforce the idea that the bilateral relationship is of higher priority for them. This can be seen from the way the existence of co-ethnics in each other's territories was depicted as another factor demonstrating the closeness of the two nations. For example, the article *Uzbekistan-Kazakhstan: An Exemplary Model of Bilateral and Multilateral Cooperation* published on the official website of the Investment Promotion Agency of the Republic of Uzbekistan noted that today more than 800 thousand Kazakhs live in Uzbekistan, and the Uzbek community in Kazakhstan has about 500 thousand people (n.d.). This article highlights the significant contribution they make to the development and prosperity of the

two states, as well as the strengthening of friendly and fraternal ties between our peoples. Furthermore, it mentions that more than 600 Uzbek citizens of Kazakh nationality and more than 20 citizens of Kazakhstan – Uzbeks were awarded state awards of the two countries. In this case, we can see the use of co-ethnics in host-states and kin-states as a source of political capital in relations with each other. According to Charles King, this case occurs when the primary focus of foreign policy is not the diaspora; instead, it centers on the potential benefits the host-state and kin-state aim to gain by strengthening their relations with each other or by establishing stronger ties with a third party (2018, p. 14). For example, when the states are interested in fostering better relationships and recognizing mutual benefits in doing so, they may point to the existence of the diaspora as a significant political and societal bridge connecting the two countries (King, 2018, p. 14). This applies to the case in question as well, as the topic of diasporas appears in the context of their role in bringing these states closer together.

Furthermore, the nature of interaction between Uzbeks in Kazakhstan and Uzbekistan is largely taking place within Kazakhstan's agenda of improving its relationship with its neighbor. This can be seen from the way Uzbeks in Kazakhstan and ethnocultural centers also served as actors in strengthening the relationship between the two states. Although they may not have been involved in the process of making important decisions concerning politics, the Uzbek community and ethnocultural centers, and the Assembly of People of Kazakhstan played important roles in cooperating with Uzbekistan. The series of conferences and events held as part of the Year of Uzbekistan in Kazakhstan including some of the diplomatic and cultural events were carried out with their cooperation. One example of this is the documentary film "Bratskaya Strana" which was presented in the building of the Assembly of the People of Kazakhstan in Shymkent in 2018 and filmed on the occasion of the Year of Uzbekistan in Kazakhstan (Administration of Muslims

of Uzbekistan, 2019). The film, shot with the support of the television and radio complex of the President of the Republic of Kazakhstan, together with the World Association of Kazakhs and Uzbek ethnocultural associations in Kazakhstan "Dustlik", tells about the achievements of the fraternal Kazakh and Uzbek peoples during the years of independence (Assembly of People of Kazakhstan, 2018; Administration of Muslims of Uzbekistan, 2019). Since ethnocultural centers' and activists' more active engagement with Uzbekistan is seen as part of the government agenda in establishing a closer connection with a neighbor, this seems to be encouraged and welcomed to a certain extent. Considering the context within which this interaction between Uzbeks in Kazakhstan and Uzbekistan is taking place, it is unlikely that this engagement will grow into a factor fueling conflict or threat.

Conclusion

The analysis of the Resolution on Measures to further improve the state policy of the Republic of Uzbekistan in the field of cooperation with compatriots shows that Uzbekistan's approach to dealing with co-ethnics abroad changed under Mirziyoyev's authority. Unlike the first decades of Uzbekistan's independence where the idea of nationhood was built primarily within Uzbekistan, the introduction of the resolution marked the renegotiation of national boundaries. These boundaries became more flexible, including the communities of Uzbeks beyond the borders of Uzbekistan. A closer analysis of the resolution and the motives listed as aims of development of stronger relationships with co-ethnics abroad show that the primary target of this policy is Uzbekistani citizens who are residing abroad for long-term work or education reasons. The definition of *vatandoshlar* (compatriots) includes co-ethnics in neighboring countries who have citizenship of the state of their permanent residence. A closer

analysis of the goals this resolution aimed to achieve points to the “tapping” kind of engagement, where the incentive to establish a relationship with the diaspora is mainly explained by the desire to tap resources from those diasporas to the homeland. Moving on to the discussion of its implications for Uzbeks in Kazakhstan and the relationship between them, it can be seen that no significant change in their dynamics was observed. Although there is considerably more engagement between Uzbeks in the Sairam district and Uzbekistan, a closer look at it shows that it is happening largely within the context of contributing to an improved relationship between Uzbekistan and Kazakhstan. This, combined with efforts put to strengthen brotherly relationships and economic, political, and social ties between Uzbekistan and Kazakhstan point to a more stabilizing form of engagement with co-ethnics.

Chapter 5: We Are Compatriots?

Surveying the data collected during the fieldwork, it could be noticed that the change in Uzbekistan's stance towards its co-ethnics in neighboring countries was largely absent from the public debate. Far from seeking support or rights on the basis of the newly introduced Uzbekistan's Compatriots policy from, the vast majority of the interviewed lacked any knowledge of this *Compatriots* policy introduced in recent years. Although many of my noticed those positive changes including the opening of the borders, and ease in maintaining business and family relationships with Uzbekistan, they largely them attributed to the improved relationship between the governments of the two states, not to the introduction of the decree on *Compatriots* living abroad. For example, when asked about the change in the relationship between Uzbeks in Kazakhstan and Uzbeks in Uzbekistan in the years of independence, Deputy Chairman of the Turkestan Regional Uzbek Ethnocultural Association Gulirano Rasulova said the following:

> The relationship between Uzbeks in Kazakhstan and Uzbeks in Uzbekistan faced some changes in the years of independence. This, I believe, is because of politics, not the people. There were times when these contacts stopped for a certain period. This is because of geopolitical reasons, I think, as there were no conflicts between the people of these states. The borders were closed, there were many restrictions, people were not allowed to cross the checkpoints, and people faced many difficulties. However, lately, with Mirziyoyev's coming to power, there were observed some positive changes. The borders are opening, and many conveniences are being created for people, for example, passport scanners on the border on the side of Uzbekistan. These all are the result of the two leader's cooperation and agreements (June 2023, Shymkent).

In this response can be seen how both distancing between Uzbeks of the two states and closer interaction was attributed to the political relationship between the host state and kin state. A similar view was widely shared by another activist, Zumrad Akhmedova (June 2023, Karabulak):

> In the early years of independence, there was a coldness in the relationship between the two parties, and the ties were cut off. There was no move from either party to improve relationships, to get closer. For approximately 25-30 years the situation was like this. After Mirziyoyev was elected, he made decisive steps to improve relationships with Kazakhstan. I don't know what happened between Nazarbayev and Karimov, maybe there were some disagreements. However, Mirziyoyev himself made the first steps to improving the relationships. The relationships have changed; especially in the past 1-2 years, there are more noticeable changes in the relationship between Uzbekistan and Kazakhstan.
>
> There is an effect of this on Uzbeks in Kazakhstan as well. When two states are in genuine and good relationships, it of course affects people, and it does.

In these responses we can see that the positive changes including closer communication and cooperation were attributed to building closer ties between the two countries' leaders and their incentives. Furthermore, another pattern that can be traced is the fact that both activists don't separate Kazakhstani Uzbeks' relations with Uzbekistan from the relationship of the two states. Instead, they see it as part of it, and the changes, therefore, are viewed and explained through the prism of the changing relationships of their leaders.

This attitude was also reflected in the discussion of the social problems of the Uzbek people in Kazakhstan. In the article published in the Uzbek newspaper, *Janubiy Qozogiston*, for

example, the concerns about the fate of the Uzbek language in Kazakhstan were brought up. While discussing some possible solutions to the question of shortage of highly qualified teachers of Uzbek language and literature, they mentioned the opportunity to get education remotely from universities in Tashkent. The fact that 34 teachers were receiving master's degrees from Uzbekistani universities was described as a result of agreements reached by the two states as part of their cooperation.

Therefore, most of the surveyed participants did not see the changes through the prism of change in the relationship between the minority ethnic group and their kin state, but rather as a change in the relationship between kin state and host state. Therefore, there were no observed traceable effects of these changes on the relationship between the minority ethnic group and the host state. The stance of the Uzbek community in the Sairam district was instead featured by loyalty to Kazakhstan and its authority.

Talking of Uzbeks in Kazakhstan, their position was characterized by loyalty to the government and the policies and goals pursued by it. This is shown in many aspects of the active members of the society who hold certain positions which include members of ethnocultural associations, work for or in cooperation with local *akimat*, or have political positions. One way how they display their support to current authority and their governance is by becoming members of parties to which the president and current leadership belong. For instance, visiting the social media pages of the Chairman of the Uzbek Ethnocultural Association of Turkestan region and influential businessman in the Sairam district, Badritdin Nishankulov, we can see numerous posts citing the current president's words and pictures of the ruling political party *Amanat*. His Instagram profile photo has the name *Nur-Otan*, the previous name of the party, and his Facebook page has a wallpaper with the name of *Amanat party*. This is the case for the

majority of the active members of the Uzbek community who hold certain positions within the local government, cultural centers, or people in important positions in the public sector.

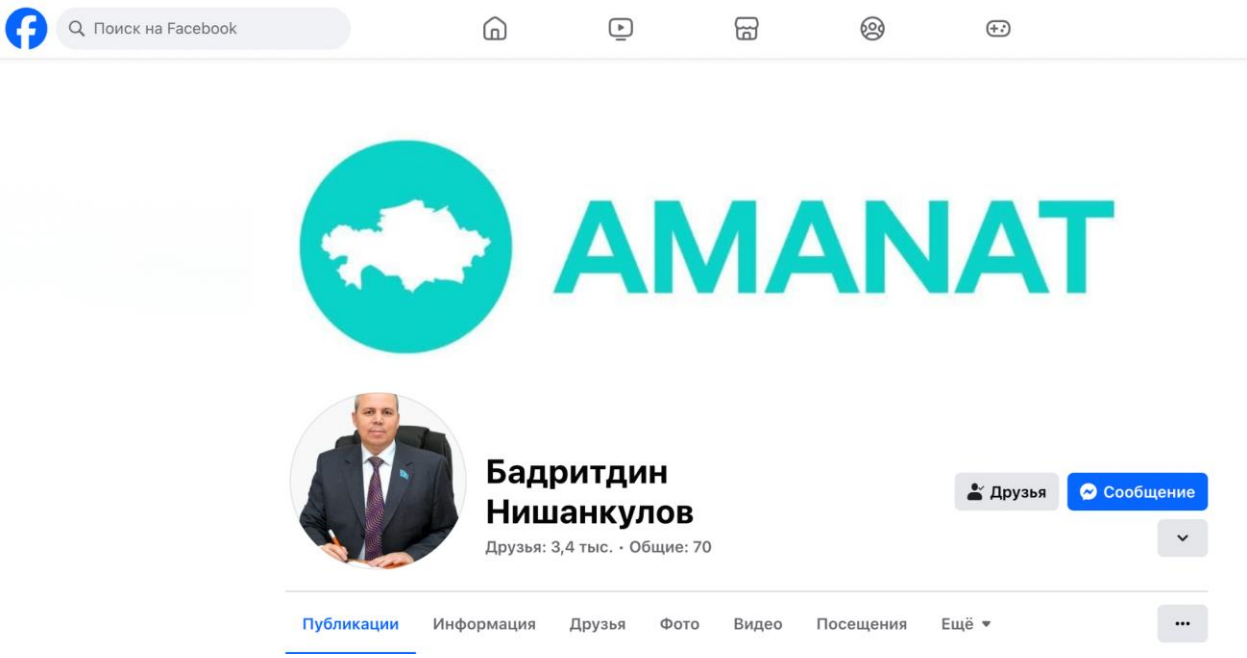

Figure 6. Facebook page of Badritdin Nishankulov, Chairman of the Uzbek Ethnocultural Association of Turkestan region (Nishankulov, 2024).

This loyalty and support of the regime was evident during the interview in the field as well, where one of the workers of the Uzbek ethnocultural center said the following:

> We support the policy of our state, and no matter what event or event our state holds, we actively participate in it. It is in Kazakhstan that we express the role of Uzbeks, their voice, their position, and their rights. That's our main goal.

Similar to this, loyalty was emphasized in indirect ways as well. For example, when asked about the languages they speak, many of the participants highlighted good knowledge of Kazakh and its use both at work and in daily life alongside Uzbek and the Russian languages. As one of the participants noted: “Our youth not only speak all three languages fluently, they even participate

in Kazakh language competitions and receive first places in them. This shows the level of knowledge of our youth and this shows that there is no limitation to knowledge of a language." Although it is true that nowadays the Kazakh language acquisition level among youth and adults working in certain spheres is good (e.g., education), there is a certain level of exaggeration and strong emphasis on some of the participants' answers. Knowing some of the participants outside the interview, their surroundings, and their community, I am aware that their use of the Kazakh language is limited to some official events or work and rarely used in daily life. Therefore, I suspect, the mentioning of such cases is giving politically correct responses, therefore highlighting the loyalty to the Kazakhstani government.

Similar cases could be seen while going over the books written about Uzbeks in Kazakhstan. For example, on one of the first pages of the book *The Old and the New in Qorabuloq* by Zumrad Akhmedova, Chairman of the Women's Council of the Sairam district at the Uzbek ethnocultural center, was placed the picture of the first president of Kazakhstan sitting in front of a young group of people wearing traditional costumes of different ethnic groups living in Kazakhstan. Under the picture was the first president's quote: "We are all citizens of Kazakhstan with the same destiny and the same future. We are a multinational in the country and we are achieving success by following the model of mutual agreement and stability." (2017, p. 4). Furthermore, in the preface of the book, the author writes the following:

> "We live in independent Kazakhstan. This land is equal for all. More than 130 nationalities and peoples, like the children of one parent, contribute to the prosperity of this homeland, working together as one soul and body. This sacred land is our independent and free, flourishing Kazakhstan."

> “During this period, we decided to write this book in order to highlight the service of people who sacrificed their lives to establish the 'Public Service Society' mentioned by our President, to strengthen our economy and statehood.”
>
> “We believe that this book will help to recognize the continuity of generations, encourage people to be cheerful, adaptive to the times, and intelligent, increase the unity of the people, regardless of which nation they belong to, and foster feelings of peaceful coexistence, brotherhood, kindness, and mutual respect. Our readers acquaint themselves with the work our people have been carrying out, and we aim to strengthen the friendship between nations, and further solidify interethnic unity, which our parents have been nurturing. Kazakhstan has taken a bold step towards global development. Upon analysis, the development achieved in the last 25 years of independence equals a century. One of the greatest achievements brought by independence is that we have discovered our continuity, our native soil, and the goal we are striving for. We consider this book of ours to be a bouquet, a wedding bouquet, dedicated to the 25th anniversary of the Republic of Kazakhstan." (Akhmedova, 2017, p. 5).

Here we can see several processes taking place. First of all, the author highlights that the purpose behind writing the book is to celebrate the achievements of the state and appreciate the works of people from this village of Karabulak contributing to the achievement of goals and plans put forward by Kazakhstan’s government. By framing the goal of this book within the larger context of the government’s goals and positioning it as something that is done to support and show this village’s people’s role in achieving them, the author highlights the loyalty of this ethnic community to state authority and avoids suspicions of separatism or disloyalty.

Furthermore, we see how the author emphasizes the fact that they are citizens of Kazakhstan, that it is their homeland in addition to pointing to the fact that this is a multiethnic state where everyone is equal. This idea is further reinforced by quoting the first president's words about everyone residing within Kazakhstan being one nation, Kazakhstani, and highlighting the importance of unity. While being citizens of this state is mentioned several times, the fact that they are Uzbeks is not once directly mentioned in the Preface section of the book. Here we see what Brubaker points out as characteristic of minority nationalist stances which includes "a self-understanding in specifically 'national' rather than merely 'ethnic' terms, a demand for state recognition of their distinct ethnocultural nationality, and the assertion of certain collective, nationality-based cultural or political rights" (Brubaker, 1996, p. 5-6). In other words, the mentioning of citizenship and emphasizing it is not coincidental; instead, it is done to emphasize the national identity of the author and people mentioned in the book who based on their citizenship and loyalty to the state receive recognition and rights within Kazakhstan.

Conclusion

The stance of Uzbeks in the Sairam district was not significantly affected by the *Vatandoshlar* decree introduced in Uzbekistan in 2016. While very few of the interviewed people were aware of this policy, even those who knew about it perceived it from a cultural perspective. Positive changes that were observed by members of these communities including the opening of the border, and tighter cooperation between citizens of both states were mainly attributed to improvement in the relationship between leaders of the two states and the agreements they reached. Furthermore, from the responses of people could be understood that

the members of this community do not separate Sairam's Uzbeks' relationship with Uzbekistan from Kazakhstan's relationship with Uzbekistan. Instead, they positioned it within the relationship between these two states and their authority and explained it through this perspective. Similar to the first decades of independence, the stance of this group today is featured by loyalty to Kazakhstan's government, and this dynamic has not changed in recent years with the introduction of the Decree on Compatriots.

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